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Comparing Emotional Responses when Viewing Death and Dying Related Video Art

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The ASH Art of Death Digital Storytelling Research Team analyzed viewer perception of death and dying when viewing death related video art, and whether targeted media can alter emotional responses to death-related stimuli. Previous research from the ASH team has indicated that viewing metaphorical footage of death evokes positive responses (“Beauty”, “Peace”, and “Positive Emotions”) in participants and primes them to think about mortality and discuss death comfortably.

To build on these findings, the team created two video art pieces, collectively named *Points of View*. The study of *Points of View* examines how the metaphorical footage affects death anxiety and perception of death.

Points of View is a two-stage video art experience of death as a physiological and emotional process. The first stage features an animation depicting the scientific process of death as a self-contained piece, while the second combines this animation with a video background reflecting emotional responses to death.

Participants (N=TBD) viewed the videos in sequence through an online survey conductor (mTurk). The factual animated depiction of death was shown first, immediately followed by a baseline survey. This measured participants’ mental response and perception of death as a physiological process. Participants then viewed the combined animation and video artwork. Afterward, participants answered the same questions again, as well as three additional questions about the viewing sequence. Finally, participants were asked to select whether each element of the artworks elicited specific emotional responses.

Data collection is still in process and results will be finalized by the beginning of April 2021. The expected result of the project is that participants will experience less death anxiety after viewing the combined footage and animation than after viewing only the animation.