

OUR LAST SUPPER:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE MOLISAN PERSPECTIVE
ON DEATH AND DYING

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a narrative about my journey dealing with loss and fear of death, and a formal analysis where I conducted focus groups — through ‘Death Dinners’ — and surveys — through Google Forms — with Canadian and Italian Molisans to investigate their perspectives on death and dying. I demonstrate and compare how Canadian and Italian Molisans presently avoid end-of-life discussions, whereas 100 years ago, death was an accepted part of the Italian daily existence. This thesis argues that when Molisans have conversations about death and dying, they will be more willing to accept their own mortality. In addition, I advocate for musical theatre as a uniquely effective medium for death education through which Molisans will be inspired to continue to discuss death and dying. *Our Last Supper*, the musical I began to write for this thesis, is an art piece grounded in data and scholarly sources, underscored by the Molisan experience, and steeped in honesty and humour to break the taboo of death — the setting — the kitchen table. A comparison between Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perspectives on death and dying will demonstrate that Molisans fear death and dying and do not engage in death discussions because it generates anxiety. However, if prompted with ‘Death Dinners’ and/or with a musical theatre production reflecting their fears and anxieties, Molisans will be motivated to communicate their emotions, cope with their anxieties, and have the ability to live out an authentic life — what better place to have these discussions than the kitchen table, an Italian safe place. Ultimately, this will assist in recognizing how these beliefs reflect the values ingrained in the Molisan culture.

DEDICATION

To my mom — Imma Giancola — somehow you are still helping me through life. Thank you for your continuous support, the meals you made for me, and for your unconditional LOVE.

To my dad — Ronnie Giancola — thank you for sharing your wisdom with me and for instilling in me the importance of education and humanity.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.”

— Marcus Aurelius

MY BACKGROUND

May 22, 1967 was the first day of my journey towards death. My mother, who was twenty-one years old and my father, who was eighteen years old, were not thinking of my death. Neither was I. My parents, newly immigrated to Canada from Italy, were celebrating my birth and the country was celebrating Victoria Day with radiant firework displays in every town and city. However, the odyssey of my death began.

At four years old, I tumbled down a flight of wooden steps bumping my head all the way down, experiencing my first concussion. In the same year, I dislocated my left arm cartwheeling over the sofa. At seven, my right arm crashed into a glass storm door — the shards of broken glass protruding like blades of grass. These three incidents gave me glimpses of my mortality.

When I was nine, I was hospitalized for the first time, unable to speak and breathe, encased in a clear plastic tent with a record high fever. No human contact allowed. All I could hear was the crashing of ice cubes converting to clean cold air behind me to help ease my breathing. My connection to death was at every exhale.

A few months after graduating from University, I was flung out of my vehicle and pinned under a YJ Jeep — one lung completely punctured, four cracked ribs, a broken collar bone, permanent nerve damage on my left arm, and bruises covering my whole body. I was lucky, I was in the Intensive Care Unit for only ten days. I realised the frailty of life and cautiously

continued living — eating a plant-based diet, exercising daily, consuming zero alcohol, and of course, no smoking.

Years later on a beach vacation I was caught in an undercurrent, not able to swim, I panicked. I gulped what seemed to be litres of water — my breathing irregular, I was not ready to die but I saw death. I floated on my back, kicked my legs, and pushed my arms as hard and quick as I could. I needed to keep living. I reached the shore gasping for air, releasing unwanted water. To this day, I do not swim in any body of water. I am not a hypochondriac, but I am afraid to die.

Then the unthinkable happened, my mother unexpectedly died. A part of me died that day too — my mother was an extension of me. I did not know what to do. What were the next steps? Did my mother have any dying wishes?

The circumstances in my life created my fear of death and dying. But communicating about these feelings, illnesses, or someone dying was strictly avoided in my Italian-Molisan family. If a family member spoke about an ill person, all the words associated with dying were avoided — it sounded as if the two conversing were merely sharing a recipe. This was my world: surrounded by death but prohibited from acknowledging it.

RATIONALE

The sweet smell of almond biscotti baking, the savory aroma of caramelized onions, and the everyday perfume of a brewing morning espresso are everlasting. You do not have to be Italian to love the delicious experience of pasta, whether in a fresh tomato sauce topped with aromatic basil, served in a hearty meat sauce, or in a creamy white carbonara. Are you hungry

yet? When you think of your favourite food, do your taste buds salivate? Mine always do. It is euphoric.

From the moment my mother suddenly passed away, I reflected on the meals she prepared and the beautiful memories we shared around the kitchen table. In my Molisan family, sharing a meal is the most important part of the day.

My mother often welcomed strangers into our home and not only gave them shelter, but always fed them breakfast, lunch, dinner, and spuntini — the Italian word for snacks — throughout the day. She created meals with real love. I often wonder what her ‘Last Supper’ was. Did she enjoy it? Would she have chosen it if she knew it would be her last? Now imagine choosing your ‘Last Supper’. What would it be?

One needs food to sustain life. But food gives us more than just nourishment. Sharing food with family, friends, and even strangers creates memorable, meaningful, and cherished moments. Food warms us. Food satisfies us. Food unites us. Italians turn to food for support. Nonna — the Italian word for grandmother — may not be able to answer your academic questions, but she is always ready to feed you.

Now imagine, you have been invited to attend a dinner, no formal wear is needed, no gifts for the host, only a willingness to discuss your end-of-life wishes. A group of healthcare and wellness leaders led by Michael Hebb, are working to break the taboo around conversations about death and dying. Hebb, the founder of DeathOverDinner.org, created a free public website to initiate discussions about death and dying with family and friends while sharing a meal — a ‘Death Dinner’. Hebb’s book *Let’s Talk About Death Over Dinner* recounts his personal realization that end-of-life conversations are needed prior to the onset of fatal illnesses. The book offers insights to twenty-two prompts that can help facilitate a ‘Death Dinner’ (Hebb 2018).

Having dinner is familiar and comfortable. Therefore, transforming the daunting conversation about death and dying to a safe space, as the kitchen table, allows for anxieties and fears toward death to subside.

This thesis is a narrative about my journey dealing with loss and fear of death, and a formal analysis where I conducted focus groups — through ‘Death Dinners’ — and surveys — through Google Forms — with Canadian and Italian Molisans to investigate their perspectives on death and dying. I demonstrate and compare how Canadian and Italian Molisans presently avoid end-of-life discussions, whereas 100 years ago, death was an accepted part of the Italian daily existence. This thesis argues that when Molisans have conversations about death and dying, they will be more willing to accept their own mortality. In addition, I advocate for musical theatre as a uniquely effective medium for death education through which Molisans will be inspired to continue to discuss death and dying. *Our Last Supper*, the musical I began to write for this thesis, is an art piece grounded in data and scholarly sources, underscored by the Molisan experience, and steeped in honesty and humour to break the taboo of death — the setting — the kitchen table.

Why Molisans? My parents were both born in a small town in Molise, Italy called Limosano. Growing up I often visited Limosano and the surrounding areas. A Molisan is who I am, it is my culture. I have Italian citizenship and a passport which deepen my ties to my heritage, traditions, and customs. My cultural connection to this thesis allows me to grow as a person and an artist while I discover a deeper understanding of the Molisan way of thinking. Throughout my work, I also leveraged my strong family network in both Canada and Italy to assist the recruitment of participants. In my immediate family, death and dying were never discussed, and while I had the impression that this was common throughout Molise, I was eager

to explore more and quantify my intuition. Examining death and dying through the Molisan lens brings forth an original narrative and provides an original source of first-hand knowledge. In this way, my cultural perspective becomes a key advantage rather than a disadvantage.

A comparison between Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perspectives on death and dying demonstrates that Molisans fear death and dying and do not engage in death discussions because it generates anxiety. However, if prompted with ‘Death Dinners’ and/or with a musical theatre production reflecting their fears and anxieties, Molisans will be motivated to communicate their emotions, cope with their anxieties, and have the ability to live out an authentic life — what better place to have these discussions than the kitchen table, an Italian safe place. Ultimately, this assists in recognising how these beliefs reflect the values ingrained in Molisan culture.

People avoid discussing death, yet talking about death and dying can have a beneficial effect on the individual, the family, and healthcare planning. Additionally, via musical theater, I want to encourage communication about death and dying, by engaging in advance care planning conversations around the kitchen table.

RESEARCH GOALS

This study has two goals. First, to examine and understand the perspectives Molisan Italians, both in Canada and Italy, have on death and dying, while emphasizing the importance of discussing our personal fears, anxieties, and end-of-life wishes toward mortality. Secondly, the use of musical theatre as death education is introduced as a unique tool to continue to inspire conversations around the kitchen table about death and dying. Through these goals, I explore my own fears, anxieties, and final wishes — after all my biggest fear is my own destined death.

To fulfill the first goal, I organized and attended ‘Death Dinners’ with Molisan families in Canada and Italy. During the meal, questions regarding their personal philosophies on death and dying were discussed with the attending group of family members, as well as the participants’ personal end-of-life wishes. Participants were encouraged to continue to share their final wishes with their loved ones after the ‘Death Dinner’ was over. I also created a survey via Google Forms for individuals that wanted to participate in the research but were not comfortable gathering in person (e.g., due to COVID-19 or personal reasons). The survey consisted of similar questions to the ones discussed at the ‘Death Dinners’. See Appendix D and E for a full list of questions asked.

To fulfill the second goal, I am writing a theatrical musical production — *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* — that has the ability to comfort people’s anxieties toward death and dying, to visually experience the Molisan perspective and coping strategies, and to aid discussions on mortality and how one wishes their final days to transpire.

I connected the two goals by writing dialogue in my musical from the Molisans who participated in the ‘Death Dinners’ and surveys. Seeing individuals — actors — portraying characters that embody and reflect our fears, regrets, and aspirations allows us to connect emotionally and physically with the performers and other audience members. A live performance makes it real, engaging all of our senses. The experience of watching a musical inspired by real people — Molisans — will encourage discussions about our fears and anxieties around mortality and allow the inevitable end of our lives to be free of regret and full of desired wishes.

Although my work could be wrongfully interpreted as overly morbid, it is critical to remember that one cannot discuss death without discussing life. Our fears of death are caused by our fears of failing to live a fulfilled life.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter Two discusses the qualitative and quantitative methodology used to gather and analyze data throughout the thesis, the participants in the study, and where and how the research was conducted.

Chapter Three begins with a historical perspective of death and dying from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. I then present an examination of scholarly work from the 1950s to present day in the field of thanatology, with emphasis on the efficacy of using the arts — visual art, music, television and film, theatre, and musical theatre — as a medium for death education.

Chapter Four presents findings from the ‘Death Dinners’ and the Google Forms/Surveys and compares Canadian-Molisans with Italian-Molisans perspective on death and dying on topics such as food, religion, life, death and dying conversations, funerals, good deaths, and final wishes. The limitations and advantages of the study are also discussed.

Chapter Five acknowledges the importance of musical theatre and presents an overview of the acts and scenes in my musical — *Our Last Supper: A Musical about Death and Dying*. Also included in this chapter are the musical’s character descriptions, each scene’s synopsis, five monologues reflecting the stages of death the main character experiences throughout the performance, the opening song of the musical, and a scene with a song about death avoidance.

Chapter Six offers a final discussion into the field of thanatology through the lens of Molisans, summarizes the research, and offers directions for future study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

“Death ends a life, not a relationship.”

— Mitch Albom

INTRODUCTION

This thesis uses qualitative and quantitative methods in combination with empirical research to gather and analyze data. Throughout the work, I use autoethnography to root the inquiry in personal experience and give the reader the opportunity to better empathize with my culture.

Death Dinners

Our modern age is characterized by a strong reluctance to discuss our mortality. Death’s detachment from everyday life — handled instead by hospitals and funeral services — makes it necessary to schedule specific times to discuss and exchange our personal views about mortality (Testoni et al. 2020b). This began my journey in organising ‘Death Dinners’ with Molisans in Canada and Italy.

In their 2017 paper titled *Contradictions and Promise for End-of-Life Communication among Family and Friends: Death over Dinner Conversations*, Lambert South and Elton use qualitative research methods to examine the importance of discussing one’s death wishes. In the study, 240 volunteers aged 18 to 76 were engaged in end-of-life conversations using Death Over Dinner, an online platform that facilitates discussions of death and dying, by sharing their beliefs and aspirations (Lambert South and Elton 2017). The majority agreed that more conversations about death and dying with family and friends are necessary to eliminate anxiety (2017).

Lambert South and Elton (2017) conclude by acknowledging Death Over Dinner as an advantageous platform to use to stimulate conversation about death and dying.

Lambert South and Elton alongside Lietzenmayer conducted another study using Death Over Dinner to analyze how humour is used when discussing death and dying (2020). They examined 83 ‘Death Dinners’ with 424 participants. Their paper, *Communicating Death with Humor: Humor Types and Functions in Death Over Dinner Conversations*, revealed six types of humour: entertainment humour, gallows humour, tension-relieving humour, confused/awkward laughter, group humour/narrative chaining, and self-deprecating humour (2020). Humour was used by participants to help them face their anxieties and fears concerning mortality — to share honest viewpoints without sounding morbid — and provided a “moment of release” for the participants (Lambert South, Elton, and Lietzenmayer 2020, 857). Again, the authors support the use of ‘Death Dinners’ as a useful tool to promote death education.

Likewise, Mroz, Bluck, and Smith (2020) had 109 participants between the ages of 18 and 28, fill out a pretest or engage in a ‘Death Dinner’ about advance care planning. The results, summarized in their 2020 article, *Young Adults’ Perspectives on Advance Care Planning: Evaluating the Death Over Dinner Initiative*, conclude that the intimate setting of the kitchen table is a better suited medium to use to begin the end-of-life dialogue — during the ‘Death Dinner’ the participants decreased their reservations toward advance care planning (Mroz, Bluck, and Smith 2020).

To date, the above three papers are the only empirical studies that used Death Over Dinner to analyze conversations about death and dying. I use the same platform the above authors used — Death Over Dinner — with Molisan Italians to discover their perspectives on death and dying and observe the value in discussing death and dying with loved ones. While

‘Death Dinners’ may seem morbid, South, Elton, Lietzenmayer, Mroz, Bluck, and Smith, proved ‘Death Dinners’ are effective for gathering data on mortality and end-of-life.

Sitting at a table is a vehicle for communication. The kitchen table is a safe environment to share food and conversation with loved ones. For Italians, the first step toward death education is the kitchen table. Sharing a meal and talking with one another about death and dying will lead to tranquillity in life. Embracing our mortality fosters deeper connections with those we cherish, enriching our lives with gratitude and joy (Albom 1997; Cave 2012; Fiorito 1999; Gawande 2014; Kübler-Ross 1969; Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2000; Lyons and Winter 2021; Neumann 2016; O’Rourke 2011; Osho 2013; Sandberg 2017; Shetty 2020; Ware 2019).

Autoethnography

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011, 1). For this reason, autoethnography is a unique tool that allows me to use my individuality as a vehicle to aid, rather than hinder, my research into the Molisan culture. Although death and dying are stressful topics to discuss, autoethnography has therapeutic qualities which allow for empathy and support, while alleviating further pain (Ellis 1999).

Matthews (2019) used personal narrative and empirical research to help her grieve the loss of her son. She concludes that “weaving academic research with personal experiences allows us to explore and examine difficult issues such as death, grief, and traumatic loss” (Matthews 2019, 8). Autoethnography allows the researcher to analyze information from a unique perspective — individual experiences — expanding our understanding of how individuals cope with similar situations (Ellis 1999; Ellis 2013; Ellis and Bochner 2006; Grant and Zeeman 2012;

Matthews 2019; Saunders and Tosey 2015). The researcher must remain sensitive and open to personal beliefs shared with them because autoethnography also provides a glimpse into the private lives, culture and history of the person (Smyth and Holian 2008).

As a cultural insider, the use of personal narratives in my research validates my experiences and allows me to understand myself within the Molisan culture, establishing this thesis as personally therapeutic but still reflective and informative for readers. My autoethnographic writing will provide a deeper insight to the Molisan cultural views, as well as spark conversation for further research and discussion. This is considered an advantage to inquiries because of the familiarity between the researcher and the participants (Saidin 2016).

METHODS

My research began with organizing and attending ‘Death Dinners’ using the platform *Death Over Dinner*. Through extensive fieldwork, I organized ten dinners with Molisan immigrant families living in Canada and ten dinners with Molisan families living in Italy. The ‘Death Dinners’ ranged from 90 to 120 minutes. All participants involved in the dinners were over the age of 19. The dinners included immediate family members (e.g., parents, siblings, spouses, children, and/or individuals close to the family) who did or did not live at the place of residence where the dinner took place. While not all dinner guests were from Molise, the majority of the guests were of Molisan heritage — born in Molise or as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd-generation migrants. Prior to participation, all participants signed a consent form that further explained the risks and benefits of participating in the study and ensured their anonymity in the current thesis and subsequent musical creation. See Appendix A for the English and Italian consent forms. Their demographic information was collected prior to the dinner. The data

collected are only from those who were of Molisan heritage. However, Molisan participants who wanted to contribute to the study but did not want to attend a ‘Death Dinner’, were given the option to fill out a Google Form/Survey that included their demographic information, questions about their personal philosophies on death and dying, and end-of-life wishes — similar to the questions asked at the dinners. For a list of all questions asked on the Google Form/Survey see Appendix E. During the ‘Death Dinners’, participants were asked a series of questions to answer and discuss with the family present at the dinner. For a full list of questions asked at the ‘Death Dinners’, see Appendix D. As the principal investigator, I asked the questions but was careful to not interrupt or guide the participant answers as they considered their personal philosophies on death and dying. I wanted their thoughts to shape organically. All participants were aware of the topic of discussion prior to the ‘Death Dinner’. When questions arose during the dinner that participants did not wish to answer, they simply declined to do so. During one dinner a middle aged Italian-Molisan decided to stop participating and left stating, “basta, non mi piace parlare di queste cose, mi dà fastidio (enough, I don’t like talking about these things, it bothers me)”. The other participants were happy to continue the discussion commenting that the individual who left “non ha mai nemmeno partecipato a un funerale, sono sorpresa che volesse partecipare con questo studio (they have never even attended a funeral, I’m surprised they wanted to participate in the study)”.

The qualitative methods used during the ‘Death Dinners’ was observation and note taking. However, when all parties agreed, some dinners were audio recorded, for transcription and study purposes only. All audio recordings are saved locally in a password-protected file to the researcher’s personal computer. All participants agreed not to make any unauthorized recordings during the ‘Death Dinner’.

The main focus of the ‘Death Dinners’ was to discover what Molisans’ personal philosophies on death and dying are, but also to encourage family members to continue to discuss personal mortality issues after the dinner is over. As will be argued below, open discussion is critical to overcoming death anxieties and fears.

Conceptual analysis and relational analysis of the information gathered from the ‘Death Dinners’ and the survey forms the bulk of the research. Through this study, I confirm that Molisan Italians both in Canada and in Italy do not mindlessly volunteer to talk about death and dying. Using autoethnography, I demonstrate their nuances and beliefs about death and dying.

All data collected on the participants and information gathered during the ‘Death Dinner’ meetings were treated as confidential. Anonymity was guaranteed and maintained throughout the study. The data collected was solely used to write this thesis paper and as inspiration for the creative component. This study has been reviewed and approved by the FGS Research Committee on behalf of York University and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

SITE OF RESEARCH

In Canada, the ten ‘Death Dinners’ took place in the Greater Toronto Area, in the families’ homes, at their usual dinner time. In Italy, eight ‘Death Dinners’ occurred throughout the day at various restaurants in Molise and two ‘Death Dinners’ took place in Termoli on the beach.

I am not a psychologist and I understand discussing one’s own mortality is frightening and could spark stressful emotions. Therefore, I offered resources to the Molisans that

participated in the ‘Death Dinners’ and Google Form/Surveys. For a list of Canadian and Italian resources see Appendix F.

RECRUITMENT

Throughout Canada and Molise, participants were recruited via email and phone calls to various Italian social clubs, Italian organizations, university professors and high school teachers teaching Italian classes, funeral parlors, Molisan wineries, photographers, and to family and friends. To view the recruitment emails see Appendix B and Appendix C.

CONCLUSION

The present research takes advantage of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies through ‘Death Dinners’ and surveys of Molisans in Canada and Italy. The literature identifies ‘Death Dinners’ as a unique and effective method of death education. Given that food is a pillar of Italian culture, the dinner table was particularly effective at encouraging Molisans to deconstruct their anxieties, take control of their fear and live a more fulfilled life without regrets. Aided by autoethnographic interpretation, the remaining pages will report the findings from each component of the study.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Dying is nothing to fear. It can be the most wonderful experience of your life.

It all depends on how you have lived.”

— Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

INTRODUCTION

How is it possible that we have come to treat death as a taboo? Not too long ago families personally dealt with the dead in their own homes. Is this a cultural phenomenon, a twenty-first century issue, a tragic moment in human kind? Death and dying are difficult topics to freely converse about, I too become tense and hesitant, which is a common initial response. We are not encouraged to discuss our death, because it is taboo, but yet we are exposed to death and dying everyday, whether it is through the media we consume or our own family situations. This is certainly a modern problem, especially because we are outliving our ancestors. Instead of fearing death, we should accept our fate and be grateful for our extended lives.

Dr. Tony Walter, a scholar in death studies, asks: “is modern death taboo or not taboo?” The word taboo means prohibited or forbidden. Death, however, is neither prohibited nor forbidden. Walter (1991) argues that two contrasting forces are at work. First, the “intelligentsia” are continually researching death and by doing so, peeling away at the taboo — nearly 300,000 citations result from searching “death taboo” in Google Scholar. In contrast, the general public is trapped in the taboo, dependent on hospitals and funeral directors to do the unpleasant work of dealing with dying and the dead (Walter 1991). These effects do not make modern death a taboo, but rather something intentionally placed out of sight for many.

When discussing mortality, it is important to examine death acceptance, death anxiety, and death denial, because one can be both in acceptance of and anxious towards death. In fact, scholars accept this view as both realistic and even positive (Ray and Najman 1974). I feel this in my own life. I am not in denial of death; I have come to accept that one day I will die. However, I am still extremely anxious and do not want to die young and unexpectedly like my mother.

Although the researchers have shown that fear of death decreases as we age (Gesser, Wong and Reker 1988; Maxfield 2007; Rasmussen and Brems 1996; Russac et.al. 2007), Aiken (2001) argues that between the ages of 40 and 60 fear of death is heightened, suggesting that this could be because of “the individual’s awareness of declining health and appearance, coupled with unfulfilled dreams and unattained goals” (263). This can also coincide with midlife crisis manifestation, that in turn could be further elevated by the death of a parent. Despite the fact that I was younger than 40, my fear of death most definitely heightened with the passing of my mom. Aiken further explains that women and men in older age (60+) view death differently — compassionately vs. coldly, although if one is “emotionally” and “financially” secure they tend to have an accepting attitude toward mortality.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ancient Greek gods of love and death, Eros and Thanatos, were treated as opposites: Eros represented life and creation and Thanatos represented death and destruction. However, it is claimed that they were always in the vicinity of one another (Rath, 2021). “Despite their interest in death, the artists, poets, and philosophers in ancient Greece believed in enjoying life while it lasted, though not necessarily in an uncontrolled, exhibitionistic manner” (Aiken 2001, 182). See

Appendix G for a list of ancient philosophers' attitudes toward death. Life and death are always connected — one cannot exist without the other. Still, fear exists.

We all know that death and dying exist but we have a way of forgetting or ignoring death, saying “it’s not going to affect me”, until it does. Why do we do this? Where does this fear come from? Are we born with it or is it a learned behaviour? Every culture, past and present, has their own specific ideology toward mortality (Corr 2014). Philippe Ariès (1976) compared and categorised historical attitudes of death from the Middle Ages to the 21st century, into five models. The first model Ariès named the ‘Tamed Death’, that took place during the Middle Ages. Throughout this time, a person knew or was warned of their imminent death by physicians, which gave them time to ask for forgiveness and take charge of their death — one was considered a “fool” not to recognize their death was near (Ariès and Murchland 1974). Mortality was acknowledged as a justified fate and death was referred to as “sleeping” (Aiken 2001). They faced their death, dissimilar to today’s fear-driven happenings (Ariès and Murchland 1974).

From the 12th to the 15th century, it was believed that at the time of your death, your soul would be met by a devil if you had not confessed your sins prior to dying. If you did confess, your soul would be taken by an angel toward the heavens, therefore dying in your sleep was avoided (Aiken 2001). Today, dying in your sleep is desired (Sanderson et al. 2019). Ariès termed this next attitude toward death as the ‘Death of Oneself’ (1976).

Throughout the 16th to 18th centuries, mortality was accepted but kept at a distance since images of death produced anxiety. Ariès named this period of time ‘Death is both Near and Distant’ (Ariès 1975). Through the 17th century, families took the responsibility of informing their kin of an imminent death, and, interestingly, by the 19th century, physicians would tell patients of their fatal illnesses, yet only when asked (Ariès and Murchland 1974). On January 16,

2003, while my mother was in recovery from a routine surgery, the gynaecologist informed our family that an aggressive cancer was found. As the doctor was speaking, my first thought was how we were going to tell my mom — I asked this to the doctor. I will never forget his words: “you won’t have to, she will see it in your face”. Unfortunately, she never recovered from the surgery and never saw her fate through me — she never opened her eyes again and died four days later.

Across the early to the middle of the 19th century, the fear of death was beginning to subside. Death was seen as divine since it reunited you with other souls gone before you, Ariès called this model ‘Death of the Other’ (Ariès 1975). While historically, emotions were more reserved, this period saw open wailing and lamenting among loved ones left behind.

The final stage was formed towards the late 19th century to the time of Ariès’ work and labelled the ‘Forbidden Death’ or ‘Denial of Death’. During this time period, death was concealed in hospitals and viewed as a misfortune or a medical negligence, often shielded from children and the dying patient, again making dying in your sleep the preferred way to pass (Ariès 1976). Ariès and Murchland (1974) state “what ought to be known is ignored — what ought to be a sacred moment is conjured away” (5). Do we not tell the dying because we love them and do not want to cause them more pain? This is certainly true within my Molisan family and is the custom by which I was raised. The day my mother left for the hospital to have her routine surgery, she walked into each room of our house gesturing the sign of the cross. I was by her side. She was no ‘fool’, she knew that something was not right — we (the family) were in denial — she was too young to be dying. In the past century, advancements in medical science have doubled our life spans, making us think of death as a distant concept and something that happens

to others but not us. The avoidance of death discussions is a phenomenon, especially in modern Western societies (Di Mola and Crisci 2001; Testoni et al. 2020c).

Only a century ago, death was a part of life in Molise. The caring of the dead took place at home with the responsibilities managed by the family and community — from washing and laying the body to the digging of the grave — embalming and funeral homes did not exist (DeSpelder and Strickland 2015). During this time, there was little money available for funerals in Italy unless you were a ‘signore’ — landowner or mayor. The ‘signori’ spent more money on funerals: a wooden casket instead of a pine box, marble monuments instead of a wooden cross, elaborate floral wreaths instead of a cross of flowers (Mathias 1974). However, when Italians immigrated to North America, they began to follow the funeral practices of the ‘signori’ and created elaborate funeral services.

In 1926, the phenomenon of death denial created The Canadian National Funeral Directors’ Association, yet it was not until the 1950s that funeral parlours were used across Canada, switching from family and community experiences to professional, licenced funeral directors, marking funeral homes as a viable business (Gillian 2011). Shortly after, Italy too began to establish funeral associations and funeral homes. Today there are approximately 50 funeral homes in Molise. I attended a funeral while visiting my parents’ hometown Limosano in Molise, Italy. Visitations took place in the home of the deceased as was done over 100 years ago. However, instead of the family taking care of the particulars, a funeral parlor in the city was called to come to the home to prepare the body and arrange the home for visitors — mobile funeral services.

Since family responsibilities have been taken over by medical and funerary experts and lives are longer, young people could go through their first 20 years of life without ever

experiencing death (Testoni 2020c). I have experienced this in my 35 years of teaching high school students and from attending family funerals, noticing that children and adolescents were often not included. Death education is not only for adults but for children and adolescents. Although I did not include those under 18 in my research, it is important to have them participate in death conversations — conversations about death and dying will help them establish coping strategies and handle frightening feelings (Cox, Garrett, and Graham 2005; Cummins 2004; Orkibi 2011; Raccichini et al. 2023; Testoni et al. 2018a; Testoni et al. 2020b).

Death awareness needs to be implemented in our lives. By accepting our mortality, we establish deeper relationships with our loved ones and fill our lives with appreciation and happiness (Albom 1997; Cave 2012; Fiorito 1999; Gawande 2014; Kübler-Ross 1969; Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2000; Lyons and Winter 2021; Neumann 2016; O'Rourke 2011; Osho 2013; Sandberg 2017; Shetty 2020; Ware 2019).

DEATH AWARENESS

The Death Awareness Movement began in the 1950s. Its goal was to better educate medical professionals, patients and their families, and those in mourning by fostering discussion and improving resources for end-of-life issues to allow them to face their fears and denials around death (Bregman 2018). The movement was a response to technologically advanced medical systems which “[made] death invisible” and “increased terror of death, refusal to speak about it, or plan for it” (Bregman 2018, 413).

Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski established Terror Management Theory (TMT) in the 1980s to investigate how humans cope with the awareness of their mortality. TMT argued that since people are aware of their mortality they automatically have

anxiety and fears toward death and dying, categorizing death anxiety into four types: the fear of one's own dying process, the fear of one's death, the fear of what happens after we die, and the fear of someone else's death (Corr, Corr, and Doka 2019).

Developing better awareness and mindfulness toward death and dying will cultivate a positive look on mortality (Benini et al. 2011). As Aiken writes, famous philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus proposed that “an awareness of death gives meaning to life...the realisation that eventually they must die motivates people to strive to live meaningful, self-actualizing lives” (Aiken 2001, 188). This is necessary in Canada and in Italy, especially with Canadian and Italian Molisans given their heightened fears.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We are afraid to use the word ‘dead’ because our society has thanatophobia — fear of death. Thanatology, “the study of death related behaviour including actions and emotions concerned with dying, death, and bereavement”, was created because of this fear (Leming and Dickinson 2016, 41). The topic of death causes fears and anxieties. Scholars have researched death and dying, discovering why these feelings exist, why the discussion of death is avoided, and how we can change the present way of thinking. Research on mortality attitudes began in the 1950s with Herman Feifel, Robert Kastenbaum, and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. These pioneers created the fundamentals of the study of thanatology, each making a significant contribution to the advancements of death studies (Bregman 2018; Corr 2014; Varga 2016). Dr. William Lamers Jr., known for opening the first hospice program in the United States, writes that Herman Feifel's book, *The Meaning of Death*, written in 1959 is still relevant today — it questions our inherent philosophies about death and dying while promoting research and discussion on the topic

(Lamers 2012). Interestingly enough, Herman Feifel died at the age of 87 on the same day and year as my mother.

Psychologist, author, professor, and playwright Robert Kastenbaum is another pioneer in the study of thanatology. He is known for his contributions to death and dying, focusing his research on understanding how societies deal with mortality and their attitudes toward death. His book, *On Our Way: The Final Passage Through Life and Death*, explores how our daily practices could lead to a good death. His theoretical work explains that a good death is beyond making end-of-life or funeral plans, but instead focused on one's need to discover who they are today and how our pasts shape us (Kastenbaum 2004). He claims that we live in a death-denying society and believes the more knowledge you acquire about death, the easier your coping mechanisms about end-of-life will be (Corr 2014).

The most well known thanatologist, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross — psychiatrist, professor, and author — questioned the way society dealt with death and dying. The research she conducted sparked a death positivity movement that changed the way humankind deals with death. While she wrote over twenty books, her first book, *On Death and Dying*, written in 1969, devised the five stages of death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages changed the way doctors, medical support staff, and researchers perceived the dying (Bregman 2018; Corr and Corr 2020; Sisk and Baker 2019; Tyrrell 2023). Although her stages are widely used today, they were criticized by some scholars for being overly sequential and lacking empirical evidence (Hamilton 2016, Stroebe, Schut, and Boerner 2017; Tyrrell et al. 2022). Kübler-Ross's intention of the five stages was not that everyone was required to go through the stages in order nor for a certain amount of time, but instead that each person take their own path when dealing with death and loss — moving in and out of the five stages as needed (Kübler-Ross 1969). Further, the

focus of the book was not meant to be the stages but rather the interviews Kübler-Ross and her students conducted with dying patients, giving them a voice instead of being traditionally ignored. These interviews were her empirical evidence. She interviewed over 20,000 dying patients and carefully listened to their stories instead of disregarding their presence and needs. *On Death and Dying* includes many excerpts from these conversations. Kübler-Ross's work transformed the way we confront death, dying, and grief. Instead of ignoring the dying patient, she placed them in the forefront, interested in "human stories, not [their] medical information" (Bregman 2018, 415).

Similarly, David Kessler, the founder of Grief.com and expert on grief and loss, co-authored two books with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: *On Grief and Grieving* and *Life Lessons* (2000). He believes that finding meaning in grief transforms you to experience a positive outlook on life. *On Grief and Grieving* looks at how the five stages of death apply to the grieving and the dying. *Life Lessons* on the other hand, is divided into 14 life lessons, including: love, fear, forgiveness, and happiness. Each author relates their insight from personal research about how these life lessons can help you live a life free of regret while still acknowledging your mortality.

Death is a reality. Many researchers, psychologists, and doctors have made immense contributions to the Death Awareness Movement so that everyone can face their fears and anxieties about mortality and come to terms with its reality. Kübler-Ross and David Kessler both believe that if one confronts death wholeheartedly, they will lead stimulating fulfilled lives because "fear doesn't stop death...but stops life" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2000, 210). Throughout my thesis, I use Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler's philosophies to continue the death positivity movement with Molisan Italians.

ADVANCE CARE PLANS

Canadians and Italians have the right to create an advance care plan or a living will, which is an informed consent document that outlines your future health care, an appointed proxy, and personal wishes that one shares with others in case they cannot speak for themselves (Leming and Dickinson 2016). The Government of Canada actively encourages Canadians to create advance care plans to avoid issues that may arise in the future (Advance Care Planning 2019b). The Advance Care Planning Canada website provides an extensive number of resources for the general public as well as for home care providers and lawyers. The resources on the website include workbooks, guides, conversation starters, planning toolkits, videos, and information on individual rights in Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. In fact, April 16 has been officially dedicated as Advance Care Planning Day in Canada (Advance Care Planning 2019b).

While Canadians are comfortable or somewhat comfortable with end-of-life choices according to a 2019 national poll regarding attitudes and behaviours concerning advance directives, only less than one in five Canadians have an end-of-life plan. The same survey showed that Canadians believe it is important to speak with family or a healthcare professional about end-of-life wishes but only 36% said they actually spoke to their families about their future preferences, with 21% of Canadians giving it no thought at all. Further, only 36% of Canadians mention that advanced care planning should start in your forties when your health is better and discussions are easier (Advance Care Planning 2019a).

Traditionally speaking, discussing death and dying in Italy is taboo, however for the past two decades, attitudes have slowly been warming (Di Mola and Crisci 2001). Provisions have been made in the Italian Law n. 219 passed in 2017 about advance directives so that Italians can

now consent or refuse medical assistance in advance, giving them the right to determine their personal desires. Debate over such a policy has been going on in Italy for nearly 30 years (Porteri et al. 2022; Vergallo et al. 2019). Since 2017, living wills in Italy have been regulated and 76% of Italians report a positive attitude toward creating an end-of-life plan (De Panfilis et al. 2023).

The major concern individuals hold is fear of suffering while dying while simultaneously, death education about palliative care and end-of-life planning in Italy and in Canada must improve (Benini et al. 2011; Cook, Rocker, and Heyland 2013). If we want to alleviate this fear as well as other fears of death, it is essential to improve public awareness of advanced care planning (De Panfilis et al. 2023). Di Mola and Crisci (2001) analyzed responses from 829 Italians' perspectives regarding fatal illnesses, end-of-life care, and death and dying, finding that those interviewed responded positively toward addressing these mortality issues. Their research also established other death attitudes that need to be further examined, in particular: palliative care, death education, communication surrounding death and dying, how religious beliefs affect mortality, and end-of-life preferences around medical treatments.

These discussions about death and dying can be formal, like Advance Care Planning Canada or informal, like a simple conversation with family, friends, and/or medical providers — either will begin the journey to making difficult but important end-of-life choices. Five Wishes, Cake, Death Wish, Death with Dignity, E-Campus Ontario, Seven Ponds, and My End are only a few of the global websites that assist individuals start the conversation for end-of-life plans.

Engaging in personal death arrangements is difficult for most people when in perfect health, and undeniably more stressful when illnesses are forcing you to make decisions. It is important to note that in order to facilitate an advanced care plan for one's end-of-life, the individual needs to be ready to embrace the idea of their mortality — by doing so, death will

become more comfortable for everyone involved and decrease the occurrence of family disagreements (McLeod-Sordjan 2014). When I began my research, I thought it would be easy to get my Molisan family to participate. It was difficult. Very few were interested — they were not yet ready.

GOOD DEATH

Meier et al. have implemented a thorough search through English-written published literature to define the term ‘good death’. They compared literature from patients, pre-bereaved and bereaved family members, and healthcare providers. The main themes discovered to characterise a ‘good death’ were that the dying person maintained their dignity, remaining pain-free and comfortable, and that the emotional well-being of the patient was cared for, while adhering to their dying wishes (Meier et al. 2016). Meier et al. conclude in saying that a call for action to healthcare professionals and lay communities regarding communication about death and dying is needed immediately in order to reduce death fears.

On June 17, 2016, The Government of Canada passed Bill C-14 Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) making changes to the criminal code and allowing for medical assistance to the dying. This stirred up a lot of discussion on how we die but it did not address the reality that we all die and/or the need to be proactive in expressing our mortality, which could potentially help us live better lives (Flegel and Patrick 2016).

In Italy, medical assistance to the dying is possible because of sentence 242/2019 of the Constitutional Court, however, the aid from a doctor must be given indirectly. Three years later, over a million signatures were collected and given to the Italian Supreme court to have full ‘legal euthanasia’— the proposed referendum was dismissed by the courts (Marrone et al. 2022).

Olivia Newton-John explained that having cancer “affects the way you approach life [and] kind of opened up the possibilities because you let go of a lot of fear”. She referred to cancer as her “curious gift” because without cancer she said, she “wouldn't have done so many things or had the opportunity to be exposed to so many things” (Ganz 2022).

FEAR AND DEATH ANXIETY

Death anxiety is “a learned emotional response to death-related phenomena characterised by extreme apprehension — used synonymously with death fear” (Leming and Dickinson 2016, 80). For the purpose of this research, ‘death anxiety’ and ‘death fear’ are used interchangeably although some may argue that there is a difference between the two terms — fear being fleeting once the circumstance is removed whereas anxiety lingers on with complex emotions (Castano et al. 2011). I am both anxious and fearful of death, but I do not deny I will one day die.

When death fears are present, one is motivated to change their negative habits by eating well, exercising, not smoking, and limiting alcohol (Castano et al. 2011). Most of my Molisan family are extremely health conscious — I have taken it to a different level by only eating plant-based and always avoiding alcohol. Is my family purposefully healthy because they fear death?

In the modern death movement, numerous death scales have been created to measure attitudes and concerns about death, elevating thanatological studies. One of the first and most common self-reporting death anxiety scale is Templer’s Death Anxiety Scale (T-DAS) by Templer (1970), comprising fifteen true-false questions. However, there are many other scales used to evaluate the existence and seriousness of death anxiety: the Twenty Statements Test by Kuhn and McPartland (1954), the Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale (CL-FODS) by Collett and

Lester (1969), the Threat Index by Krieger, Epting, and Leitner (1974), the Multidimensional Fear of Death Scale by Hoelter (1979), the Fear of Personal Death Scale by Florian and Kravetz (1983), the Death Attitude Profile-Revised (DAP-R) by Wong, Reker, and Gesser (1987), the Revised Twenty Statements Test devised by Durlak, Horn, and Kass (1990), the Revised Death Anxiety Scale (R-DAS) amended by Thorson and Powell (1994), the Multidimensional Orientation toward Dying and Death Inventory of Wittkowski (2001), and the Testoni Death Representation Scale (TDRS) (2015) (Iverach, Menzies, and Menzies 2014). Most of these death scales are in the form of a questionnaire using 5-point or 7-point Likert scales with similar direct questions lacking in assessing personal emotional behaviours (Neimeyer 1998).

Wong, Reker, and Gesser (1994) issued the Death Attitude Profile-Revised (DAP-R) to 300 individuals aged 18 to 90. After one month, the authors selected 30 participants to be retested, finding near-identical responses over time. The five theoretical scales measured were: Fear of Death, Death Avoidance, Neutral Acceptance, Approach Acceptance, and Escape Acceptance. They found that to get a true measurement of someone's perspective on death, all five theoretical scales were necessary, and that "these attitudes together determine the way [participants] conduct their lives" and approach death and dying (135).

Further, Dr. Neimeyer (1998), a scholar in death studies, argues that although there is a large number of academic studies published on death anxiety (over 27,000 to date are available to examine on the York University Library database), the quality of the literature is lacking in advancements. In his 1998 paper, Neimeyer analyzes the kind of research gains that have been made toward death anxiety and makes recommendations for future study. Although his paper was published over 20 years ago, he makes valid arguments that are still worth examining. Neimeyer claims that there is a weakness in the methods chosen to analyze death anxiety — the

death anxiety scales most often used are in the form of a questionnaire that result in a broad range of information of the participant's present attitude. Neimeyer suggests that in future studies what is needed is "a less structured form of assessment, which allows the respondent a chance to express his or her reactions to death with minimal constraints" (Neimeyer 1998, 108).

I took Dr. Neimeyer's suggestions and incorporated a combined methodology to my studies of death anxiety in the Molisan community via 'Death Dinners' for participants to articulate their beliefs in a more casual setting as well as a Google Form/Survey to formally assess both cognitive and emotional perspectives. The questionnaire included short answer questions within the survey to allow the participants to state their personal viewpoints about death and dying. Another point Neimeyer (1998) proposes is that death anxiety research needs to examine more specific outcomes in terms of age, gender, and religion, and use "stratified, community-based sampling" (113). My work also incorporates this suggestion by focusing specifically on Molisans both in Canada and Italy, collecting highly specific data on age, gender, and religion.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

During the 15th century, the church was opposed to customary public gatherings around the dying — the clergy believed that at the end of their lives, the sick should remain alone with God and not be preoccupied with those around them (Ariès and Murchland 1974). In order to analyze death perspectives it is important to look at individual and cultural attitudes (Ray and Najman 1974). "Gender, ethnicity, health status, education, religion, personality, and other demographic and personal variables" (Aiken 2001, 277), including culture, affect our perspectives on death and dying. Culture and religion specifically shape our personal views,

forming reactions that are distinct to those beliefs. Growing up in a Molisan family meant you attended mass every Sunday. It was part of our weekly ritual along with chatting with ‘paesani’ — the Italian word for people from the same hometown you were from, in this case Limosano, Molise — at the end of the service. We often rotated which Roman Catholic Church we visited, it all depended on the occasion or simply at whose home we were gathering at for Sunday lunch. This shaped my perspectives on life, emphasizing the importance of community and family in all that I do. Having cultural connections makes us better (Harney 1998). Confidence and cultural beliefs play an important part in our personal acceptance of mortality (Kneer and Reiger 2016). Our beliefs concerning death stem from our personal encounters, our external influences, and our attitude toward mortality, making our fears unique to us (Cantisano et al. 2020; Penson et al. 2005). “The fear of death — is ancestral, but so are ways of overcoming it” (Ariès and Murchland 1974, 5).

The belief in the afterlife was historically used as a buffer in death anxiety, but with a rise in secular beliefs, this is no longer the case (Testoni et al. 2020b). Cultural beliefs are a critical consideration that influence death and dying conversations with family and friends (Kreuter and McClure 2004). The majority of Italians are of the Roman Catholic faith and the image of death and dying, that of the cross, is the main focus of the religion. The belief in immortality, of one day being in Heaven with Jesus, is prayed upon. While this could have been a natural gateway to discussing one’s own mortality, this is not the case in Molisan families. As soon as I mentioned I was engaged in research on death and dying, the common response was, “you don’t speak of such things”.

Scholars in Italy have stated that end-of-life discussions with Italians are rare, however within the topic of spirituality, death education can be successfully integrated (Testoni et al.

2020c). Death and religious attitudes are inherent to humanity and present throughout a person's life such that using religion as a coping mechanism with the uncertainty of death results in positive outcomes (Dezutter, Luyckx, and Hutsebaut 2009): "fear of death decreases with increasing religiosity" (Testoni et al. 2020c, 8).

Faithful religious individuals fear death less, due to the belief of an afterlife, and strong atheists are also less afraid of death, seeing death as a mere natural end to life (Aiken 2001). Testoni et al. (2018b) also discovered that there were no differences between atheists and theists in death portrayals. They suggest that education in spirituality and religion for medical professionals would be advantageous because "religion presents the most important discourses, historically rooted and developed, that discuss and indicate immortality, with a wide florilegium of reasoning and narrations" (8).

Furthermore, culture and religion influence how someone deals with the loss of a loved one. Reactions to loss produce suffering in the manner of grief, mourning, and bereavement — these reactions, as with perspectives on death and dying, stem from our cultural and religious viewpoints (Testoni et al. 2019). When someone grieves, they mourn a loss in two ways: the emotion felt with the loss and the adjustment to life without the existence of the loved one (Schut and Stroebe 1999).

Grief iconography on social media platforms is extensively used — posting photos of loved ones and sharing emotional sentiments was found to be effective in coping with loss and life readjustments (Cupit, Sapelli, and Testoni 2021). Italians prefer to use Facebook as their most used social network and although commonly used by Italians to post death tributes, it is still, of course, not substituted for traditional funeral services (Bovero et al. 2020). By experiencing the death of others, through personal experiences or through external sources, we

learn how to accept or deny our morality. Every passing day alters our lives, reshaping not just who we are but also evolving our connection with death and dying.

Professor Paolo Mazzola from the University of Milano, suggests that Italy needs to change their end-of-life practices by investing in resources that promote dialogue and communication (2016). Italy has a strong cultural and Catholic background, focused intensely on the family unit, which influences their end-of-life attitudes. Therefore, promoting dialogue with family about one's dying wishes and fears is the most justified way to accept death and in turn improve one's quality of life (2016). Similarly, Canada needs to allocate more resources to the improvement of the quality and quantity of end-of-life discussions for families and physicians (Cook, Rucker, and Heyland 2013).

In her book *Social Perspectives on Death and Dying*, Jeanette Auger (2019) writes, "death is inevitable, but our perspectives about death and dying are socially constructed". Auger discusses various concerns Canadians face in regards to death and dying: hospice and palliative care, drug and opioid deaths, funeral and burial practices, legal and ethical considerations, and euthanasia. She examines ways in which the sick and their family can deal with grief and bereavement in a holistic manner. Auger shares tools that Molisans can implement in understanding and conquering their anxieties toward death and dying. Auger also gives the reader opportunities to reflect and research after each chapter, connecting writer and reader.

DEATH EDUCATION

Death education literature shows a multitude of promising ways to start communicating about death through death education (Fonseca, Mascarenhas, and Testoni 2012; Harrawood, Doughty, and Wilde 2011; Kim 2009; McClatchey, Searles, and King 2015; Ronconi et al. 2023;

Testoni et al. 2018a, 2020b, and 2021a). It includes diverse educational activities centered around death, such as: perceptions and attitudes toward death, the stages of dying and coping with loss, and providing support for individuals impacted by death. Death education promotes life positivity. Testoni et al. (2020a), state that death education has “an impact on enhancing life by promoting a positive view of the future” (8). Engaging in death education of any form is beneficial in reducing anxiety and fears associated with mortality (Testoni et al. 2020c).

Throughout my career as a high school teacher, I was faced with students losing a parent or grandparent — and three times, I was confronted with the loss of a student. I was given no training or guidance on how to deal with these situations. I was uncertain on what to do — a prayer was said, everyone moved on, and nobody spoke about the losses. I encountered Canadian and Italian Molisan teachers while recruiting participants for this study and they too expressed the same challenges in the classroom. Death education in schools is lacking — teachers must be educated on death in order to support students so that they can be equipped with the skills needed to cope with death in the future (Engarhos et al. 2013).

Lehto and Stein (2009) reviewed over 200 health related papers written between 1980 and 2007 on the topic of death anxiety, determining that death education is an important asset as medical professionals support patients and their families with death concerns. Death education will therefore help anyone who potentially suffers from death anxiety and death fears. One particularly effective form of death education is education through the arts.

DEATH EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

Understanding and accepting that life is limited should give individuals the motivation and courage to accomplish their dreams and wishes so that when faced with the end of one’s life,

there will be fewer regrets (Aiken 2001). “To the creative person, even greater than the fear of death is the fear of living an incomplete life — life seems too short or rapid to do the things the person is capable of doing” (166). This brilliant quote is what inspires me to complete the present research and, specifically, its creative component: *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying*.

Our attitudes are influenced by external factors like television, media, music, our personal narratives, and by shared involvements with our family and friends. These experiences form our attitude toward life and mortality. We often copy what we have seen, whether positive or negative — we learn by observing.

Participating in arts therapy allows individuals to feel safe and protected (Rankanen 2016). Rankanen (2016) measured how art therapy impacted the participants’ everyday life, specifically with their physical health, mental health, and their social relationships. The results were in favour of arts therapy: 67% stated their physical health was positively or highly positively affected, 98% stated that their mental health was positively or highly positively affected, and 82% stated their social relationships were positively or highly positively affected. These outcomes justify the effectiveness in the utilisation of the arts.

Specifically, there are many studies that show a positive correlation with the introduction of death education through the arts. Arts therapies including psychodrama, intermodal psychodrama, photovoice, film, visual arts, dance, music, and literature proved beneficial in inspiring individuals to decipher their emotions regarding the themes of death by expressing their thoughts of mortality and simultaneously improving their psychological wellness and appreciation of life (Chang 2005; Cummins 2004; Ginicola, Smith, and Trzaska 2012; Harrawood, Doughty, and Wilde 2011; Kim and Lee 2009; McClatchey et al. 2015; Nan et al.

2020; Ordal 1980; Orkibi et al. 2011; Pentaris and Yerosimou 2022; Pfaffenwimmer 2014; Roconi et al. 2023; Skye et al. 2014; Stack 2022; Testoni et al. 2020a; Thurman 1993; Tsisiris et al. 2012; Walter 2012b).

Two specific death education studies using psychodrama and artistic activities were successfully used among teenagers in Southern Italy and with Italian University students. Students were encouraged to communicate about death, dying, and immortality which diminished their death anxiety and promoted emotional competence while simultaneously encouraging creative thought (Ronconi et al. 2023; Testoni et al. 2018a).

Death is used as entertainment, throughout film, television, music, novels, poetry, paintings, sculpture, theatre, and musical theatre. Why do we use art forms to experience death and dying? Humans like to create to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings, while opening the mind to different possibilities. Davis and Breede (2018) in their book *Talking Through Death*, state that, “death and dying are such personal, confusing, mysterious, painful, and mystical experiences, sometimes poetry and artwork, literature, and mediated stories are the only ways we can communicate about it” (21).

Visual Arts

Art therapy — the creative process of art-making — is known to be effective in reducing anxiety toward death, loss, and the end of one’s life (Dunphy et al. 2019; Guzman et al. 2011; Testoni et al. 2020a). 19th century Norwegian painter Edward Munch was six when his mother died and eight when his sister died. These events triggered his obsession with death and illness, making it a predominant and expressively graphic theme in his paintings throughout his life (Aiken 2001). Paintings such as *The Sick Child*, *The Death Chamber*, *By the Death Bed*, and *The Dead Mother*, are narratives of his anguishes and anxieties. Munch is considered the exception to

the romanticised and symbolic way artists from the Middle Ages to the 20th century encapsulated death in their paintings, drawings, and sculptures (Aiken 2001). In contrast, Munch used art to escape his grief.

Whether a piece of art has been created by a professional or amateur, art sparks personal emotions and experiences (Cardany 2018). The painting *The Last Supper* by Leonardo DaVinci focuses on the emotional aspects surrounding Jesus' impending death announcement. This well known painting can spark conversation around death and dying. I cannot look at this painting without asking "how was Jesus feeling knowing he was going to die soon" and "would he not have preferred to eat something else as his last meal". This is why I have chosen *The Last Supper* as the inspiration behind my musical: *Our Last Supper*.

Another medium used in art therapy is photography, specifically photovoice. Photovoice involves photography around a social issue, usually followed by a discussion of the photos taken. Testoni et al. (2020a) used photovoice in a study to initiate death education. After watching a film, the participants were asked to take photos that answered the prompt "in my life I would like to" and afterwards elaborate on the significance of the photos. The results from the deliberations promoted positive life wishes which were directly related to positive end-of-life views (Testoni et al. 2020a).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Latin phrase "memento mori" translates to "remember that you must die" and "memento vivere" translates to "remember you must live" (OED n.d.). In 2011, a "Before I Die" wall was created as a memento mori by artist Candy Chang to help her through her grief. This aroused interest on the topic of death and as a result, over 2000 "Before-I-Die" walls have been created in over seventy countries — these photo-based activities promote personal and community wellbeing (Testoni et al. 2018b).

The use of visual art, whether through painting, photography, or another art form, improves end-of-life experiences by helping individuals overcome their fears and anxieties of death and dying.

Music

Songs tell alluring stories, and songs about death, grieving, and our mortality support individuals with their fears, sequentially leading to a deeper outlook on life. From Verdi to Gospel, funeral music is used throughout the world, with different melodic phrasing to evoke emotion. After the loss of his four year old son, Eric Clapton was inspired to write *Tears in Heaven* about his loss. For a year, Clapton wrote emotional sorrowful songs to help him heal — sharing his grief through music was Clapton’s way of dealing with the pain (Leerhsen and Peyser 1992). Music has a way of healing the soul.

Metallica, a heavy metal band, dedicated their 2008 album, *Death Magnetic*, to the theme of death. James Alan Hetfield, original songwriter and lead singer of Metallica said “just like the poles of a magnet, some people are drawn to death and others are repulsed by it, but we all have to deal with it” (Revolver 2020). Despite the music’s aggressive and angry sounds, heavy metal music helps fans deal with death anxiety — validating music as an ‘anxiety buffer’ (Kneer and Reiger 2016).

Schubert’s classic song *Ave Maria* was sung at my mother’s funeral — I cannot listen to this music without thinking of my mom. The song transports me back to a time when I believed that without my mom by my side, I could no longer continue living. “Music and the arts mediate between life and death by giving form to death while we live — an essential role for the arts given that the dead cannot describe their experiences for others” (Cardany 2018). Today

Schubert's *Ave Maria* gives me strength to face my sadness and anxieties while helping me realise that the memory of my mom lives on within me.

Showtunes — songs from musicals — are educational, they reveal personal and factual information through lyrics accompanied by music. Rousu argues that showtunes are a powerful tool to use to familiarise people to topics. In fact, he explained economics by using eleven songs from musicals (Rousu 2018). So, if we use the topic of death and dying in showtunes, would we not have the same outcome? Death education in the form of a musical. My musical, *Our Last Supper*, is based on the research I gathered from this thesis and will inspire discussions about mortality and loss to help people, especially Molisans, to face and overcome their fears and anxieties toward death. Thinking of watching a musical about death and dying may feel uncomfortable, but we already do this nearly everyday without even realizing it.

Television & Film

The Cultural Indicators Project created by researcher George Gerbner in the late 1960's, introduced "cultivation theory". This theory analyzes the long-term effects of how viewers interpret themes from television and how they are perceived as real. Topics such as homosexuality, gender roles, mental health, dietary health risks, violence, and death have been researched using cultivation theory (Calzo and Ward 2009; Diefenbach and West 2007; Kahlor and Easton 2011; Netzley 2010; Russell and Buhrau 2015). Cultivation research has been studied for decades. The prominent topic of research is whether exposure to violence on television is attributed to higher rates of hostility and violent actions (Hermann, Morgan, and Shanahan 2021; Ibrahim 2023; Riddle and Martins 2021; Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes 2004). More broadly, research showed that extensive amounts of television watching does alter a viewer's perspective, making what is seen on television their understood reality (Gerbner 1970).

Media is powerful and influential, and its interpretations of death and dying display high levels of anxiety and impart these thoughts on their viewers (Walter 1991). As viewers, we have become detached from death scenes in film and television. We see vicious deaths as a casual occurrence with very little grief responses from the actors on the screen — “death is distorted into a sensational stream of violent attacks” (Schultz and Huet 2000, 137). In entertainment, death is almost never represented as we experience it in reality. Are we trying to escape reality? Are we aware of the mortality shown in the media? The effect movies and television have on society should be a concern (Schultz and Huet 2000). *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will help by portraying death and dying in a realistic manner to audiences. I want to represent the human condition: birth, emotion, dreams, conflict, and death. While *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will be a fictional narrative, it will be grounded in reality and based on my research about Molisans.

Schultz and Huet (2000) analyzed death representations in various American films, finding frequent conversations about death, however, noting that crying and grief in a response to death were portrayed more often than scenes showing illnesses, treatments, deaths, funerals, and burials. Schultz and Huet (2000) also found that within these scenes euphemisms for death were more often used than the word “death” itself. Among the dozens of euphemisms used, the most common are: passed on, departed, resting in peace, was called home. However, there are some euphemisms that are bizarre as: expired, kicked the bucket, there number was up, dirt nap, and pushing up daisies. Instead of “died”, my Molisan family uses the words “passed” or “lost”. Avoiding the word “death” does not change the reality that a person has died. The use and mere vast number of euphemisms for death confirms that our society is in denial of death (Corr 2014).

Death is the essence of horror films. These fictional narratives can become a tool for individuals to confront death. Horror films look at the connections between the living and dead allowing for viewers to communicate about mortality with confidence and understanding, while unravelling worries about life and death (Davis and Crane 2015). By directly confronting death, as is done in horror films, the avoidance of the topic is eliminated.

I recently binge watched the five seasons of the HBO drama series *Six Feet Under* that premiered in June 2001 (Austerlitz 2021). The series, written by Alan Ball, is about the dysfunctional Fisher family who own and operate a funeral home — the funeral home is on the main floor of their home. In the beginning of each of the 63 episodes, a death occurs, some realistic but more often than not the deaths are improbable, but yet we the audience (me included) believe in the story that is being depicted. The episodes explored realistic questions about loss, grieving, death, and dying. The episodes went into detail about the necessary paperwork that must be completed after a death, what to expect when visiting a morgue, crematorium or funeral home, the preparation required for a body before the viewing, the way a body is embalmed, how a deceased body smells and feels, the noises a dead body can produce, as well as the hardships of owning a funeral home business. Not your typical television show.

Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2004) conducted research on death attitudes associated with television. 174 participants over a course of five weeks viewed ten episodes of *Six Feet Under*. The authors found that the show was a successful death education tool and helped participants explore and overcome their negative attitudes associated with death and dying (Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes 2004). The narratives in *Six Feet Under* were filled with thought-provoking information about death and dying. However, what I found most interesting is that the episodes were equally about the meaning of life. Each episode made me laugh and cry,

and think about my mortality, yet it also made me appreciate the amazing experiences of my life shared with those around me. Over twenty years after the first episode aired, the subject matter remains relevant given that we are still living and we are still dying. *Six Feet Under* is fundamentally death education.

In the same way, Disney Entertainment chose to confront mortality in many of their animated films. While the subject of death is usually avoided with children like in my Molisan family, Disney embraced it, placing death as a primary theme in films such as, *The Lion King*, *Up*, *Soul*, and *Coco*. These films, specifically Disney Pixar's *Coco*, give children a way to communicate their feelings, especially when confronted with loss, generating fewer fears. *Coco* takes place in Mexico during Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) where a twelve year old boy named Miguel journeys to the Land of the Dead in search of his great-great-grandfather. *Coco* faces the subject of death 'dead on', framing death as playful and as a tradition of not forgetting one's ancestors. "In *Coco*, death is presented as natural. It is not meant to scare the audience but rather engage it in a more probing question about legacy and family" (Weir 2017).

Coco is also an effective conversation-starter to introduce children to the concept of death, allowing viewers to face death as a celebration (Castillo 2017). Cox, Garrett, and Graham (2005) analyzed how death was portrayed in animated Disney films and how children conceptualised the meaning of death after viewing such movies. They discovered that Disney movies are an influential means to teach children about death and facilitate conversations with each other, parents, teachers, and counselors (Cox, Garrett, and Graham 2005).

Roger Ebert was a film critic for 46 years before passing away with cancer. He critiqued many films about death, stating that movies about people dying are not for the dying but for the survivors to "provide a way for [them] to deal with [their] fears" (Roger Ebert 2011). It has been

proven that discussing one's own mortality, prior or following a movie about a death, served as an influential strategy towards death anxiety (Hofer 2013; Rieger and Hofer 2017). Once again justifying that narratives about death and dying serve as means to death education. Musical theatre, specifically my musical *Our Last Supper*, will establish the same outcome.

Theatre

Theatre is a place to share stories. Straight theatre and musical theatre address multiple themes: love, religion, war, being different, animals, social and mental issues, poverty, wealth, family, and death. For 2,500 years theatre has been used to demonstrate, articulate, and illuminate knowledge to spectators. Theatre is vital for humanity. This art form brings people together in a space to share an experience together in addition to stimulating communication. Storytelling, a form of theatre, can be used as a healing tool for individuals coping with grief and bereavement (Bosticco and Thompson 2005). Specifically, stories that have themes of death and loss have been proven effective in stimulating conversations about one's mortality (Ordal 1980; Thurman 1993).

As a means to expand health research, Rossiter et al. (2008) examined the advantages and disadvantages of using four theatre genres: non-theatrical performances, ethnodramas, theatrical research-based performances, and fictional theatrical performances. The study concluded in saying that, "theatre has the potential to enhance health care practitioners' understanding of the complex emotional, interpersonal and psychological dynamics that arise in medical practice, many of which are difficult to fully convey in more traditional forms of dissemination" (145).

Dr. J.L. Moreno developed psychodrama in the 1920s. Psychodrama is a technique where psychologists have their patients roleplay their personal issues to help them understand and initiate new ways of dealing with their emotions and anxieties. In contrast, intermodal

psychodrama also lets patients use characters from written plays. Individuals who specifically engage in psychodrama are more able to identify and describe their feelings of adversity toward death and dying, confirming this to be a beneficial form of death education (Orkibi 2011; Testoni et al. 2018a; Testoni et al. 2021a). Psychodrama's most beneficial appeal is that it allows the participant to act out what is in their imagination and personal reality (Testoni et al. 2019; Testoni et al. 2021a). This is called "surplus reality", a term Moreno coined and is considered to be the "magic ingredient" in psychodrama (Watersong 2008).

Margaret Edson's play *Wit* is about the struggles Vivian Bearing, a cancer patient, encounters at the end of her life. The connecting and disconnecting qualities of life, death, and life-everlasting are presented throughout the play promoting end-of-life discussions. The scenes are thought provoking, demonstrating empathy and compassion that can be found in human relationships in the final days of life. Researchers Lorenz, Steckart, and Rosenfeld started the Wit Educational Initiative (WEI) to help medical students with dying patients, by boosting empathy, understanding, and kindness (Rossiter et al. 2008). This is Death education presented in the form of straight theatre.

Likewise, Blignault et al. (2010) created a study to promote mental health and well-being for the Australian Macedonian community. A play in Macedonian titled *Fear and Shame* was written depicting the emotional collapse of a young man and the negative encounters he faced. Strategies of dealing with his distress unfold throughout the play, ending the play with a positive outcome (Blignault et al. 2010). 1,600 Macedonians went to see the performance and 236 were later interviewed by telephone to discuss if the play was beneficial in supporting mental health. Blignault et al. (2010) found that "theatre was an effective means of disseminating information and reducing stigma around mental illness in the target community" (120).

Furthermore, Michalak et al. (2014) formed a study using a theatrical performance. The play Michalak et al. used was about a woman coping with the struggles and stigmas associated with bipolar disorder. The study was designed specifically for patients with bipolar disorder and for health care providers working with bipolar patients. They were asked to view the theatrical performance and afterwards communicate the emotions and insights they experienced. It was discovered that “theatrical traditions clearly hold the potential to impact audience members, both at affective and cognitive levels, and to foster insight and deepened understanding” (10). This theatre-based exploration shows the power a live performance has on audiences. If it worked for mental health education, then a theatrical performance whose main theme is mortality, will also help audiences face their closely related fear of dying.

In addition, Neilson and Reeves (2019), discuss the importance of successful conversations between medical professionals and their dying patients. Theatre influences audiences by allowing them to reflect on their personal attitudes toward topics. Neilson and Reeves' exploration of good and bad communication was demonstrated through the use of live theatre performances. Seven scenarios with challenging conversations about end-of-life care were developed by undergraduate drama students into a performance for student nurses. The performances assisted the medical professionals in real-life situations where delicate communication and empathy were essential (Neilson and Reeves 2019). In the same way that these performances aided the medical professionals, my musical will depict Molisan Italian characters dealing with issues of death and dying and will spark audiences to have the undesired conversation with loved ones while unraveling their internalized coping mechanism.

My musical *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* indirectly uses the biblical story behind Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. This is the story of Jesus announcing his death

to his disciples as he shares his last meal with them. Recreating biblical stories is called bibliodrama. As the participants in a bibliodrama interact with each other, they further explore the characters through fictional interviews as they investigate the deeper meaning of the text. A study using death education with bibliodrama proved to be an effective approach to help individuals express their emotions and encourage a positive mindset concerning their fears and avoidance of death discussions (Testoni et al. 2021).

Theatre motivates discussions while creating awareness. It allows the audience to be cognitively and emotionally engaged. A theatre performance with realistic characters focusing on addressing social issues and conversation is influential and beneficial to promote discussion (Blignault et al. 2010; Cheechov 2016; Rossiter et al. 2008; Szostak 2022). Therefore, a musical for the Molisan community depicting the realities of death and dying would also spark conversations about their personal perspectives and dying wishes.

Musical Theatre

Sherman, Larsen, and Levy (2021) used musical theatre to stimulate discussions around mental illness for actors, audiences, and behavioural health consultants. The participants were asked to share their thoughts after watching a musical. Five themes transpired from the interviews: the influence of musical theatre on the audience, the actors' exposure to mental illness issues, the intensity of character development, the function of behavioural health consultants, and the positive support behavioural health consultants can deliver to both the audience and actors. The participants in the study reduced their reservations about mental illness by allowing them to discuss the sensitive themes revolving around emotional instability (Sherman, Larsen, and Levy 2021).

The claims the participants made are important to share because of the encouraging impact the study had on mental health and the possible efficacy of musical theatre as a tool in death education. The following are only a few of the influential words shared by the participants from Sherman, Larsen, and Levy's (2012) analysis about the power of watching musical theatre: "telling human stories that others can see themselves in are like, 'Oh, my God. That's exactly what I think'", "musical theatre in particular, has a sort of doorway into the soul", "people can see themselves and the incredible buoyancy and resilience of the human spirit", "thank God for musical theatre, it has a way of shining a light and it just creates a different kind of conversation", "it opened up conversations", "I see myself in this particular character, and I feel like I understand myself more", "the most profound impact that theatre has is that it is an art form that breeds and increases empathy", and allows audiences to "suddenly [be] able to understand things in a way that we couldn't before" (583).

There are pages of positive insights from the participants of Sherman, Larsen, and Levy's inquiry, however, a couple of somewhat negative comments also transpired: "musical theatre is so potent, it seeps in...it can do beautiful things, but it can also do damage", "theatre can be hard", and "why the hell did I come and see this show today?" (584). As the study recommends, these negative feelings can be reduced by distributing resources and offering question and answer sessions after the show for actors and audience members.

Actor Ben Platt, who played the main character Evan on Broadway in *Dear Evan Hansen*, spoke of the positive reactions the audience members had after seeing the performance. Platt said, "it seemed to be such a powerful icebreaker. There were just consistent tears and sharing of real difficult emotional conversations afterward" (Topel 2021). Actor Julianne Moore, who played Heidi, Evan's mom in the film adaptation of *Dear Evan Hansen* hopes the movie

will spark conversations with families — “giving people a place to find their shared humanity is a wonderful thing” (Topel 2021).

In addition, an inquiry from the University College London, discovered that audience members’ hearts literally beat together while watching a live musical performance — for this study they were watching *Dreamgirls* (Devlin et al. 2017, 1). Devlin et al. (2017), conclude by stating, “this clearly demonstrates that the physiological synchrony observed during the performance was strong enough to overcome social group differences and engage the audience as a whole”.

Why does Tim Burton’s 1988 film *Beetlejuice* and Scott Brown and Anthony King’s 2018 Broadway musical adaption have a cult following? After 30 years, because of a strong fanbase — 2.3 million followers on Instagram — *Beetlejuice* is again loved by multiple generations, all laughing at the same death-related jokes, while dressed up in costume to go see the live performance (Thomas 2023). *Beetlejuice* is about a deceased couple who haunt their home’s new dwellers, the Deetz family, made up of Charles Deetz, his second wife Delia, and his teenage daughter Lydia, from his first marriage. A funny storyline steeped in horror iconography with the theme of death is woven throughout. In this way, *Beetlejuice* frequently transitions from horror to humour. For example, the gruesome appearance of the deceased couple that should frighten audiences, is taken away and made comical and compassionate, consequently making it amusing, establishing horror and humour to be similar (Noel 2001). As Schultz and Huet (2000) point out “by pairing humour with death-related behaviours and conversations, [stories] distort psychological reactions to death” (147).

Popular mainstream musicals touch many lives, impacting the audience's emotions, values and beliefs. The music, lyrics, and book of a musical can be healing and comforting and

used to teach about difficult issues. I want to use these tools to teach audiences about loss, grieving, death and dying, but mostly living. Musical theatre is the perfect inspiration for death education. I believe that musical theatre will alter the anxieties of Molisans for an external and acceptance of their fears.

To this date, I was unable to find a study that researched the advantages and/or disadvantages of watching musicals in reference to death education — future study is most definitely needed. Although this study does not fill the literature gap, it does however argue musicals are influential.

CONCLUSION

We are surrounded by symbols and notions of death: hospitals, funeral homes, cemeteries, social media, entertainment, research, and self-help books. Each contributes to the lessening of the death taboo, since, during the past decades, death is slowly being discussed more often among individuals (Aiken 2001; Neimeyer 1998). This is a step in the right direction — would it not be wonderful to have your dying wishes known and become a reality — but there is more work to be done.

We all have different views about death. I do not know what is going to happen to me after I die, no one does, and this is what I struggle with and fear. This research was especially difficult for me. While I reminded myself to remain calm, I became anxious listening and reading all the responses from the participants. I questioned my research wondering if it was worth the discomfort I was feeling and the anxieties the participants were perhaps also feeling. During the ‘Death Dinners’ my goal was to initiate and guide the discussions without adding my view points, always keeping the participants feeling they were in a safe environment. I wanted to be

involved in the conversation with the guests too, in order to comfort my uneasiness. However, I understood why many Molisans did not want to engage in a ‘Death Dinner’ with others and instead chose to share their thoughts about death and dying in a more private setting — a Google Form. Gradually, the more we communicate with each other about our mortality, the less afraid we will become. I only came to this realization when my mother suddenly passed away, it was something missing in my life.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

“Death is nature’s way of saying, ‘Your table is ready.’”

— Robin Williams

INTRODUCTION

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, mortality salience is the “awareness of the inevitability of one’s death” (APA n.d.). Stressful environments, diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, and experiences with death and dying trigger mortality salience causing death anxiety among sensitive healthy individuals (Lehto and Stein 2009). When I was recruiting participants from the Molisan community for my research, I brought their awareness of death to the forefront. Less than 23% of the people contacted participated in the research. Did so few Molisans participate because of their anxiety toward death? The terror management theory states that when mortality is made salient and death anxiety is present, the individual will revert to their cultural values to reinforce their beliefs (Castano et al. 2011; Goldenberg et al. 2000). For Italians, this is a state of denial and fear.

From the beginning of the 21st century there has been a surge in the number of digital platforms available to guide and encourage conversations about death and dying, specifically focused on personal mortality, such as: ‘Death Over Dinner’, ‘Death Cafe’, ‘Talk Death’, ‘The Conversation Project’, ‘Dying to Know Day’, and ‘Life Support’. I have chosen ‘Death Over Dinner’ as a tool to encourage Molisans to discuss death and dying since food is such a fundamental component of Italian culture — I have never met an Italian who does not enjoy eating — and therefore I believed I would spark their interest instantly. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Therefore, to acquire more participants, I introduced a Google Form/Survey.

Approximately 300 Canadian-Molisans and 300 Italian-Molisans were contacted via email and word of mouth to participate in a ‘Death Dinner’ and/or fill out a survey. In reality, the number may be larger as individuals were encouraged to pass on the information to other Molisans that would be interested in participating in the study. In total, 123 Canadian-Molisans and 47 Italian-Molisans participated in the research. In actuality, 32 (maximum of 11%) participated in the ‘Death Dinners’ and 91 (maximum of 30%) Canadian-Molisans participated in the survey, while 21 (maximum of 7%) Italian-Molisans participated in the ‘Death Dinners’ and 26 (maximum of 9%) in the survey. Both parties were similarly informed of the topic and reason for the survey prior to their participation. Correspondence took place in English for Canadian-Molisans and in Italian for Italian-Molisans. For full recruitment materials, see Appendix B and Appendix C.

I used short answer questions as well as 5-point and 7-point Likert scale questions in the ‘Death Dinner’ and Google Form/Survey. See Appendix D for a list of the ‘Death Dinner’ questions and Appendix E for the Google Form/Survey questions. While I could have used one of the existing death scales to discover Molisans’ perspectives on death and dying like the Templer’s Death Anxiety Scale (T-DAS), I wanted the questions to be specifically geared toward Molisans. I wanted to get personal, having participants answer questions about their childhood, religion, fears, wishes, and future death. Whether Molisans answered questions about their mortality in a ‘Death Dinner’ or on a Google Form/Survey, it triggered a need to continue the conversation. This is noted from the positive responses I received from participants to continue researching Molisans in relation to end-of-life issues. One participant wrote, “I enjoyed participating in the survey, thank you for the opportunity. My parents who were both from Santa Croce di Magliano, Provincia di Campobasso, would have loved to have also participated, and

knowing how proud they would be to know that a university would be interested in their province and people, would have made their day. THANK YOU!”

ADVANTAGES

Death and dying is a topic that is valuable to investigate within every culture. The knowledge gained from Molisan Italians’ philosophies about death and dying will help gain a deeper understanding of the Molisan culture and in turn interpret other cultures’ viewpoints.

As a researcher, it is an advantage being a cultural insider — seeing that the objectivity of the research is maintained without bias and that the research is following the ethics approved by the FES Research Committee, of course. My familiarity of Italian culture, customs, and traditions gave me a deeper understanding of my findings and as an insider, I am deeply invested in the success of the project. Being a Molisan myself, I discovered my own fears about death and dying, so that I too can head toward a path to overcome my anxieties.

In addition, the participants directly benefited from this study as they were able to freely express their beliefs about death and dying and come to learn the dying wishes of close family members. This allows the participants to begin to alleviate stress from these challenging conversations, realize their own personal wants, and break down their contained fears.

LIMITATIONS

One important limitation is selection bias: on average, participants in both the survey and ‘Death Dinner’ are more comfortable talking about death and dying than those who opted to not participate, meaning important perspectives were unavoidably lost. This is further reflected in relatively low participation rates, especially amongst Italian-Molisan participants. As notable

discomfort was observed amongst participants (described in detail below), it is reasonable to assume that discomfort is only amplified amongst those not studied. Therefore, the results reported here can reasonably be interpreted as a lower bound for all Molisans. Another limitation is that as of this time, there were no follow-ups to see if there were any negative or positive effects after the participant had time to reflect on the dinner or survey.

PARTICIPANTS

Prior to any information being collected, the broad topic of the study — death and dying — was mentioned in a consent form since this topic typically generates negative emotions and discomfort. After consent was received, participation began. Table 1 depicts the demographics of the participants consisting of gender, age, education, family status, religion, and cultural background. Both the number and percentages of each section are listed.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

Characteristic	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Sample Size	123	47
Consent	123	47
Female	64 (52%)	29 (62%)
Male	58 (47%)	17 (36%)
Non-binary	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
Age 19 - 29	20 (16%)	12 (26%)
Age 30 - 39	12 (11%)	10 (21%)
Age 40 - 49	19 (15%)	16 (34%)
Age 50 - 59	30 (24%)	3 (6%)

Characteristic	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Sample Size	123	47
Consent	123	47
Age 60 - 69	25 (20%)	2 (4%)
Age 70 - 79	15 (12%)	4 (9%)
Age 80+	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
< Highschool Diploma	8 (7%)	1 (2%)
Highschool Diploma	14 (11%)	14 (30%)
< College Diploma	11 (9%)	2 (4%)
College Diploma	18 (15%)	4 (9%)
< Undergraduate Degree	10 (8%)	1 (2%)
Undergraduate Degree	37 (30%)	7 (15%)
< Graduate Degree	3 (2%)	2 (4%)
Graduate Degree	22 (18%)	16 (34%)
Married	75 (61%)	16 (34%)
Dating	14 (11%)	9 (19%)
Single	18 (15%)	7 (15%)
Domestic Partnership	6 (5%)	8 (17%)
Divorced	5 (4%)	4 (9%)
Widowed	5 (4%)	2 (4%)
Clergy	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Roman Catholic	109 (89%)	33 (70%)
Agnostic	8 (7%)	4 (9%)
Atheist	4 (3%)	9 (19%)
Spiritual	2 (1%)	0 (0%)

Characteristic	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Sample Size	123	47
Consent	123	47
Buddhist	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Born in Canada	91 (74%)	0 (0%)
Born in Italy	32 (26%)	47 (100%)
Immigrant to Canada	27 (22%)	n/a
1st Generation Italian	63 (51%)	n/a
2nd Generation Italian	31 (25%)	n/a
3rd Generation Italian	2 (2%)	n/a

Notes: 70% of Canadian-Molisan participants immigrated to Canada between 1950 and 1970.

FOOD

Gathering around the table in a Molisan household is a cultural, social, and sometimes emotional experience but it creates memories and bonds that foster love and empathy. 96% of Canadian and Italian Molisans stated they enjoy sharing a meal with their family and friends, describing the feeling using words such as “happy (*felice*)”, “talking (*parlare*)”, “sharing (*convivialità*)”, “complete (*completa*)”, and “alive (*viva*)”.

A Canadian-Molisan said, “I grew up seeing the kitchen table as a place of communication, a stage, a place that could be a confessional and a place where family business (personal and financial) are discussed with extensive chats about food and the good things in life”. An Italian-Molisan said, “it’s the best opportunity to share, get to know the people we love better (*è l’occasione migliore per condividere, imparare a conoscere meglio le persone che amiamo*)”.

Eating is not just about providing our bodies with nutrients to maintain good health, it unites us. Sharing food with family and friends creates cherished and celebrated moments — it creates conversation. Melanie Dunea photographed and interviewed 100 of the world’s greatest chefs and asked them to describe what their final meals would be. With this information, she created two coffee-table books. Each book includes a portrait and a description of the chef’s last meal wishes. The two books are titled *My Last Supper: 50 Great Chefs and their Final Meals* and *The Next Course: 50 Great Chefs and their Final Meals*. These books are filled with a vast variety of heartfelt sentiments sprinkled with humour (Dunea 2007 and 2011). Similarly I asked each participant, “if you were to unexpectedly die tomorrow, what would you hope your last meal to be?” I wanted to start the conversation of death and dying. Table 2 summarizes their last meal wishes.

Since traditional Italian meals consist of multiple foods, Italians’ responses were more detailed than their Canadian counterparts. Pasta was the most popular dish for Canadian-Molisans — mentioned 50% of the time — while only 12% of Italian-Molisans wanted pasta. Interestingly, 9% of Canadians vs. 33% of Italians mentioned that the specific dish was irrelevant as long as the meal was shared with their loved ones.

Most participants felt comfortable answering this question and amusingly, one Canadian-Molisan wrote, “A plate of ‘pasta a aglio e olio’, I want to go on a light stomach!”, and one Italian-Molisan wrote, “a light dinner so as not to have unpleasant physiological surprises! (*una cena leggera così da non avere sgradevoli sorprese fisiologiche!*)”.

Other than starting the death discussion, the information gathered from this question will be used in my musical since the inspiration behind the musical and the glue that holds the various inquiries together is Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*.

TABLE 2: LAST MEALS WISHED FOR

Food	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Pasta	29%	14%
Meat	15%	6%
Wine	9%	6%
Dessert	9%	2%
Fruit/Vegetables	7%	0%
Pizza	6%	9%
Indifferent	5%	9%
Any meal with family/friends	5%	40%
Seafood	5%	14%
Bread	4%	0%
Cheese	3%	0%
McDonalds	2%	0%
Coffee	1%	0%

Notes: Each percentage reports the frequency at which each food category was mentioned.

RELIGION

The majority of the participants were Roman Catholic — 89% of the Canadian-Molisans and 70% of the Italian Molisans — and as Roman Catholics, their beliefs are that death is not the end but a transition to the afterlife. They follow Jesus Christ’s teachings — the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. These beliefs are prayed upon for comfort and assist thiests as they approach death. As a Roman Catholic myself, this belief does not help me. As much as I try, I struggle with the idea that there is no proof that I will be reunited with those that have passed before me — my mother — in an afterlife. When I begin to reflect on this belief, it causes me

distress instead of help.

The literature suggests that religious individuals and atheists both fear death less than their indifferent counterparts (Aiken 2001; Teastoni et al. 2018b). Amongst theists and atheists groups, I found that 92% and 91% of the participants did not fear death, hence their participation in the research. Whereas the other 72% of possible participants feared death, hence the lack of participation in the research.

Table 3 reveals the number of visits participants made to their place of worship. Since the majority of the participants are Roman Catholic, the prominent place of worship is going to church to celebrate the eucharist. While Roman Catholics are obliged to attend church at least once a week, only 33% of Canadian-Molisans and 19% of Italian-Molisans did so and 49% and 66% respectively did not attend church more than nine times per year.

Religion helps to lessen the fear of death and it shapes our personal views, forming reactions that are distinct to those beliefs (Testoni et al. 2020c). Death and religious attitudes are part of humanity and are ongoing throughout a person's life and using religion as a coping method to relieve anxiety toward death has been shown to produce positive outcomes (Dezutter, et al. 2009). As noted above, I find that I personally become more frightened knowing of a possible afterlife. What will it be like? Will I have my same body? Will I actually meet my mother again? Scientifically it does not seem possible, but yet so many people devote their lives to the belief of an afterlife, as the Roman Catholics do.

TABLE 3: HOW MANY VISITS TO YOUR PREFERRED PLACE OF WORSHIP DID YOU MAKE IN A YEAR, PRIOR TO COVID-19?

Times Per Year	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
0	14 (11%)	15 (32%)

1 - 9	44 (36%)	16 (34%)
10 - 19	4 (3%)	2 (4%)
20 - 29	8 (7%)	4 (9%)
30 - 39	4 (3%)	1 (2%)
40 - 49	6 (5%)	0 (0%)
50 - 59	31 (25%)	6 (13%)
60 - 69	4 (3%)	1 (2%)
70 +	6 (5%)	2 (4%)
Wedding and Funerals	2 (2%)	0 (0%)

LIFE

While the reality of death eventually comes for all and this can happen at different ages, this reality becomes more frequent as we age (Aiken 2001). Table 4 shows the percentage of Molisans' perspectives on desired life expectancies and lifespans. On average, perspectives were similar. Interestingly, only 3% of Canadian-Molisans and 13% of Italian-Molisans consider 100+ as the age at which someone has 'lived a long life' with more participants mentioning ages in the 80s and 90s. However, 30% of Canadian-Molisans and 35% of Italian-Molisans would be happy to live to be 100+. In this way, participants wished longer lives for themselves than what they considered to be long. Are we all wishing to live a long life and delay the reality of the uncertainty of death? According to Harvard Health (2002) the number of centenarians doubled in the 1980s and 1990s. This trend will continue in industrialized countries as demographers predict that by 2050 there will be an 88% increase in individuals that will reach 100 (Harvard Health 2002). The Molisan participants may get their wish granted.

TABLE 4: LONG LIVES

**PANEL A: AT WHAT AGE DO YOU CONSIDER SOMEONE TO HAVE
'LIVED A LONG LIFE'?**

Years of Life	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
50s	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
60s	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
70s	3 (2%)	2 (4%)
80s	46 (38%)	12 (26%)
90s	68 (55%)	25 (53%)
100+	4 (3%)	6 (13%)

**PANEL B: IF YOU WERE OF SOUND BODY AND MIND,
AT WHAT AGE WOULD YOU BE HAPPY TO LIVE UNTIL?**

Years of Life	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
50s	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
60s	1 (1%)	2 (4%)
70s	1 (1%)	2 (4%)
80s	32 (26%)	6 (13%)
90s	44 (36%)	17 (36%)
100+	36 (30%)	16 (35%)
Forever	2 (2%)	1 (2%)
God's Decision	6 (5%)	3 (6%)

A little more than half of the Molisans that participated in the research expressed a desire to know if they were approaching their end-of-life. 59% of Canadian-Molisans would want to know if they only had a few months to live, 23% would prefer not to know, and 18% were

unsure. Comparably, 55% of Italian-Molisans would want to know if they only had a few months to live although 36% would prefer not to know — a 13 percentage point increase — whereas only 9% were unsure — a 9 percentage point decrease. This sparked a controversial conversation during the ‘Death Dinners’ where participants were able to expand on the question. Those in favour of knowing stated, “this way you can be prepared mentally and emotionally” and “it will give you a chance to say your goodbyes and tie up loose ends”. Those in favour of not knowing said, “just keep on living...make plans and enjoy” and “if you know then you’ll get depressed”. While both groups made good points, the important takeaway was that they were seriously discussing their mortalities. From this research I recognize and agree with the importance of knowing how much time I have left to live, but no one can truly predict our end-of-life. In this way, it is better to discuss and make plans with loved ones prior to death and living life without regret.

What do Molisan Italians regret doing or not doing each day? Working in palliative care, Bronnie Ware (2019) learned of the preciousness of life. In her memoir, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* she compiled first-hand information from dying patients into five chapters/regrets. Their wishes were simple: (1) to be more courageous and live your dreams, (2) to not have worked needlessly hard, (3) to express how you truly feel, (4) to appreciate friendships, and (5) to be happier.

17% of Canadian-Molisans and 12% of Italian-Molisans who participated in the study reported having no regrets if their life was to end tomorrow. This reveals that 86% of the Molisans will have some sort of regret if they unexpectedly died. The majority of responses in each group — 38% of Canadians and 44% of Italians — described missing and leaving their family as the most important regret. A Canadian-Molisan wrote, “not seeing my children in their

careers and with their life partners; not being able to retire with my husband”. Similarly, an Italian-Molisan wrote, “not seeing my children grow up, but above all, having to leave my little boy who is yet to turn ten! (*non vedere i miei figli crescere, ma soprattutto, dover lasciare il mio piccolo bambino che deve ancora compiere dieci anni!*)”. Furthermore, 14% of Canadians and 16% of Italians wished to travel more, and a small percentage — 6% and 7%, respectively — would regret not accomplishing their goals and passions. One Canadian added humour by saying they would regret, “not eating a larger ice cream cone”.

Understanding and reacting to these regrets before end-of-life will allow Molisans to improve relationships and find confidence to live a life free of regret and die with peace of mind (Ware 2019). I regret not appreciating my relationship with my mother more — I took it for granted that she would be by my side forever. This was a hard lesson to learn but I have become grateful for the small things in life and for each day I share with my loved ones. This would not have been possible without the realization of the frailty of life.

If I had an opportunity to speak with my mom one last time, I would simply say “I love you”. 54% of Canadian-Molisans and 44% of Italian-Molisans would mention “love” in their last words to those they leave behind. Love connects everyone, it gives life meaning. “To enjoy life” was the second largest wish Molisans wanted to convey to those they left behind — 24% Canadians and 19% Italians — and 8% and 12%, respectively, expressed they would not want anyone to cry or feel pain for them after they die. 14% of Molisans wished to simply be remembered. An Italian-Molisan stated the following profound response:

I would like to tell my children not to cry more than necessary and to always smile while looking at the sky because I would always be with them and I would live in them... at every sunrise, at every sunset, with a gust of wind, in front of a stormy sky, a rainbow, a crystal clear sea, with the scent of a flower... I would like them to draw serenity thinking of my absence while admiring one of the things listed (*Vorrei dire ai miei figli di non piangere più del necessario e di sorridere sempre rivolgendo lo sguardo verso il cielo*)

perché io sarei sempre con loro e in loro vivrei...in ogni alba, in ogni tramonto, con una folata di vento, davanti un cielo in tempesta, un arcobaleno, un mare cristallino, dal profumo di un fiore...vorrei che traessero serenità pensando alla mia assenza ammirando una delle cose elencate).

Although the majority of the messages Molisans wanted to leave behind to their loved ones after they died were serious in tone, a few humorous ones stood out. One Canadian said, “if you are sad for longer than two days I will haunt you. It's really not a big deal” and one Italian wrote, “they removed me from the earth too al dente (*mi hanno tolto dalla terra troppo al dente*)”.

If death conversations are not continued, these thoughts and feelings will never be shared with family and friends. To live fulfilled lives we need to share our hopes through discussions. At the end of this research I plan to share my wishes to my family and friends — they may not be ready to accept it but they will know it.

DEATH AND DYING CONVERSATIONS

Open dialogue allows us to reflect and clarify our beliefs. From my own experience of dealing with loss and grief I understand the importance of discussing the painful and avoided topic of death and dying. I delved into my past experiences, feelings, and memories of loss and grief to continue to grow and heal.

As reported in Table 5, if we eliminate the neutral responses for both groups (11% of Canadians and 36% of Italians), 58% of Canadian-Molisans reported feeling some sense of comfort talking about death and dying, as opposed to 36% of Italian-Molisans. In contrast, 28% of Italians vs. 31% of Canadians felt some sense of discomfort talking about death and dying. These findings are driven by Italians reporting more neutrality towards death whereas Canadians' views were more polarizing.

TABLE 5: COMFORTABLE VS. UNCOMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT DEATH & DYING

Degree of Comfort	Canadian-Molisian	Italian-Molisian
Very Uncomfortable	15%	11%
Uncomfortable	3%	4%
Somewhat Uncomfortable	13%	13%
Neutral	11%	36%
Somewhat Comfortable	19%	17%
Comfortable	24%	15%
Very Comfortable	15%	4%

When asked why they felt comfortable, Canadian and Italian Molisians similarly expressed that, “it’s a part of life (*parte della vita*)”, “it’s a reality (*una realta*)”, “its natural (*è naturale*)”, “it happens to everyone (*succede a tutti*)”. However, “fear (*paura*)” was the main reason why both groups felt uncomfortable speaking about death and dying.

On discussing death and dying, Canadians stated that it: “help[s] with worries and concerns”, “[is] therapeutic to discuss”, “[is] helpful to those you leave behind”, and “the more you speak of it the less stressed you will be”. One Italian stated, “death is also an aspect of life and as such needs to be addressed as a topic even in conversation, despite being seen as the end of life (*anche la morte è un aspetto della vita e come tale deve essere affrontato come argomento anche in una conversazione, nonostante sia vista come la fine della vita*)”.

The Canadian-Molisians and Italian-Molisians that participated in this research feel that conversing about death and dying is necessary and it will aid individuals to overcome the anxieties and worries they hold. How do we start this conversation with those that chose not to be part of the study? The musicals *Rent* and *Dear Evan Hansen* jump started conversations about

aids and mental health, respectively. My musical *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will continue and/or initiate the needed conversation about death and dying.

59% and 68% of Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans, respectively, remember discussing as children, death and dying with their family. Whereas 37% and 44% of Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans, respectively, remember as children, talking with friends about death and dying. These are large percentages and imply that mortality discussions have taken place throughout Molisans’ lives. However, since only a fraction of the Molisans approached took part in the research, this signifies that the majority of Molisans do fear talking about death and dying and will choose to avoid the conversation when prompted.

Table 6 illustrates the percentages of adult participants engaged in conversations about death and dying with family and friends. In comparing Canadian-Molisans to Italian-Molisans the percentages are balanced between each other and between family and friends. It is important to note that on average only 9% of Canadian-Molisans and 13% of Italian-Molisans speak to family and friends about death and dying on a weekly basis while the majority rarely or sometimes participate in death-focused discussions. This confirms that the death education is lacking in both Canada and in Italy.

TABLE 6: OCCURRENCES OF DEATH DISCUSSIONS

PANEL A: AS AN ADULT, HOW OFTEN DO YOU TALK TO YOUR FAMILY ABOUT DEATH AND DYING?

Time-Frame	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Never	7 (6%)	6 (13%)
Rarely (once or twice a year)	54 (44%)	19 (40%)

Sometimes (once or twice a month)	49 (40%)	15 (32%)
Often (once or twice a week)	11 (8%)	6 (13%)
Always (more than twice a week)	2 (2%)	1 (2%)

PANEL B: AS AN ADULT, HOW OFTEN DO YOU TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT DEATH AND DYING?

Time-Frame	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Never	12 (9%)	8 (17%)
Rarely (once or twice a year)	63 (51%)	18 (38%)
Sometimes (once or twice a month)	39 (32%)	16 (34%)
Often (once or twice a week)	7 (6%)	4 (9%)
Always (more than twice a week)	2 (2%)	1 (2%)

Interestingly, Table 7 shows that 72% of Canadian-Molisans and 62% of Italian-Molisans believe it is important to talk to family about death and dying, and 53% of the Canadian participants and 44% of the Italian participants also agree that speaking with friends about mortality is just as important as speaking with family. However, as observed earlier, these conversations are not being arranged. Once again, this demonstrates the reluctance yet need to gather and discuss our end-of-life fears, anxieties, and wishes.

TABLE 7: IMPORTANCE OF DISCUSSIONS

PANEL A: HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK IT IS TO TALK TO FAMILY ABOUT DEATH AND DYING?

Importance	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Very Unimportant	9 (7%)	5 (11%)
Unimportant	4 (3%)	3 (6%)
Somewhat Unimportant	4 (3%)	1 (2%)
Neutral	18 (15%)	9 (19%)
Somewhat Important	40 (33%)	9 (19%)
Important	36 (29%)	16 (34%)
Very Important	12 (10%)	4 (9%)

PANEL B: HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK IT IS TO TALK TO FRIENDS ABOUT DEATH AND DYING?

Importance	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Very Unimportant	5 (4%)	4 (9%)
Unimportant	9 (7%)	6 (13%)
Somewhat Unimportant	9 (7%)	1 (2%)
Neutral	35 (29%)	15 (32%)
Somewhat Important	47 (38%)	9 (19%)
Important	13 (11%)	10 (21%)
Very Important	5 (4%)	2 (4%)

DEATH AND DYING FEARS

Table 8 reports the imagery respondents associated with death and dying. Across both groups, funerals, suffering/pain, and darkness were mentioned most frequently. Overall,

Canadian respondents used “lighter” imagery, referencing celebration, peace, light, and nature more often than their Italian counterparts. For example, a Canadian mentioned “a baby tree” — conjuring thoughts of rebirth and growth — while in contrast, an Italian mentioned “a tree without leaves (*un albero senza foglie*)”. Most notably, being that Italian-Molisans are a less religious group as noted above, only one participant mentioned religion or religious iconography — “a stone statue in the shape of an angel looking down (*una statua di pietra a forma di angelo con lo sguardo all’ingiù*)” — while Canadian-Molisans had 22 mentions of religion that were more descriptive and vivid: “standing in front of St. Peter and he deciding if I will be going to Heaven” and “finally to see and be judged by Jesus and God”.

The *Last Supper* by Leonardo DaVinci, an image that hangs in my family dining room, was displayed in the majority of the homes I visited in Canada and Italy during the ‘Death Dinners’. Displaying this iconic painting is not only a religious symbol but one that represents relationships, loyalty, and death. The mere fact that the *Last Supper* is visible (especially in Canadian-Molisan homes) demonstrates the importance of this pivotal moment in Jesus’ life — the day before he dies — and the fact that it is continuously in our thoughts. Da Vinci’s original *Last Supper* painting is visited by merely half a million people each year. Since this painting is known by many, *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will be relatable to the masses.

TABLE 8: IMAGERY MOST COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH DEATH AND DYING

Image	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Funeral	18%	23%
Unsure	15%	6%
Religion	15%	3%

Suffering/Pain	13%	17%
Darkness	11%	23%
Peace	10%	3%
Hospital	8%	3%
Flowers	4%	9%
Light	3%	0%
Nothingness	3%	13%

Notes: Each percentage reports the frequency at which each image category was mentioned.

Caruso et al.’s (2019) research shows that the general Italian public will more often choose ‘not sure’ to end-of-life questions over health professionals, suggesting it is necessary “to address and enhance people self-awareness, which is the paramount way to express what oneself really wants in such particular situations” (14).

On average, Canadian-Molisans think of death and dying less than Italian-Molisans, no more than twice a year — 34% and 55% respectively. However, both groups, on average, are equally afraid of death and dying — 48% and 51% respectively. See Table 9 and Table 10 for exact percentages. Therefore, 50% of Molisans are afraid of death and dying yet 45% of the Molisans do not think about mortality. Molisans are suppressing their thoughts on this topic. This once more highlights the necessity of death education among Canadians and Italian Molisans.

TABLE 9: FREQUENCY OF DEATH AND DYING THOUGHTS

PANEL A: HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK ABOUT DEATH?

Time-Frame	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Never	4 (3%)	7 (15%)
Rarely (once or twice a year)	32 (26%)	15 (32%)

Sometimes (once or twice a month)	44 (36%)	14 (29%)
Often (once or twice a week)	28 (23%)	7 (15%)
Always (more than twice a week)	15 (12%)	4 (9%)

PANEL B: HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK ABOUT DYING?

Time-Frame	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Never	6 (5%)	11 (23%)
Rarely (once or twice a year)	42 (34%)	18 (39%)
Sometimes (once or twice a month)	45 (36%)	11 (23%)
Often (once or twice a week)	17 (14%)	6 (13%)
Always (more than twice a week)	13 (11%)	1 (2%)

TABLE 10: FEARS OF DEATH AND DYING
PANEL A: HOW AFRAID ARE YOU OF DEATH?

Fear	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Very Unafraid	9 (7%)	1 (2%)
Unafraid	22 (18%)	6 (13%)
Somewhat Unafraid	16 (13%)	7 (15%)
Neutral	23 (19%)	10 (21%)
Somewhat Afraid	36 (29%)	12 (25%)
Afraid	10 (8%)	6 (13%)

Very Afraid	7 (6%)	5 (11%)
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PANEL B: HOW AFRAID ARE YOU OF DYING?

Fear	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Very Unafraid	10 (8%)	1 (2%)
Unafraid	17 (14%)	6 (13%)
Somewhat Unafraid	17 (14%)	8 (17%)
Neutral	14 (11%)	7 (15%)
Somewhat Afraid	40 (33%)	12 (25%)
Afraid	14 (11%)	6 (13%)
Very Afraid	11 (9%)	7 (15%)

Terror management theory (TMT) is a psychological belief that while the awareness of our mortality causes “anxiety, denial, and terror”, the controlling of these fears originate from our personal and cultural principles “that seek to provide life with meaning and value” (Corr, Corr, and Doka 2019, 62). In my immediate and extended Molisan family, the topic of death was never discussed. Were they in denial? I believe, as noted above, that fear is the cause of their silence. However, what do they fear?

34% of Canadian-Molisans and 33% of Italian-Molisans equally report that suffering is one of their most significant fears around death and dying. In addition, they feared leaving their loved ones behind and not accomplishing their goals: 36% and 12% of Canadian-Molisans vs. 23% and 15% Italian-Molisans, respectively. The literature reveals that confronting these fears instead of suppressing them allows individuals to cope with end-of-life anxieties — promoting dialogue with family about one’s dying wishes and fears is the most justified way to accept death

and in turn improve one's quality of life (Corr 2014; Mazzola 2016; McLeod-Sordjan 2014; Testoni et al. 2020a).

One Canadian and one Italian participant also mentioned fearing being forgotten: “the living not remembering me” vs. “not being remembered by the people I love (*avrei paura di non essere ricortata dalle persone che amo*).” While one participant from each sample is too small a group to over-generalize, the Canadian response was interestingly less focused on the family unit and more on outward accomplishment, reflecting the influence of a less collectivist North American society. When my mom suddenly died, our bond, our friendship, our relationship also died. This irreversible loss increased my fear of death and dying. When this bond ends, tremendous feelings of grief transpire and at the same time uncover other distressing memories (Testoni et al. 2019).

In the musical *Rent* (Act 1 Scene 16), the whole cast, whether healthy or critically sick with AIDS, sing “Will I?”. This song is about their fears of facing death. The words are repeated throughout the entire song — “will I lose my dignity, will someone care, will I wake tomorrow, from this nightmare?” I have seen this musical at least ten times on Broadway and in Toronto, and twice this year at Stratford, every time the cast sings “Will I?”, I reflect on my mortality having similar reservations about dying. The characters in *Rent* lean on each other for encouragement, gathering at life support groups to talk and help them cope with life and death. The audience recognizes how this helps the characters and can use similar coping mechanisms to assist them with their fears and anxieties about death and dying. *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will have the same impact on Molisans and other viewers.

16% of Canadian-Molisans specified that they do not know what happens after death while 31% stated they enter heaven or go to paradise. In contrast, 30% of Italian-Molisans

mentioned uncertainty while only 5% spoke of heaven or paradise. However, both groups similarly believed — 16% Canadians and 19% Italians — that their soul lives on, reincarnated into another life or spirit, while 23% Canadians and 19% Italians indicated that nothing at all happens. No one will ever know for certain the answer to this question. The uncertainty, however, puts perspective on life, allowing us to appreciate our relationships more fully while motivating us to live authentic lives and prioritize what really matters. This unknowing should encourage us to make arrangements for the future.

One Canadian-Molisian encapsulated everyone's thoughts on what they think happens after death by writing,

I don't know. If I knew or people knew then maybe people wouldn't be so afraid or scared of it. It's one of those unknown things in the universe. Sometimes I think we go to heaven and there you can do anything you like and see people who have passed away. Then sometimes I think we just die, that's it we are dead. Sometimes I think we come back in a reincarnation and that's how sometimes we have déjà vu. Or who knows maybe we go to a parallel universe and it's the opposite of what we have now. Or maybe aliens come and take us away. Wish I knew. I would sleep better at night knowing.

I agree with this participant. Their words summarize the uncertainty of Molisians and their quest for knowledge.

FUNERALS

In Canada, up until 1994, there was a constant increase in the number of deaths that took place in hospitals, while simultaneously, belief of the 'home' as the preferred place to die substantially increased (Cook D. et al. 2013; Wilson 2009). Similarly, according to the Italian Survey of the Dying of Cancer, 93.5% Italians interviewed chose 'home' as the preferred place to die (Beccaro M. et al. 2006). This corresponds to my research, where 'home' was the favoured place to die in both countries — 62% of the Canadian-Molisians and 66% of the Italian-Molisians.

The hospital and hospice were the next desired places for Molisans to die. See Table 11 for other unique desired places Molisans wished to die.

It is important to share where you want to die with families and equally valuable for governments to acknowledge the trend toward dying at ‘home’. This information will establish effective healthcare planning while implementing policies to assist dying patients and their families (Wilson 2009).

When my time comes, I would like to die at home among familiar surroundings and family support without the stresses of public areas. This was the consensus during the ‘Death Dinners’. We never discussed death and dying in our Molisan family and I did not know where my mother wished to die. This should further incentivize us to discuss our dying aspirations with family and/or friends and begin to create an Advanced Care Plan.

**TABLE 11: IF YOU ARE AT THE END OF YOUR LIFE,
WHERE WOULD YOU WANT TO DIE?**

Place	Canadian-Molisan	Italian-Molisan
Hospital	13 (11%)	6 (13%)
Hospice	14 (11%)	4 (9%)
Home	77 (62%)	31 (66%)
Sea	6 (5%)	1 (2%)
Unsure	3 (2%)	1 (2%)
With a Loved One	3 (2%)	0 (0%)
Somewhere Cool/Dramatic	2 (2%)	1 (2%)
Italy	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Golf Course	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Under a Tree	1 (1%)	2 (4%)

Spontaneous Place	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
None of the Above	1 (1%)	1 (2%)

86% of Canadian-Molisans and 72% of Italian-Molisans remember attending a funeral as a child. However, 89% of Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans equally have not planned their own funeral arrangements. If you could plan your own funeral or memorial service, how would you like it to be? The answer to this question will alleviate stress for your loved ones, while allowing you to make specific requests on how you want to be celebrated, and you could also relieve the financial burden on the family by prepaying for funeral expenses — I am not receiving kickbacks from funeral parlors or cemeteries! If you do not discuss your wishes, they cannot possibly be honoured. This question received many interesting responses from the participants, although one Canadian-Molisan and one Italian-Molisan did not want to discuss planning their own funeral or memorial service and passed on commenting.

Many Molisan participants indicated highly specific funeral desires. A Canadian noted, “there would be a choir with three musicians: an organist, violinist, and guitarist”, and another stated, “...cremated, no viewing, no funeral, family and close friends have 2 days to cry then get over it. I want a party, an open bar. You have to be blackout to attend my funeral...I will haunt whoever puts me in a coffin in the floor or in a wall”. In contrast, at one of the Canadian-Molisan ‘Death Dinners’, a participant specifically wished for:

A dark coffin black or dark coloured wood. Don’t want flowers. Just a few black roses on top of the coffin. Coffin closed and no suit on me. I never wear suits. Why am I going to wear one now? Never understood that. Why do you need to look good when you die? I want to wear jeans and a t-shirt and my chequered plaid shirt that I always wear and like. I also want music to be played like my fav songs at the funeral home. I have my own pictures already on a usb stick of the ones that I want them to use in a video thing. I made sure everyone I know is in it with me.

Additionally, an Italian-Molisan wished their funeral to be:

Very simple, few flowers and I absolutely wouldn't want anyone to come and look at me or touch me. I would like a picture of me in the foreground where I smile because after all life is beautiful! I would like some music suitable for the event because I think it would be a way to console my loved ones in my absence since I love music (*molto semplice, pochi fiori e non vorrei assolutamente che chiunque venisse a guardarmi o toccarmi. Vorrei una mia foto in primo piano dove sorrido perché infondo la vita è bella! Vorrei della musica adatta all'evento perché penso che sarebbe un modo per consolare i miei cari in mia assenza dato che io amo la musica*).

Humour was again included when an Italian-Molisian specifically desired to be buried “in a vineyard, to be able to give back to the earth all the wines I’ve drunk (*in una vigna, per poter restituire alla terra tutto il vino che ho bevuto*)”. Interestingly, one Canadian and one Italian both wished to be buried under a tree. Canadians and Italians equally wished (5%) for cremation, 24% vs. 21% desired a simple funeral ceremony, and 17% vs. 12% intended for a traditional religious function. However, 40% of Canadian-Molisians preferred their memorial service to be a celebration of life with a party atmosphere (e.g., open bar, food, music), whereas 19% of Italian-Molisians favoured a festive ceremony after they died.

Canada and Italy have individual death practices and these differences originate from “history, institutions, and culture” (Walter 2012a, 139). Italian dying patients entrust their families with their health choices and their families relinquish it to health professionals — however, in Canada doctors are required to speak directly to the patient, unless there is a power of attorney in place (Walter 2012a). Whatever the individual prefers in regards to their end-of-life, it needs to be spoken of with family and/or friends prior to death.

The majority of people who die have some sort of farewell ceremony. Why not be part of the planning. There is no right or wrong answer to how you would want your funeral or memorial service to be, but it could be the last wish you are granted. Again this cannot be achieved unless you discuss death and dying with your loved ones and make your desires known. It is important for Molisians to start this conversation and alleviate the fears and anxieties that

surround end-of-life so that they can live more fulfilling lives free of regret (Cox, Garrett, and Graham 2005; Cummins 2004; Orkibi 2011; Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2000; Raccichini et al. 2023; Testoni et al. 2018a; Testoni et al. 2020b; Ware 2019)).

A minimum of 71% of Molisans that were contacted chose not to partake in this research, and although we do not know the exact reason, many did express to me that they do not like talking about “such things (*queste cose*)” and were reluctant in saying the word ‘death’. Another response I received from an Italian-Molisan via email was “you are not well (*tu non stai bene*)”. I replied back asking for their reason but I never received a response. For the Molisans that did participate, the conversation started, the seed has been planted. My musical will include ideas mentioned above from participants, as well as aid them to continue the conversation about death and dying. It will also introduce the topic of death and dying to those that did not participate in this research.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the end of the ‘Death Dinners’ and Google Form/Survey, each group was asked if they had any further thoughts or comments they would like to share. The majority of the responses were positive, finding the experience “fascinating”, “original”, and “important”. A Canadian participant wrote, “we should talk about death and dying but it is an uncomfortable topic, wish it wasn't, might make it easier to accept if we talked about it more”, and another participant wrote, “I think it’s important to talk about life goals and also funeral arrangements with your kids and spouse. Just in case you are unable to make the arrangements yourself, it will give them peace of mind to know what you wanted”.

In addition, many participants expressed their desire to ‘live life’: “dying is part of life”, “it’s not how we die that counts but what we have done with our life”, “we never have a choice to die; it’s a given, but we do have a choice everyday to live”, “my mom used to tell me to ‘live your life as if you’re never going to die but always be ready’”, and one Italian-Molisan stated, “live with serenity, peace, and love (*vivi con serenità, pace, e amore*)”.

However, three participants expressed that they found the survey difficult. Two Canadian-Molisans wrote: “completing this was not easy and by far, not enjoyable”, and “this was really hard for me to do as I can really relate to it”, and one Italian-Molisan wrote, “this survey was very difficult for me!!!! I don’t like to talk about these things!!!! (*questo sondaggio era molto difficile per me!!!! Non mi piace a parlare di queste cose!!!!*)”. Interestingly, no one voiced they had difficulty with the ‘Death Dinners’, instead stating that the research could actually be about life and not death.

Some participants shared personal stories:

My mother dying in her sleep at 65 changed my life drastically. 10 years later I still can’t ‘get over it’. It completely altered who I am and sent me into depths of sadness. I had never experienced this before. The unfairness of her dying young and being left rudderless still haunts me. Although I have always been healthy, her young death has reinforced my wanting to stay healthy, exercise, eat right and maintain my mental health so that I can have a long happy life. As children we were forced to go to funerals, it was just part of life. The Italian ritual of wailing and going through a reception line was traumatic, but it did teach us about grief, sadness and support. The sense of community at a funeral is important. The tradition or custom of open caskets seems to be waning, which I approve of. I don’t like the last memory of someone to be in their casket.

Excluding children from death and dying was also noted, a Canadian-Molisan wrote:

In my personal experience, experiencing a loved one’s passing at a young age - and my family allowing me to participate and understand the dying/death/funeral process has allowed me to carry an understanding about death that I would not have had otherwise. I am not scared of death because of that reason. I believe it’s important to communicate with your children about this topic as it is inevitable.

An Italian-Molisan similarly wrote:

The thing that displeases me most about the subject of death is the fact that many people still today exclude children to protect them from suffering. But what does it mean? Children suffer when they lose a grandparent, a dog, a goldfish, any member of the family... they suffer and must metabolise suffering precisely so that they become strong from an emotional point of view but above all so that they grow up peacefully without unnecessary fears or unfounded phobias (*la cosa che più mi dispiace del tema della morte è il fatto che molte persone ancora oggi escludono i bambini per proteggerli da una sofferenza. Ma che significa? I bambini soffrono quando perdono uno dei nonni, il cagnolino, un pesciolino rosso, un qualsiasi membro della famiglia..soffrono e devono metabolizzare la sofferenza proprio perché diventino forti dal punto di vista emotivo ma soprattutto affinché crescano sereni senza inutili timori o infondate fobie*)”.

Humorously, one Canadian-Molisan and one Italian-Molisan, wrote respectively, “You must be fun at parties! :)”, and “I hope I don't die after hitting ‘enter’ because that means it was God’s trap (*spero di non morire dopo aver premuto ‘invio’ perché questo vuole dire che era un tranello di Dio*)”.

Testoni et al. (2020b) found, as I too discovered, that humans welcome opportunities to discuss their feelings about death and dying, especially the reminiscing of loved ones that have passed. Discussing mortality in a safe environment allows for “the possibility of communicating one’s own difficult emotions produced both a sense of liberation and greater empathy for others, activating the discussion on everyday meanings, from the simplest to the most important existential themes” (7). The wonderful thing that happened at least once during each of the ‘Death Dinners’ I conducted was that a story was freely shared about someone dear to them that had passed away. These stories were not sad but rather beautiful memories that live on and are cherished — they do not die with the deceased person. Although talking about mortality does awaken our fears toward death, it also gives us a chance to ask questions and hear how others cope with their anxieties.

CONCLUSION

Fonseca, Mascarenhas, and Testoni (2012) state that “economics, politics, theology, social concerns, and cultural factors have influenced the way in which we live and the way in which we die. The gradual changes throughout human history and the rapid transformations in recent decades have made it necessary to formally consider the concept of death and to embrace the interdisciplinary nature of the field of thanatology” (165).

As much as fears and anxiety about death and dying are present, we have been indirectly dealing with death. This is evident when a loved one dies — whether it is through professional help or by simply calling the funeral home to take care of the planning, sharing the details, and/or attending the funeral. These actions can be considered part of the coping methods that have been going on for centuries (Neimeyer 1998). In my research, I did not ask the Molisan participants specific questions about personal coping mechanisms, but this would be valuable information to investigate in future studies.

Death and dying are inevitable. They loom over our everyday existence. We often look at death as taboo and tend to avoid discussing our mortality, yet this should not be the case. Encouraging one another to talk about death and dying can be beneficial to living enriched lives. The notion of death and dying is a discussion that must be had and with this, an end-of-life plan. Italians, specifically Molisan Italians are reluctant to discuss death and dying, however by simply using conversation, they can deconstruct their anxieties, take control of their fear and live a more fulfilled life without regrets.

Overall, Canadian-Molisans had highly similar remarks to Italian-Molisans. Therefore, what impact does my study make? I learned the Molisans’ perspectives on death and dying. I established death-related concerns for the Molisans. I recognized that death education for

Canadian and Italian Molisans is important and necessary to alleviate their fears and anxieties. Worries and apprehensions will lessen for Molisans through discussion around the dinner table and by viewing a future musical depicting Molisans end-of-life issues and challenges. In this way, Molisans can lead a rewarding life full of joy, fulfillment, and meaningful experiences.

My personal experiences throughout this thesis — phone calls, emails, Google Form/Surveys, ‘Death Dinners’, and life — allowed me to understand my thoughts and desires. I hope that I helped others, as I did myself, to overcome some fears and anxieties toward death and dying or at the very least, we enjoyed a meal together.

CHAPTER 5: CREATIVE COMPONENT

“No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don’t want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life.”

— Steve Jobs

MUSICAL THEATRE

Theatre is a valuable tool to inform people and reduce stigmas (Faigin & Stein 2010, Michalak et al. 2014, Blignault et al. 2010). Musical theatre is a genre of theatre that includes song and dance and has been around since the Greek and Roman times — even Shakespeare included songs into his stage plays (Atkey 2006).

Many musicals portray serious issues: *Hair* depicted youth protests in the 1960s about the Vietnam War and their struggles with drugs and sexuality, *West Side Story* showed the challenges of racial intolerance and gang violence, *Showboat* embodied interracial relationships, *Les Misérables* confronted the unjust class system and the treatment of women, *Come From Away* recounted the true story of 9/11 emergency landings in Newfoundland, *In The Heights* touched on cultural identities, gentrification, and diversity, *Rent* addressed HIV from multiple scenarios, and *Dear Evan Hansen* confronted suicide and bullying. The actors were ready and willing to perform these difficult moments as audiences were ready to engage in the experience. These musicals and more sparked discussions about their subject matter. For example, *Rent*, written and composed by Jonathan Larson, raised notional awareness about HIV. *Rent* was filled with HIV-positive characters struggling with the acceptance of their destiny yet the friendships that grew from their misfortune displayed hope and empathy. Similarly, *Dear Evan Hansen* written

by Steven Levenson, contributed and provided a unique approach to jumpstarting the conversation about social anxiety, depression, and suicide. Musical theatre reflects the human experience which fosters awareness and discussion on social and cultural issues.

In opera, characters that were victims of death did not instantly die as in movies and television, but rather, characters prior to dying would “sing a death song that may last a half hour” (Stack 2002, 432). Although not as long, musical theatre characters also sing death songs. These death songs, referred to as ‘swan songs’, are a character’s final performance before they die. They are filled with heartbreaking authentic emotion, eliciting the audience’s senses. Uta Hagen, a pioneer in acting pedagogy, affirms that “theater is an experience that should provoke, challenge, and enlighten” (Bookey). A few of the swan songs found in Broadway musicals are: “Eva’s Final Broadcast” from *Evita*, “There’s a Place For Us” from *Westside Story*, “Somewhere That’s Green (Reprise)” from *Little Shop of Horrors*, “Tell Her I Love Her” from *Urinetown*, “One Last Time” from *Hamilton*, “Judas’ Death” from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, “A Little Fall of Rain” from *Les Misérables*, and “Contact” from *Rent*. Even though the main theme of the above musicals is not death, these swan songs add authenticity and empathy to the storyline (Wolkenhauer, 2022).

To date, the best attended and highest grossing Broadway season was the 2018-2019 season which began in September 2018 and ended in August 2019. Almost 15 million people attended a Broadway show, grossing just under two billion dollars. Each year since the 1996-1997 season, over 10 million people have watched a performance on Broadway, and since 2009-2010, over a billion dollars was grossed — excluding the 2021-2022 season during the COVID-19 pandemic where only 6 million attended a show, grossing \$845 million (The Broadway League 2015). More detailed statistics can be found in Appendix H and Appendix I.

Musical theatre is popular, influential, and has been demonstrated to encourage discussions about its themes. In this way, it can be used to supplement or even replace present methods used in death education.

68% of the top 100 grossing Broadway shows and 66% of the longest running Broadway shows involve death in some manner. Again, refer to Appendix H and Appendix I. However, death remains an avoided subject. Can Broadway musicals help us through these difficult conversations and emotions? The theme of death and dying is used in many of Stephen Sondheim's musicals. Sondheim, the acclaimed American composer and songwriter, uses death "as a celebration of life" where death is given power to inspire existence (Mark Robinson 2014, 1). I want to push boundaries with *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying*. Instead of a musical touching on death and dying, I want to confront it face-to-face. Iconic actor Alan Rickman, said "actors are agents of change, a film, a piece of theatre, a piece of music, or a book can make a difference. It can change the world" (Vibes 2016).

Many people from Canada, United States, and throughout the world have attended musical theatre performances about difficult topics throughout the century: HIV-AIDS, religion, politics, gender identity and equality, racism, social justice, politics, mental health, sexual violence, and drug addiction. These sensitive intense themes depicted on stage, open the door for individuals to have meaningful, important and helpful conversations. I am going to represent Italians on stage to help them understand the essential conversation they need to have about death and dying. Perhaps by doing so, a meaningful conversation can commence.

OUR LAST SUPPER: A MUSICAL ABOUT DEATH AND DYING

Narratives “give voice to stories that are difficult to tell and understand and open spaces to reflect alternative ways of knowing” (Davis and Warren-Findlow 2011, 563). I longed to create an artistic piece after my mother passed away. I started writing short stories, but my passion lies with musical theatre. I admire musical theatre because the combination of music and theatre is euphoric. Tony Walter (2012) at the Center for Death and Society from the University of Bath writes, “mortality and grief provide a motor for artistic practice” (76). Likewise, Davis and Warren-Findlow (2011) express that, “people have always coped with trauma through creating” (570).

The information gathered from the ‘Death Dinners’ and the Google Form/Surveys will form the basis of my musical — *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying*. In this manner, characters and plot will be relatable, grounded, and reflective to the audience. I stayed true to what my participants shared yet editing, rewriting and interpretation naturally occurred. By combining many of the personalities, expressions, and viewpoints I experienced with my research, I created fictional characters based on facts that are thought-provoking — audiences will connect with their beliefs, behaviors, and nuances. “Working with fictional characters helps us relate to trauma and lets us rewrite our stories as people who can overcome and cope with real-world traumas” (Davis and Warren-Findlow 2011, 568). Although the characters are based on real people, the musical will always provide anonymity to all research participants. The audience in a live theatre production completes the creative process. As the actors and the creative team form a relationship, so do the audience members. These relationships then expand to form a trusting agreement between each other.

Mazzola (2016) created an End-of-Life Education Program which addresses issues related to end-of-life. He suggests that Italy as well as Canada, are lacking in end-of-life resources and support. Mazzola divided the education programs into three categories: ‘basic’ (the introduction of end-of-life directives), ‘advanced’ (creating an end-of-life plan), and ‘specific aspects’ (patient and bereavement support with end-of-life) to use as a platform for implementing end-of-life education to the general public and medical practitioners (Mazzola, 2016). The topics Mazzola included in his End-of-Life Education Program coincide with the issues *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* would bring forth. Instead of a more formal program that Mazzola suggests, viewing a performance that deals with mortality issues will informally introduce end-of-life care and spark conversation while alleviating difficult emotions associated with death and dying. A live musical performance depicting mainly Molisan characters with anxieties toward death and dying will assist not only Molisan audiences, but all audiences viewing the performance. The musical will encourage conversation about end-of-life fears and how they wish their final days to be celebrated. I agree with Lara Veitch, collaborator of the musical *A Pacific’s Guide to the War on Cancer* when she stated, “your life spins out of control [when diagnosed with cancer]. That’s why it had to be a musical: it’s big and loud and colourful and mad. The aim is to demystify illness and death” (Hurley 2016).

Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* is the inspiration behind the musical and the glue that holds the various inquiries together. How was Jesus so relaxed knowing that this would be his last meal? Leonardo da Vinci’s portrayal of Jesus’ ‘Last Supper’ has been studied artistically and academically for centuries throughout many disciplines. I waited 5 hours in front of Santa Maria delle Grazie to gaze at Leonardo’s *Last Supper* for a mere 15 minutes. Was it worth the wait? Absolutely. I was stunned by the beauty of Leonardo’s brush strokes and vivid colours but I was

also consumed by the story being depicted. Jesus organized the gathering with his followers and family to share in the breaking of bread and drinking of wine, knowing and accepting that this would be his last meal. I discovered Molisan Italians' wishes for their last meals and discussed the emotions associated with having this dialogue.

The musical consists of two acts with multiple scenes. Below is the outline of the musical, the synopsis of the scenes, some character monologues, the opening number, and the second scene that will be used in the production. The lyrics create emotional, rhythmic, and memorable moments while the accompanying music has a contemporary sound with a traditional Italian flair.

Sandra Bertman (1999), a pioneer in utilizing the arts to support death education argues, “since grief is not a cerebral problem but a subjective experience, we understand grief only and entirely as we filter and interpret it through our own experience. [...] and the expressive arts and therapies function beautifully as vehicles to help us reshape grief” (15). Through my research and creative writing, I will assist myself and others to lead meaningful lives.

Watching a musical about death and dying will reduce death anxiety — compelling people to be less fearful about death and dying and initiate conversation among audience members as well as with their family and friends. Anita Gaffney, executive director at Stratford Festival states, “going to see a play with someone encourages you to talk about it, to compare notes, perhaps to disagree about it [...], but either way you are reacting in a socially lively way that will continue to absorb your mind and spur your emotions long after the final curtain” (Gaffney 2023, 9). This is what *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will accomplish. Our lives are our stories.

MUSICAL OUTLINE

ACT ONE

1. **Prelude Scene:** Gioia receives news she has cancer...via call/ in person...
2. **Monday Morning:** The Rhythm of the Day Song...only Gioia is in the cafe...others are positioned all over the stage but not in the cafe (perhaps in their individual spotlight)...
3. **Cafe Scene:** lots of chatter, movement, getting to know all the customers walking into the cafe...make reference to brother, father, her work ethics,...
4. **Malocchio Scene & Song:** Bianca & Amara are on Gioia because she doesn't look well...they go into song...Gioia reveals she's got cancer at the end of the scene...
5. **Hail Mary Scene & Song:** serious scene between mother and daughter...discussing what's next...discuss she hasn't even accepted father's death...eventually brother comes into the discussion too...
6. **Just say the word - "DEAD":** Gioia is having fun with mom that she can't say the word or accept her diagnosis...Sings The 4 Letter/ Forbidden Word Song
7. **Gioia is Scared/Hard to be Brave Scene:** Sing Me a Song When I Die Song with Po singing I'll Sing You a Song When you Die...Duet song...we start to see romance starting...
8. **Family Feud Scene:** between Gioia, Bianca & Luigi (sister, mom, brother) They all have different views...they talk about dad's death...
9. **Mom Solo Song:** frustrated with life, kids,etc....My Song to the Universe
10. **I'm Having a Party Scene:** Gioia announces she is going to have a death dinner...sends out invites...
11. **I'm Invited! Song:** whole cast reacts when they receive their invites...
12. **Preparing for Dinner Scene:** Everyone getting ready...guests, Gioia, mom, brother etc...
13. **Guests Arrive Last Supper Song:** tableaux...superstitions....13 people sitting at table

14. **Gioia Asks the Questions:** everyone could have their moment to say/sing something
15. **Mom Dies!** : unexpectedly mom/Bianca has a heart attack...throughout the prior scenes everyone subtly always asks Bianca about her taking her cholesterol pills...I Pray, I Pray song?

ACT TWO

16. **One More Conversation Song:** Gioia wishes she could have had one more talk with mom before she died
17. **How Do People Do It Scene:** Gioia has a scene with Luigi and she accepts his way of thinking...
18. **Bucket List Song:**
19. **Grieving Scene:**
20. **Romance between Gioia & Po:**
21. Work in progress
22. Work in progress
23. Work in progress
24. **I remember all the NIce things you did for Everyone Scene/Song:**
25. **Did You Enjoy the Ride Song:** Gioia and Luigi about mom, dad and themselves
26. **We Enjoyed the Ride:** Mom and Dad (we realize that Dad is the one at the piano he is always there in the cafe but actually no one ever talks to him...he sings but no one reacts to him throughout the scenes...he is that 13th person at the table...he actually never got an invite but he's there at the dinner)

CHARACTERS

1. **Gioia Zuccarelli** - 34 years old...born Sunday May 1st, 1988...Bianca's daughter...Luigi's sister

2. **Bianca Zuccarelli** - 56 years old...born September 28, 1966...Gioia & Luigi's mom...very Italian
3. **Luigi Zuccarelli** - 29 years old likes to be with different girls...Bianca's son...Gioia's brother...barista
4. **Po/River Riva** - musician(like Jovanotti)...secretly loves Gioia...Gioia thinks just friends...good looking, hip
5. **Amara Gallo** - Bianca's friend...also a widow but not your typical widow...was a chef now retired...living large off husband's pension and selling off the restaurant chain...smokes...hair always done...makeup always on, reapplies lipstick right after she drinks or eats...dressed beautifully but always in black...she plays the part of the lonely widow...very SUPERSTITIOUS...very Italian
6. **Massimo Saccone** - macho, business type...suits, ties, etc... Luigi's friend from elementary school
7. **Kadence Song** -wife of Kai.... she is pregnant...traveling from Canada...very touristy/stereotypes...falls in love with Luigi
8. **Kai Song** - husband of Kadence.....traveling from Canada...very touristy/stereotypes...not happy in marriage
9. **Zuri Rossi** - fashionista...fashion designer...always looks great...maybe has a breakdown and shows her true colours...likes how simple Kai is
10. **Lorenzo Zappa** - in between jobs...artist, film maker, photographer, dancer, actor...super smart...academic has a PHD in...actual dad who died...ghost like 6th Sense...very Italian
11. **Giorgio/Giorgia Leone** - drag queen...fun but serious...
12. **Flora Di Maggio** - professor for 40 years...ready to retire but will never...very Italian
13. **Summer Datta** - university student from New York studying at University of Molise...wants to be a professor like Flora

GIOIA'S MONOLOGUES

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's 5 Stages of Dying & Grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Knowing and understanding the Five Stages of Dying & Grief prepares us to show empathy and support to one another. Individuals who have a terminal illness or are grieving, may or may not experience all or some of these stages, in no particular order, and they can easily move back and forth from each stage. The following monologues are in no particular order. Gioia speaks to her mother as she experiences the five stages of dying and grief.

ANGER

Stop saying "God willing, everything is going to be okay".
Because it's not okay! Mamma, I have cancer!
And NOT talking about it is NOT going to make it go away!
I'm 34 years old, living at home, working in your caffè... NOT MINE!,
and don't give me that crap that one day it will be mine.
I never wanted it and I don't want it!.....and even if I did, it definitely won't happen now,
because I'll be dead soon!
You wanna know something... God better "will it"!
Because I want my life! I deserve my turn!
I wanted to study at 'The Culinary Institute of America' and open up my own osteria in
Manhattan ... but now...now I can't!
How could I possibly live there now?
I don't even know what's going to happen to me tomorrow.
But, you know what I do know...
I'm getting out of this beach town...everyone just cares about how they look. Tell me, how am I
going to look in 3 months?.....
This.. is.. such bullshit...and IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!.....don't walk away.....
Yes, it's your fault that I 've been putting off going to New York for the past 13 years'. Why?
Because I can't afford it... and why can't I afford it?...
because you need me working at the caffè... for free!
Luigi is supposed to be taking care of the caffè, not me...but he's always leaving to screw the
newest tourist that falls for his bullshit, sweet talk... and somehow, with those eyes of his, he
even gets these girls to pay for dinner.
Your son's a joke!
So I'm stuck running the place...and everyone knows the caffè will fall apart if I'm not there...
and we can't have that, can we.....because you promised papà...

Well this guilt, this guilt you put on me is WHY I'M SICK!
I'm always thinking of everyone else...but no more.
I'm done...I'm out. I need to find my LIFE.....whatever bit of it I have left.

DENIAL

Believe me, I... am... fine. I don't know why you're so worried.
Be happy... I've been baking everyday.
The customers love my new biscotti they have with their espresso.
Mamma, you should be thankful.
The caffè has never looked better.
I colour coded all the tazze.
The spoons are sitting nicely on top of each other in order of their sizes.
I even came up with this great idea to organize the receipts not only by date
but by... delivery time...I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner.
It makes so much sense to do it this way.
We know exactly when things get delivered.
The milk is dropped off every morning.
Monday and Thursday afternoon, the coffee and sugar get delivered
and before lunch on Wednesdays, the flour, eggs and butter.
It just makes life much easier.
Believe me mamma, I have never been better.
Oh mamma, wait, you gotta try this cornetto.....isn't it great...fluffy, buttery, not too sweet
with a touch of spice...I made them this morning...
secret ingredients.. ginger and curcuma.
I figured...we sell about 30 dozen cornetti a day, that's only 360 cornetti. I'll bake them fresh
every morning instead of those frozen ones we buy from Luigi's "friend".
I'll make some with nocciola and some with pistachio,
Oh, I should make some with marroni and mandorle too.
You know what...I'll make some with all the nut flavours..
....Mamma please...I don't know what you are talking about...I'm perfectly fine!

BARGAINING

Tell whoever is up there to leave me alone so I can finish these recipes.
I want them to be perfect...I need them to be perfect... for me.
Then, I promise I will come to church with you.....
yes and pray the rosary with you.....
Okay, maybe not everyday...
Okay, va bene... 3 times a week.
Just a bit more time, that's all I need.
They're not right.

The texture is dry... The taste is too sharp,
The biscotto crumbles to dust after one bite...
And the cornettos leave a bitter taste...
....maybe it's the combination of the hazelnut with the chestnut.
If I could just figure it out I 'll be okay.....I know it.
Mamma, please... I need to do this for me... 13 flavours.. it's nothing.
I don't know how Nonna did it...she couldn't read or write but somehow her biscotti were
always delicious.
They had the perfect crunch with the right amount of sweetness.
.....I remember she'd make them every Sunday... without a recipe...
She'd try to hide them from me because she knew I'd eat them all and leave none for precious
Luigi...But I'd find them.
.....I regret not spending more time with Nonna.....
and with you mamma.....
Mamma..I'm so sorry...I was horrible to you...I didn't mean what I said.
Please don't be mad with me...I had no right blaming you.
I promise I'll start coming to church with you.
Just a bit more time, that's all I need.

DEPRESSION

I remember when I turned 13... finally a 'signorina'.
I was the last of my friends to get boobs and now they're filled with fucked up cells growing so
fast they're screwing with my head.
I screwed up my life mamma, and now it's over! I'm hopeless....
I can't even whisk this egg...
Such a hard shell ... but yet one little tap and it breaks into pieces.
I feel like a cracked egg. I should be thrown away.
What was I thinking... that I was going to live forever.
I can't keep going. I have nothing left to give.
I should have left Termoli years ago. Now I'm stuck. I have nowhere to go.
I can't believe... I've never left Italy, and the Vatican doesn't count.
I don't blame you mamma...I am 34...
the caffè would have survived if I traveled for a few weeks.....
You and Luigi have to figure things out, because soon, I'll be gone forever.
I know you both don't want to talk about it but we're gonna have to eventually.
I should have been more like Luigi, but I was always looking for instant fireworks...
what's the point of being with someone, if you feel it's just not right...
I'm going to die here mamma, alone.
I wish I could have had a little of what you and papà had.
I know, you fought a lot but you really loved each other.

You miss him? ...you're still wearing black...it's been 13 years...
papà won't care if you wear some colour.
You know...I never saw you break down once...you just kept going.
....I'm not like you... I'm not a superwoman...I won't be able to handle the treatments.
I'm choosing comfort over cure.
Right now, I don't feel sick.... And you know how much I enjoy food....
I don't want that taken away from me.
I want to eat cavatelli and taste them.
Mamma,.....I'm really scared.

ACCEPTANCE

I have finally embraced my name...."Gioia"
It's true, without death you can't appreciate life.
I'm so grateful for everything you have given me mamma, and although I would still like it to last a bit longer... I know that when the time comes... I'll be okay.
Grazie mille per la mia vita mamma!
I get it...this is what God willed for me and I succeeded in my own way.
I created 13 unforgettable cornetti and biscotti that all of Termoli could savour...
I know it's nothing like Leonardo DaVinci's legacy, but it's mine.
I'm not afraid... Let's just say I'm moving to a different caffè...
"Gioia's caffè Paradiso"... although I will be leaving behind some damn good recipes!
Okay mamma?...Don't worry about me...Papà and I will be watching sipping espresso!....
Don't cry..... I do need your help.....
I want to use the caffè to organize a special dinner.... to celebrate.....to celebrate life.
I know...I Know... You promised papà you would never close the caffè ...
and you are going to keep your promise....
I can't believe that 'Gioia's caffè' has been open every morning since Sunday May 1st, 1988.
Well, we do serve the best espresso and biscotti in town! ...
You know, that's 12,583 days... yes...I'm counting...
The day the first espresso was served at 'Gioia's caffè' was the night I was born.
I can't believe you named me after the caffè instead of nonna.
She must have given you and papà a vicious malocchio.
I was always teased about my name... I kept trying to get people to call me 'Jazz' but no one did... I'm glad they didn't. I like my name now... Gioia Zuccarelli...and I am proud of it!
So, we'll have dinner after we close... because...
"What would the people say if we actually closed the caffè for a day?"
We'll be just a few people, you, Luigi... the regulars...13 in total.
.....So, mamma, are you willing to help me?..... Okay perfetto!
I have the menu all figured out.
We are gonna to start with... "Polenta grigliato con mozzarella di bufala",

followed by... “Cavatelli con pomodorini e radicchio”, are you hungry yet...because there’s more... per secondo,... “Salmone con noci e tartufo”.
And for dessert...”Sfogliatelle ripieno di ricotta”...and maybe some of my one-of-a-kind biscotti served with the best... Gioia caffè!

OPENING SCENE AND SONG

THE RHYTHM OF MY DAY

GIOIA (*starts on stage*)

(slowly building rhythmic sounds of coffee grinding, coffee machine warming-up, coffee cups clinking, etc...are heard)

Before the sun rises, my crown must rise.

My crown must rise to lead my day.

I’m ready to warm every soul, and start the commotion,

And start the commotion of the day.

How many souls are left for me to fill,

Until I close the doors at the end of my day.

(Pause, no sounds)

But first my espresso,

My espresso to start the rhythm of my day.

(Music starts)

My steps create the rhythm of my day,

before I fly away and it becomes yesterday.

A day to remember, a day to forget,

A day to continue, a day to reset.

The rhythm of my day begins with a brew

What’s important is today and maybe tomorrow too.

(I miei passi creano il ritmo della mia giornata,

prima che voliamo via e diventa ieri.

*Un giorno da ricordare, un giorno da dimenticare,
Un giorno per continuare, un giorno per resettare.*

*Il ritmo della mia giornata inizia con un caffè.
Oggi è importante e forse anche domani.)*

GIOIA

I made it through the night, I'm still alive.
But why me, I'm just starting to thrive.

BIANCA *(walking into the café)*

You made it through the night, you're still alive.
It should be me not you, you're just starting to thrive.

I gave you life but not enough.
I was warned this would be tough.

*(Hai superato la notte, sei ancora vivo.
Dovrei essere io non te, stai appena iniziando a prosperare.*

*Ti ho dato la vita ma non abbastanza.
Mi avevano avvertito che sarebbe stata dura.)*

GIOIA

You made me rise like bread you bake.
You fed me love with lots to take.

BIANCA

Have I been selfish to take more than I need?
Can I accept your fate and watch you bleed?

*(Sono stato egoista a prendere più del necessario?
Posso accettare il tuo destino e guardarti sanguinare?)*

GIOIA

I refuse to bleed a tear, as I crumble on this ride.
Can someone tell me what is on the other side?

BIANCA

I fear tomorrow you might not be here.

(Temo che domani potresti non essere qui.)

GIOIA

I fear tomorrow I might not be here.

BIANCA

I don't want your sun to set, at least not...just yet!

(Non voglio che il tuo sole tramonti, almeno non... ancora!)

GIOIA

I wonder when my sun will set?

Till then, another coffee?

BIANCA

Another coffee,

(Un altro caffè,)

GIOIA & BIANCA

To survive the rhythm of our day.

(Per sopravvivere il ritmo dei nostri giorni.)

My steps create the rhythm of my day,
before we fly away and it becomes yesterday.

A day to remember, a day to forget,

A day to continue, a day to reset.

The rhythm of my day begins with a brew.

What's important is today and maybe tomorrow too.

*(I miei passi creano il ritmo della mia giornata,
prima che voliamo via e diventa ieri.)*

Un giorno da ricordare, un giorno da dimenticare,

Un giorno per continuare, un giorno per resettare.

Il ritmo della mia giornata inizia con un caffè.

Oggi è importante e forse anche domani.)

FLORA & SUMMER & LORENZO *(walking into the café)*

There's a lot to live up to.

The pressure is surging.

FLORA

My muscles notice it's a Monday.

Everyday a new adventure,

Will I make it through another lecture?

I should call it a day

Un caffè latte I crave today.

SUMMER

Nothing will stand in my way.

My mind is ready to perform and play.

I want to give the world all I can be,

I already have two degrees.

I think today I better have...herbal tea.

LORENZO

My days are adding up...it's a great thing...right?

My inner light is my guiding light.

No matter what I'll be alright!

I served peace with love to everyone,

I deserve my coffee to be a long one.

GIOIA, BIANCA, FLORA, SUMMER & LORENZO

My steps create the rhythm of my day,

before we fly away and it becomes yesterday.

A day to remember, a day to forget,

A day to continue, a day to reset.

The rhythm of my day begins with a brew

What's important is today and maybe tomorrow too.

*(I miei passi creano il ritmo della mia giornata,
prima che voliamo via e diventa ieri.*

*Un giorno da ricordare, un giorno da dimenticare,
Un giorno per continuare, un giorno per resettare.*

*Il ritmo della mia giornata inizia con un caffè.
Oggi è importante e forse anche domani.)*

KAI & KADENCE *(walking into the café)*

Will today be the day my life changes forever?

I've been blessed with this chance.

I've been cursed with this chance.

I love this feeling!

I hate this feeling!

It will be you and I forever.

It will be you and her forever.

It's not about me anymore.

Will I make the right choices?

Am I making the right choices?

Will she love me forever?

I thought she'd love me forever.

Should we stay here alone?

Should I leave here alone?

I don't really know you but I really do love you.

No coffee for me today.

A double coffee for me today.

GIOIA, BIANCA, FLORA, SUMMER, LORENZO, KAI & KADENCE

My steps create the rhythm of my day,
before we fly away and it becomes yesterday.

A day to remember, a day to forget,

A day to continue, a day to reset.

The rhythm of my day begins with a brew

What's important is today and maybe tomorrow too.

*(I miei passi creano il ritmo della mia giornata,
prima che voliamo via e diventa ieri.*

*Un giorno da ricordare, un giorno da dimenticare,
Un giorno per continuare, un giorno per resettare.*

*Il ritmo della mia giornata inizia con un caffè.
Oggi è importante e forse anche domani.)*

ZURI & GIORGIO & RIVER *(walking into the café)*

I'm not ready, I'm not ready to go yet.
I want to hide, I want to hide so I won't be found yet.
The sun has moved up, but I don't want to sit up.

RIVER

My soul plays in a string quartet,
Where did I go? Can I go back? Where am I now?
As my dreams wisp away, can't reality skip a day?

ZURI

I'm trapped in silk, but I'd rather be wrapped in silk,
I need my coffee, I need my coffee with a splash of milk.

GIORGIO

Why can't I be who I want to be
I'm not trying to hide who I am, I just want to be who I am
I am not what you see, I want to be free to be me,
I need a glass of Pellegrino with my cappuccino.

ZURI & GIORGIO & RIVER

The beat picks up, heats up, it's fired up,
I'm ready for a new day!

GIOIA, BIANCA, FLORA, SUMMER, LORENZO, KAI, KADENCE, ZURI, GIORGIO, &
RIVER

My steps create the rhythm of my day,
before we fly away and it becomes yesterday.

A day to remember, a day to forget,
A day to continue, a day to reset.

The rhythm of my day begins with a brew
What's important is today and maybe tomorrow too.

*(I miei passi creano il ritmo della mia giornata,
prima che voliamo via e diventa ieri.*

*Un giorno da ricordare, un giorno da dimenticare,
Un giorno per continuare, un giorno per resettare.*

*Il ritmo della mia giornata inizia con un caffè.
Oggi è importante e forse anche domani.)*

MASSIMO (*walking into the café*)

I'm always ready to impress with my charming smile and slicked back hair,
With my pinstriped suit and polished shoes, I always look like a billionaire.
My head is in a daze, I haven't had my coffee yet.
My insides bubble, my mind is set.

AMARA (*walking into the café*)

My story has been served a la carte,
Thanks to everyone who has done their part.
With the shot I'm not a threat,
Make it lungo with Anisette!

LUIGI (*rushing into the café*)

What a night! A bit of work and a lot of play!
Don't you worry I'm more than alright!
But, I need my espresso,
My espresso to start the rhythm of my day.

GIOIA, BIANCA, FLORA, SUMMER, LORENZO, KAI, KADENCE, ZURI, GIORGIO,
RIVER, MASSIMO, AMARA & LUIGI

My steps create the rhythm of my day,
before we fly away and it becomes yesterday.

A day to remember, a day to forget,
A day to continue, a day to reset.

The rhythm of my day begins with a brew
What's important is today and maybe tomorrow too.

*(I miei passi creano il ritmo della mia giornata,
prima che voliamo via e diventa ieri.*

*Un giorno da ricordare, un giorno da dimenticare,
Un giorno per continuare, un giorno per resettare.*

*Il ritmo della mia giornata inizia con un caffè.
Oggi è importante e forse anche domani.)*

GIOIA

When will my tomorrow end?
My hour will come, but not prayed by me, my friend.

I count down the rhythm of my days.

There is no telling if I'll go to heaven.
There are no profits with my losses.

I cannot stop my hourglass,
The hourglass is my boarding pass.

Who controls the seat I get.
The rhythm of my day I do with no regret.

(music ends)

I need my coffee and a cigarette!
(Ho bisogno del mio caffè e una sigaretta!)

SECOND SCENE AND SONG

MALOCCHIO

Dialogue and Song

AMARA

Gioia, she don't look so good. She's too thin, too pale. She looks terrible. She has no joy in her face anymore.

BIANCA

What are you talking about! She looks as good as she could. She's fine, she's just delicate. She works too hard!

(she takes a second look)

But now that you mention it she does look awful.

(Di cosa stai parlando! Ha un bell'aspetto come potrebbe. Sta bene, è solo delicata. Lei lavora troppo! Ma ora che me lo dici, ha un aspetto orribile).

AMARA

(they both go over to Gioia)

We need to ask you a few things. Prima di tutto, were you by an open window?

BIANCA

Did you forget to wrap your scarf around your neck?
(Hai dimenticato di avvolgere la sciarpa intorno al collo?)

GIOIA

I don't know.

AMARA & BIANCA

'Colpo d'aria'!

AMARA

I knew it!

BIANCA

You caught a 'Colpo d'aria'! How many times does mamma have to tell you to cover your neck and mouth when you go outside, never breathe the cold air!
(Hai beccato un colpo d'aria! Quante volte mamma deve dirti di coprire il collo e la bocca quando esci, non respirare mai il freddo!)

AMARA

The cold wind could give you a stye...

BIANCA

a sore throat...

(mal di gola...)

AMARA

pneumonia...

BIANCA

you can become paralyzed...
(puoi rimanere paralizzato...)

AMARA

and even...

BIANCA

Oh Dio!

AMARA & BIANCA

(they do the sign of the cross together)

Nel nome del Padre, e del Figlio, a dello Spirito Santo, AMEN!

(they along with other women in the cafe touch their left breast and men in the cafe touch their testicles)

GIOIA

I did not get a 'Colpo d'aria'! No wind came near me! I did not go outside with wet hair! And that is not what's going to kill me!!!!

AMARA

Allora, Did you put ice in your water?

GIOIA

(annoyed, rolls her eyes)

BIANCA

Did you drink a Coca-Cola out of the fridge?

(Hai bevuto una Coca-Cola dal frigo?)

GIOIA

(walks away from them)

AMARA & BIANCA

'blocco di stomaco'.

(they follow Gioia)

AMARA

Sentami... When your body is warm and you drink something cold, your body goes into shock.

BIANCA

How many times I tell you, it causes severe digestion problems.

(Quante volte te lo detto, provoca gravi problemi di digestione.)

AMARA

Or maybe even....

BIANCA

Oh Dio!

AMARA & BIANCA

(they do the sign of the cross together)

Nel nome del Padre, e del Figlio, a dello Spirito Santo, AMEN!

(they along with other women in the cafe touch their left breast and men in the cafe touch their testicles)

GIOIA

I don't have a 'blocco di stomaco'. Let me assure you I did not drink iced water and I have not had a Coca-Cola in months! And again that is not what's going to kill me!!!!

AMARA

Dimmi, did you go swimming after you ate cavatelli?

BIANCA

Oh MAMMA! How many times I tell you...

(Ah MAMMA! Quante volte te lo detto...)

GIOIA

Swimming? Al mare? I wish! I have not even touched the sand in over a month!

BIANCA

Then you must have turned on the air conditioner when I was not here...

(Allora hai acceso il condizionatore quando non c'ero...)

AMARA

I knew it..it feels colder here today.

BIANCA

Tell mamma the truth!!

(Di' la verità alla mamma!!)

GIOIA

So you would rather suffer heat exhaustion instead of turning on the air conditioner?

BIANCA

Sì!

AMARA

Certo!

GIOIA

Do you two ladies not have anything better to do...because I can find you plenty!

AMARA

Bella...You don't look too good.

BIANCA

It's true amore mia...you look sick.
(È vero amore mia... sembri malato.)

AMARA

Okay, ascolta...whatever you do, don't take a shower.

BIANCA

Good idea, no doccia!
(Buona idea, niente doccia!)

AMARA

If you do...it's a recipe for disaster, and of course possible...

BIANCA

Oh Dio!

AMARA & BIANCA

(they do the sign of the cross together)

Nel nome del Padre, e del Figlio, e dello Spirito Santo, AMEN!

(they along with other women in the cafe touch their left breast and men in the cafe touch their testicles)

BIANCA

I'm going to call Doctor Varonese.
(Chiamerò il dottor Varonese.)

GIOIA

I'm fine!

BIANCA

I'm your mother... I can see you are not fine.
(Amara nudges Bianca...they look at eachother)
(Sono tua madre... vedo che non stai bene.)

AMARA & BIANCA
Malocchio!

AMARA
Oh Dio! Someone put the bad eye on Gioia!

BIANCA
But who would do such a terrible thing to my little Gioia?
(Ma chi farebbe una cosa così terribile alla mia piccola Gioia?)

GIOIA
Please stop with the crazy superstitions!!! They are all OLD WIVES tales!
(insinuating Amara and Bianca are old wives)

AMARA & BIANCA
(they take great offense to this)
OLD WIVES!...TALES!
(VECCHIE MOGLI!... RACCONTI!)

(music starts)

BIANCA *(spoken)*
Yes it's true we are old.
(Sì, è vero, siamo vecchi.)

AMARA *(spoken)*
Hey, speak for yourself.

BIANCA *(spoken)*
And we were wives.
(Ed eravamo mogli.)

AMARA *(spoken)*
That's true.

BIANCA *(spoken)*
But malocchio is not a tale!
(Ma il malocchio non è una favola!)

(Amara & Bianca sing... Gioia speaks)

AMARA
Every female,

BIANCA
and every male,
(e ogni maschio.)

AMARA
We'll tell you malocchio is not a tale!

BIANCA
Anche Pinocchio crede in malocchio!

AMARA
The cornicello charm, and the horn charm,

BIANCA
Should be always worn to ward off harm.
(Dovrebbe essere sempre indossato per scongiurare danni.)

AMARA & BIANCA
Listen carefully to what we tell you.
Superstitions these are not.
What we tell you is sacred truth.
Perhaps it's lost with the youth.
*(Ascolta attentamente ciò che ti diciamo.
Superstizioni queste non lo sono.
Ciò che vi diciamo è verità sacra.
Forse è perso con i giovani.)*

GIOIA *(spoken)*
I need a Vermouth!

AMARA & BIANCA
You must believe,
We don't deceive.

*(Devi credere,
Non inganniamo.)*

BIANCA

Someone you know...

(Qualcuno che conosci...)

AMARA

Someone you love...

BIANCA

Is jealous of you!

(È geloso di te!)

AMARA

Is envious of you!

GIOIA

But who?

AMARA & BIANCA

A curse,

We must reverse.

A hex, a vex,

We must disperse

(Una maledizione,

Dobbiamo fare retromarcia.

Una maledizione, un vex,

Dobbiamo disperderci.)

AMARA & BIANCA

Malocchio we're sure they did bestow,

It's why no love you did prevail.

It's why your face looks so pale.

Malocchio, my dear we're sure to show!

(Malocchio siamo sicuri che hanno conferito,

È per questo che nessun amore hai prevalso.

Ecco perché il tuo viso è così pallido.

Malocchio, mio caro, lo mostreremo sicuramente!)

BIANCA

Don't you worry,

(Non ti preoccupare,)

AMARA

Don't you stress,

BIANCA

We'll get you out of this mess,

(Ti tireremo fuori da questo casino.)

AMARA

We're sure you possess!

AMARA & BIANCA

Christmas Eve many moons ago,

The only day the protected prayer to know.

We were trained,

The malocchio prayer was attained.

(Vigilia di Natale molte lune fa,

L'unico giorno la preghiera protetta da sapere.

siamo stati addestrati,

La preghiera del malocchio è stata raggiunta.)

GIOIA (spoken)

This can't be happening to me!

AMARA & BIANCA

You must believe,

We don't deceive.

(Devi credere,

Non inganniamo.)

BIANCA

Someone you know...

(Qualcuno che conosci...)

AMARA

Someone you love...

BIANCA

Is jealous of you!

(È geloso di te!)

AMARA

Is envious of you!

GIOIA

But who?

AMARA & BIANCA

A curse,

We must reverse.

A hex, a vex,

We must disperse.

(Una maledizione,

Dobbiamo fare retromarcia.

Una maledizione, un vex,

Dobbiamo disperderci.)

AMARA & BIANCA

It's time to turn your luck around.

It's time the evil energy comes down.

Change the path and clean the air,

It's time to do the malocchio prayer!

(È ora di dare una svolta alla tua fortuna.

È ora che l'energia del male scenda.

Cambia il percorso e purifica l'aria,

È ora di fare la preghiera del malocchio!)

(music ends)

BIANCA

Gioia, get a bowl.

(Gioia, prendi una ciotola.)

GIOIA

I can't believe I'm doing this!

AMARA

I have the Holy Water.

BIANCA

I'll get the olive oil.

(Prendo l'olio d'oliva.)

AMARA

Fill the bowl,

BIANCA

Drop the oil,

(Lascia cadere l'olio,)

AMARA

Say the name,

BIANCA

Gioia Zuccarelli

AMARA & BIANCA

Pray, pray, pray!

(Pregate, pregate, pregate!)

AMARA

Two eyes have seen thee.

BIANCA

All saints have helped tee.

(Tutti i santi hanno aiutato te.)

AMARA & BIANCA

Father this prayer,

Is being said for Gioia Zuccarelli.

We pray it works,

In the name of The Father,

The Son,

And the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning,

Is now and ever shall be,

World without end.

Amen!

(should be said 3 times)

(Padre questa preghiera,

Si dice per Gioia Zuccarelli.

*Preghiamo che funzioni,
Nel nome del padre,
Il figlio,
E lo Spirito Santo.
Come era all'inizio,
è ora e sempre sarà,
Mondo senza fine.
Amen!)*

BIANCA

If the oil doesn't disperse,
(Se l'olio non si disperde,)

AMARA

You'll be okay.

BIANCA

But if the oil dilutes,
(Ma se l'olio si diluisce,)

AMARA

if the oil creates circles....

(they stare into the bowl...waiting in anticipation...even Gioia has succumbed to the process)

AMARA & BIANCA

You have the curse!
You have malocchio!
*(Hai la maledizione!
Hai malocchio!)*

BIANCA

Oh, Mamma!

AMARA

Oh, Dio!

GIOIA

Why me?

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die.”

— Bible (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Very little empirical research has been done on the power of musical theatre to stimulate conversation, support, and awareness on uncomfortable topics with audiences, actors, and musical theatre creators.

For future study, once the musical *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* is complete, audiences could be asked questions to reflect on their perspectives on death and dying after viewing the performance and whether watching the musical was helpful in aiding conversation toward end-of-life issues or more of a deterrent.

Similarly how Sherman, Larsen, and Levy (2021) used musical theatre to stimulate discussions around mental illness for actors, audiences, and behaviour health consultants. *Our Last Supper: A Musical About Death and Dying* will inspire audience conversation about their fears and anxieties toward death and dying while enticing them to lead meaningful lives.

Additionally, to add to the research, it would be useful to see if other regions of Italy have the same perspectives on death and dying as the Molisans — expanding the study nationally and internationally.

DISCUSSION

Sooner or later we eventually all find our path to death acceptance, regardless how and when we get there. Whether it is in the form of discussions in a ‘Death Dinner’ (Lambert South and Elton 2017), through palliative care (Benini et al. 2011), end-of-life preparations (Mazzola 2014), or through the arts (Testoni et al. 2018b), death education is critical. Simple communication with each other about our mortality and our dying wishes is important. Discussions could encompass the individual’s personal desires regarding medical decisions, personal and family wishes, memorial preferences, the allocation of one’s wealth or merely what they desire their last meal to be.

This research established the Molisan perspectives and their related concerns on death and dying — by identifying challenges, solutions can be found. The fears and anxieties that participants expressed during the ‘Death Dinners’ and through the Google Form/Survey can be acknowledged as a step forward in lessening the anguish associated with mortality. The conversation has begun, however we need to continue to discuss our dying wishes. The future viewing of a musical depicting Molisans end-of-life issues and challenges, will assist in continuing this discussion. In this way, Molisans can lead rewarding lives full of joy, fulfillment, and meaningful experiences.

My young daughter is afraid of dying, I am too, but we are not the only ones. Most of us are afraid of dying — we are frightened of the unknown, which is natural, as is death. I did not have the chance to say goodbye to my mother or ask if she had any dying wishes. Since my mothers’s death, I have searched for answers about death and dying. I wish we had shared a ‘Last Supper’ together before she died.

Having the courage to speak about death and dying takes time, when and how this important journey takes place is personal. Having supportive family and friends to help you along this process makes it beneficial for you and them.

Life is filled with intimate moments. The most dreaded moment is our last moment, our last moment of energy, our last breath. Together we can overcome this anxiety. By sharing our fears, wants, and mental images of death and dying, we will overcome our anxieties and live more peaceful, fulfilled lives.

This research created awareness and acceptance about death and dying by examining the Molisan culture. It began the process to eliminate death anxiety, change how we approach death, help us live fully, make choices about how we want to live our last days, and decide how we want our lives celebrated by those we leave behind once we pass on.

One day we will die and we will leave behind memories within the people that we have encountered in our lives, some bad, but hopefully, mostly good. Those left behind may remember your existence from the house you lived in, the place you worked, the restaurants you enjoyed to frequent, or the foods you loved to prepare and eat. Photos and videos of our existence remain, along with the possessions we collected — some of these may be kept as momentos, some donated, and some thrown out.

What are your dying wishes? If you could choose, what would your ‘Last Supper’ be?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

ENGLISH:

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Study Name: *Italian Cultural ‘Death Dinners’*

Researcher Name: Rita Giancola (Principal Investigator), Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program, York University ritagian@yorku.ca.

Purpose of the Research: The goal of the research is to gain an understanding of how Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perceive death and dying. To do so, dinners will take place in Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans family homes. The dinners will take place at each of the families’ usual dinner time and place. The family members able to partake must be of legal age (19 or older). The dinners may include immediate family members (parents, siblings, spouses, children, and/or blood-related individuals close to the family) that do not live at the home of the dinner. The meal eaten is what the family would usually have on that particular day of the week. During the meal, questions regarding their personal philosophies on death and dying will be discussed with the attending group of family members, as well as the participants’ personal end-of-life wishes. Each dinner will be audio recorded with limited participation by the principal investigator. The secondary goal of the research is to encourage participants to continue to share their final wishes with their loved ones after the ‘Death Dinner’ is over.

What You Will Be Asked To Do in the Research: Demographic information from all participants will be gathered as well as questions regarding their personal philosophies on death and dying. Participants will also be asked to fill out a Google Form/Survey that will include their demographic information and personal philosophies on death and dying. The answers will be discussed with the attending group of family members. The participants’ personal end-of-life wishes will also be discussed.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no foreseeable major risks from participation in this research. Participants have the right to not answer any questions. There are no potential physical, social, data security, or deception risks linked to the participants. There may be a possibility of emotional risk if the participant feels uncomfortable or anxious speaking about death. However, when participants consent to join the research project, they are fully informed that death and dying will be the main topic discussed. If there are questions during the dinner they do not wish

to answer, they may simply decline to do so. **There may be a risk of COVID-19 during the research due to the gathering of people.**

Also, if at any point any uncomfortable feelings arise, participants can instantly opt out of the study.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: Death and dying is an important topic to discuss, by doing so the researcher will gain knowledge about individuals' philosophies about death and dying, and in turn learn how to approach this taboo conversation so that society can help people to overcome these fears. The participants will also directly benefit from this study by allowing them to freely express their beliefs about death and dying and come to learn the dying wishes of close family members. This will allow the participants to begin to alleviate stress from these challenging conversations and realize their own personal wants. The benefit of participating in this research study can and will also help family and friends during difficult times when the planning of final wishes needs to take place.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality: The methods that will be used during the study will be audio, observation and note taking. Participants will each be asked a series of questions by the researcher to answer and discuss with the family group members. All data collected on the participants and information gathered during the 'Death Dinner' meetings will be treated as confidential. The participants' names will be recorded anonymously.

The researcher acknowledges that the host of the online survey (Google Form) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses.) Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researcher, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researcher's system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

All hard copy written data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers residence. All electronic data will be securely stored in a locked facility on the researchers primary laptop and iPad that are both password-protected on secure servers. The data will be

stored for 3 years and then destroyed. All hard copy written data collected will be shredded and all electronic data will be permanently deleted by June 30 2024.

The principal investigator will be the only person who will have access to the data collected. The data collected will be used to write a thesis paper and for a creation of a theatrical production incorporating drama and music. All participants will remain anonymous, there will be NO potential of identification of the participants in the thesis paper and/or the theatrical production. The data will be solely used for the purposes described above. Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

If this study needs to use Zoom to host the ‘Death Dinners’ in order to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service, there is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as Zoom, that data collected on external servers may fall outside the control of the researcher. All audio recordings will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher’s personal computer, not the cloud based service. Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a research ‘Death Dinner’ data collection session.

Uses for the Data: The data collected will be used to write a thesis paper and for a creation of a theatrical production incorporating drama and music. All participants will remain anonymous, there will be NO potential of identification of the participants in the thesis paper and/or the theatrical production. The data will be solely used for the purposes described above.

Questions About the Research: If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Rita Giancola by email ritagian@yorku.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the FGS Research Committee on behalf of York University and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 309 York Lanes, York University, 416-736-5914 or email ore@yorku.ca.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the Italian Cultural ‘Death Dinners’ Study conducted by the graduate student Rita Giancola, in the Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program at York University. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

I, _____, agree to allow audio recordings to be used in the gathering of information only, with the understanding that I will not be identified by name. I am aware that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

ITALIAN:

Nome del Partecipante: _____ **Data:** _____

Nome dello Studio: *Italian Cultural ‘Death Dinners’*

Nome Ricercatore: Rita Giancola (Principal Investigator), Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program, York University ritagian@yorku.ca.

Scopo della Ricerca: L'obiettivo della ricerca è comprendere come gli Molisani percepiscono la morte e il morire. Per farlo, si svolgeranno nove cene nelle case di famiglie di Molisani. Le cene si svolgeranno all'ora e nel luogo abituali di ciascuna famiglia. I familiari in grado di partecipare devono essere maggiorenni (19 anni o più). Le cene possono includere familiari stretti (genitori, fratelli, sorelle, coniugi, figli e/o persone consanguinee vicine alla famiglia) che non vivono nella casa della cena. Il pasto consumato è quello che la famiglia consuma abitualmente in quel particolare giorno della settimana. Durante il pasto, le domande riguardanti le loro filosofie personali sulla morte e sul morire saranno discusse con il gruppo di membri della famiglia presente, così come i desideri personali di fine vita dei partecipanti. Ogni cena sarà audioregistrata con una partecipazione limitata da parte del ricercatore principale. L'obiettivo secondario della ricerca è incoraggiare i partecipanti a continuare a condividere i loro desideri finali con i loro cari dopo che la ‘Cena della Morte’ è finita.

Cosa ti Verrà Chiesto di Fare nella Ricerca: Verranno raccolte informazioni demografiche da tutti i partecipanti, nonché domande riguardanti le loro filosofie personali sulla morte e sul morire. Ai partecipanti verrà inoltre chiesto di compilare un modulo/sondaggio Google che includerà le loro informazioni demografiche e le filosofie personali sulla morte e sul morire. Le risposte saranno discusse con il gruppo di familiari presenti. Saranno discussi anche i desideri personali di fine vita dei partecipanti.

Rischi e Disagi: Non ci sono rischi prevedibili derivanti dalla partecipazione a questa ricerca. I partecipanti hanno il diritto di non rispondere ad alcuna domanda. Non ci sono potenziali rischi fisici, sociali, di sicurezza dei dati o di inganno legati ai partecipanti. Potrebbe esserci una possibilità di rischio emotivo se il partecipante si sente a disagio o ansioso a parlare della morte.

Tuttavia, quando i partecipanti acconsentono a partecipare al progetto di ricerca, sono pienamente informati che la morte e il morire saranno l'argomento principale discusso. Se ci sono domande durante la cena a cui non desiderano rispondere, possono semplicemente rifiutarsi di farlo. **Potrebbe esserci un rischio di COVID-19 durante la ricerca a causa dell'assembramento di persone.** Inoltre, se in qualsiasi momento sorgono sensazioni spiacevoli, i partecipanti possono immediatamente rinunciare allo studio.

Benefici della Ricerca e Vantaggi: La morte e il morire sono un argomento importante da discutere, in tal modo il ricercatore acquisirà conoscenze sulle filosofie degli individui sulla morte e sul morire e, a sua volta, imparerà come affrontare questa conversazione tabù in modo che la società possa aiutare persone per superare queste paure. I partecipanti beneficeranno anche direttamente di questo studio, consentendo loro di esprimere liberamente le loro convinzioni sulla morte e sul morire e venire a conoscere i desideri morenti dei familiari stretti. Ciò consentirà ai partecipanti di iniziare ad alleviare lo stress da queste conversazioni impegnative e realizzare i propri desideri personali. Il vantaggio di partecipare a questo studio di ricerca può e aiuterà anche la famiglia e gli amici nei momenti difficili in cui deve aver luogo la pianificazione dei desideri finali.

Partecipazione Volontaria e Ritiro: La tua partecipazione a questo studio è completamente volontaria e puoi scegliere di interrompere la partecipazione in qualsiasi momento. La tua decisione di non fare volontariato, di interrompere la partecipazione o di rifiutare di rispondere a domande particolari non influenzerà la natura del rapporto in corso che potresti avere con il ricercatore o la natura del tuo rapporto con la York University né ora né in futuro. Puoi interrompere la partecipazione allo studio in qualsiasi momento, per qualsiasi motivo, se lo decidi. Nel caso in cui lei si ritiri dallo studio, tutti i dati associati raccolti saranno immediatamente distrutti ove possibile. Se desideri ritirarti dopo lo studio, avrai la possibilità di ritirare anche i tuoi dati fino al completamento dell'analisi.

Riservatezza: I metodi che verranno utilizzati durante lo studio saranno l'audio, l'osservazione e la presa di appunti. A ciascuno dei partecipanti verrà posta una serie di domande dal ricercatore per rispondere e discutere con i membri del gruppo familiare. Tutti i dati raccolti sui partecipanti e le informazioni raccolte durante gli incontri della 'Cena della Morte' saranno trattati con riservatezza. I nomi dei partecipanti saranno registrati in forma anonima.

Il ricercatore riconosce che l'host del sondaggio online (modulo Google) può raccogliere automaticamente i dati dei partecipanti a loro insaputa (ad es. indirizzi IP). Sebbene queste informazioni possano essere fornite o rese accessibili al ricercatore, non verranno utilizzate o salvate senza consenso del partecipante sul sistema del ricercatore. Inoltre, poiché questo progetto utilizza tecniche di raccolta basate su elettronica, i dati possono essere soggetti all'accesso di terze parti a seguito di varie normative sulla sicurezza ora in vigore in molti paesi e quindi la riservatezza e la privacy dei dati non possono essere garantite durante la trasmissione basata sul web.

Tutti i dati cartacei raccolti saranno conservati in un archivio chiuso a chiave presso la residenza dei ricercatori. Tutti i dati elettronici saranno archiviati in modo sicuro in una struttura chiusa a chiave sul laptop principale e sull'iPad dei ricercatori, entrambi protetti da password su server sicuri. I dati saranno conservati per 3 anni e poi distrutti. Tutti i dati cartacei raccolti saranno distrutti e tutti i dati elettronici saranno definitivamente cancellati entro il 30 giugno 2024.

Il ricercatore principale sarà l'unica persona che avrà accesso ai dati raccolti. I dati raccolti saranno utilizzati per scrivere un articolo di tesi e per la creazione di una produzione teatrale che incorpori dramma e musica. Tutti i partecipanti rimarranno anonimi, NON ci sarà possibilità di identificazione dei partecipanti nell'elaborato di tesi e/o nella produzione teatrale. I dati saranno utilizzati esclusivamente per le finalità sopra descritte. A meno che tu non scelga diversamente, tutte le informazioni che fornisci durante la ricerca saranno mantenute riservate e, a meno che tu non indichi espressamente il tuo consenso, il tuo nome non comparirà in alcun rapporto o pubblicazione della ricerca. La riservatezza sarà garantita nella massima misura possibile dalla legge.

Se questo studio deve utilizzare Zoom per ospitare le "cene della morte" al fine di raccogliere dati, che è un servizio basato su cloud ospitato esternamente, c'è sempre il rischio che le tue risposte possano essere intercettate da terzi (ad es. agenzie governative, hacker). Quando le informazioni vengono trasmesse su Internet, la privacy non può essere garantita. Inoltre, mentre i ricercatori della York University non raccoglieranno o utilizzano indirizzi IP o altre informazioni che potrebbero collegare la tua partecipazione al tuo computer o dispositivi elettronici senza informarti, c'è un piccolo rischio con qualsiasi piattaforma come Zoom, che i dati raccolti su server esterni possano sfuggono al controllo del ricercatore. Tutte le registrazioni audio verranno salvate in un file protetto da password sul personal computer del ricercatore, non sul servizio basato su cloud. Si prega di notare che ci si aspetta che i partecipanti accettano di non effettuare alcuna registrazione non autorizzata del contenuto di una sessione di raccolta dati della 'Cena della Morte' di ricerca.

Usi per I Dati: I dati raccolti saranno utilizzati per scrivere un documento di tesi e per la creazione di una produzione teatrale che incorpori dramma e musica. Tutti i partecipanti rimarranno anonimi, NON ci sarà possibilità di identificazione dei partecipanti nell'elaborato di tesi e/o nella produzione teatrale. I dati saranno utilizzati esclusivamente per le finalità sopra descritte.

Domande Sulla Ricerca: se hai domande sulla ricerca in generale o sul tuo ruolo nello studio, non esitare a contattare Rita Giancola via e-mail ritagian@yorku.ca. Questa ricerca è stata esaminata e approvata dal comitato di ricerca FES per conto della York University ed è conforme agli standard delle linee guida canadesi Tri-Council Research Ethics. In caso di domande su questo processo o sui tuoi diritti come partecipante allo studio, contatta Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 309 York Lanes, York University, 416-736-5914 o inviare un' e-mail al ore@yorku.ca.

Diritti Legali e Firme:

Io, _____, acconsento a partecipare all'Italian Cultural 'Death Dinners' Study condotto dalla dottoranda Rita Giancola, nelle Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program presso la York University. Ho compreso la natura di questo progetto e desidero partecipare. Non rinuncio a nessuno dei miei diritti legali firmando questo modulo. La mia firma sotto indica il mio consenso.

Firma del Partecipante _____ Data _____

Firma dello Sperimentatore _____ Data _____

Io, _____, accetto di consentire l'utilizzo delle registrazioni audio solo per la raccolta di informazioni, con la consapevolezza che non sarò identificato per nome. Sono consapevole che posso revocare questo consenso in qualsiasi momento senza alcuna penalità.

Firma del Partecipante _____ Data _____

APPENDIX B EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS FOR 'DEATH DINNERS'

ENGLISH:

Hello, my name is Rita Giancola. I am a graduate student and researcher at York University and I would like to invite you to participate in a 'Death Dinner'!

I know, this will be the strangest invitation you will ever receive, but please read on, because I promise you that you will be in for a memorable night.

A group of healthcare and wellness leaders led by Michael Hebb, are working to break the taboo around conversations about death and dying. They have created a project called "**Let's Have Dinner and Talk About Death**".

This is simply what I would like to do with you and your family. Let's enjoy a meal together and talk about death. I would be excited to join you and a few members of your family — about 4 to 10 adults in total — for dinner to talk about death and dying. We can even just discuss over an espresso if you prefer. This is not meant to be a morbid conversation, but rather a very humane one, where we may consider what we want, both in life and in what comes after. I want to talk about this so that we can release some of our fears and inhibitions and build deeper connections with ourselves and with our loved ones. My secondary goal is to encourage participants to continue to share their final wishes with their loved ones, even after the 'Death Dinner' is over.

You may ask, "*But why is she doing this?*" My answer to you is that I am eager to gain an understanding of how Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perceive death and dying. I am fascinated by the Molisan perspective as both my parents were born and raised in Molise.

The family members that can participate in the dinner must be of legal age (19 or older). The dinners may include immediate family members (parents, siblings, spouses, children, and/or blood-related individuals close to the family) who do or do not live at your place of residence. Not all dinner guests need to be from Molise, however at least one must have Molisan heritage.

The meal eaten during the 'Death Dinner' is what the family would usually have on that particular day of the week, there is no need for a special meal to be prepared. **The dinner will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes.**

During the meal, questions regarding personal philosophies on death and dying will be discussed with the attending group of family members.

This is a study that is part of my research for the Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program at York University.

Each dinner will be audio recorded with limited participation by me, the principal and sole investigator. The data collected will be used to write a thesis paper and for a creation of a theatrical production incorporating music. All participants will remain anonymous. **There will be NO potential of identification of any of the participants** in the thesis paper and the theatrical production. The data will be solely used for the purposes described above.

There will be a consent form that each participant is required to sign that will further explain the risks and benefits of participating in this study.

Again, the goal of my research is to gain an understanding of how Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perceive death and dying. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time.

I hope that you do accept my invitation to this 'Death Dinner'. Together we can help ourselves, our family, and our society to overcome the fear around death and dying.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Buon appetito! I await your RSVP!

Rita Giancola
ritagian@yorku.ca
416-937-****

ITALIAN:

Ciao, mi chiamo Rita Giancola. Sono una studente laureato e ricercatore presso la York University e vorrei invitarvi a partecipare a una 'Cena della Morte'!

Lo so, questo sarà l'invito più strano che tu abbia mai ricevuto, ma per favore continua a leggere, perché ti prometto che passerai una notte memorabile.

Un gruppo di leader della sanità e del benessere guidati da Michael Hebb, sta lavorando per rompere il tabù sulle conversazioni sulla morte e sul morire. Hanno creato un progetto chiamato **"Let's Have Dinner and Talk About Death (Andiamo a Cena e Parliamo della Morte)"**.

Questo è semplicemente quello che vorrei fare con te e la tua famiglia. Godiamoci un pasto insieme e parliamo della morte. Sarei entusiasta di unirmi a te e ad alcuni membri della tua famiglia - da 4 a 10 adulti in totale - a cena per parlare della morte e del morire. Possiamo anche solo discutere davanti a un espresso, se preferisci. Questa non vuole essere una conversazione morbosa, ma piuttosto molto umana, in cui possiamo considerare ciò che vogliamo, sia nella vita che in ciò che verrà dopo. Voglio parlarne in modo che possiamo rilasciare alcune delle nostre paure e inibizioni e costruire connessioni più profonde con noi stessi e con i nostri cari. Il mio obiettivo secondario è incoraggiare i partecipanti a continuare a condividere i loro ultimi desideri con i loro cari, anche dopo che la 'Cena della Morte' è finita.

Potresti chiedere: "Ma perché lo fa?" La mia risposta è che sono ansioso di capire come gli immigrati **Molisani** percepiscono la morte e il morire. Sono affascinato dalla prospettiva Molisana poiché entrambi i miei genitori sono nati e cresciuti in Molise.

I familiari che possono partecipare alla cena devono essere maggiorenni (19 anni o più). Le cene possono includere familiari stretti (genitori, fratelli, coniugi, figli e/o persone consanguinee vicine alla famiglia) che risiedono o meno nel luogo di residenza. Non tutti i commensali devono essere Molisano, ma almeno uno deve avere origini Molisane.

Il pasto consumato durante la 'Cena della Morte' è quello che la famiglia consuma abitualmente in quel particolare giorno della settimana, non è necessario preparare un pasto speciale. **La cena durerà dai 60 ai 90 minuti.**

Durante il pasto, con il gruppo di familiari presenti, verranno discusse questioni riguardanti le filosofie personali sulla morte e sul morire.

Questo è uno studio che fa parte della mia ricerca per la Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program presso la York University.

Ogni cena sarà audio registrata con una partecipazione limitata da parte mia, principale e unico investigatore. I dati raccolti saranno utilizzati per scrivere un elaborato di tesi e per la creazione di uno spettacolo teatrale che incorpori la musica. Tutti i partecipanti rimarranno anonimi. **NON ci sarà alcun potenziale di identificazione di nessuno dei partecipanti al lavoro di tesi e alla produzione teatrale.** I dati saranno utilizzati esclusivamente per le finalità sopra descritte.

Ci sarà un modulo di consenso che ogni partecipante dovrà firmare che spiegherà ulteriormente i rischi e i benefici della partecipazione a questo studio.

Ancora una volta, l'obiettivo della mia ricerca è comprendere come gli Molisani percepiscono la morte e il morire. La tua partecipazione a questo studio è completamente volontaria e puoi scegliere di interrompere la partecipazione in qualsiasi momento.

Spero che accetterai il mio invito a questa 'Cena della Morte'. Insieme possiamo aiutare noi stessi, la nostra famiglia e la nostra società a superare la paura della morte e del morire.

Se hai ulteriori domande, non esitare a contattarmi in qualsiasi momento.

Buon appetito! Aspetto il tuo RSVP!

Rita Giancola
ritagian@yorku.ca
416-937-****

APPENDIX C EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS FOR SURVEY

ENGLISH:

Hello _____,

I hope this email finds you healthy and happy.

My name is Rita Giancola, and I am a part-time student in the Interdisciplinary Studies Master's Program at York University. My research is focussed on understanding how Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perceive death and dying, supervised by Roberta Iannacito-Provensano. I am fascinated by the Molisan perspective as both my parents were born and raised in Molise, Italy.

I discovered that you are a faculty member at the University of Toronto in the Italian Studies Department and am reaching out for your assistance.

To collect data, I have created a Google Form which is only for individuals with Molisan heritage. The survey takes 10 to 15 minutes to complete, and I would greatly appreciate you sharing the survey with any students/colleagues/contacts that are of Molisan heritage. If preferred, you can simply share my email with those interested in participating. The data will be used to write my thesis paper and for the creation of a theatrical production incorporating drama and music.

All participants will remain anonymous and there will be NO potential of identification of the participants in the thesis paper and the theatrical production. Note that this research has been reviewed and approved by the FES Research Committee on behalf of York University and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

The survey can be accessed at: _____.

Thank you for your time and assistance! If you have any questions/ideas/suggestions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Stay safe and healthy,
Rita Giancola

ITALIAN:

Ciao _____,

Spero che questa email ti troverà sana e felice.

Mentre riflettiamo sulla morte e risurrezione di Gesù, possono venire in mente pensieri sulla nostra mortalità.

Mi chiamo Rita Giancola, studentessa part-time per il Master in Studi Interdisciplinari presso la York University in Toronto, Canada. La mia ricerca è focalizzata sulla comprensione di come i Molisani concepiscono la morte e il morire, sotto la supervisione della Professoressa Roberta Iannacito-Provenzano. Sono affascinato dalla prospettiva Molisane perché i miei genitori sono nati e cresciuti in Molise.

Sto cercando la tua aiuto per completare il sondaggio e mandare il sondaggio di altri Molisani che conosci.

Per raccogliere i dati ho creato un Google Form. Questo sondaggio è rivolto a coloro che sono di origine italiana, in particolare del MOLISE e maggiorenni (19 o più). Il sondaggio non dovrebbe prenderà più da 10-15 minuti. I dati raccolti verranno utilizzati per scrivere una tesi e per la creazione di una produzione teatrale che incorpora dramma e musica.

Tutti i partecipanti rimarranno anonimi e NON ci sarà alcun pericolo di identificare i partecipanti al sondaggio nella tesi e nella produzione teatrale. Questa ricerca è stata esaminata e approvata dal Comitato di ricerca FES per conto della York University ed è conforme agli standard delle linee guida sull'etica della ricerca canadese del Tri-Council. I dati verranno utilizzati esclusivamente per le finalità sopra descritte.

Il sondaggio è accessibile a: _____.

Grazie mille per il vostro tempo dato a questo progetto!

Per ulteriori domande, contattare la ricercatrice principale, Rita Giancola, all'indirizzo email ritagian@yorku.ca.

A presto,
Rita Giancola

APPENDIX D

'DEATH DINNER' QUESTIONS

ENGLISH:

Introduction Starter:

It is okay to disagree with any of the answers your family members give...there is NO judgment!

Nothing you say is permanent. Your answers can change, just as the future changes, so can your outlook.

Let us all begin this evenings' dinner with gratitude for the meal we are about to enjoy, and to our ancestors. One at a time, let us raise a glass (or light a candle) to someone who is no longer with us, someone you admire deeply...and with no more than 20 seconds, share with everyone why you admire them. Cheers!

Conversation Questions:

1. If you knew this would be your last dinner, what would you want to eat?
2. What food would you want to be served at a reception after your funeral or memorial service?
3. What foods do you remember a departed loved one cooking for you?
4. If you could have anyone sing at your funeral or memorial service, who would it be? What would you want them to sing?
5. How many days, weeks, months, years would you want to extend your life?
6. If you had one month left to live, how would you spend your last days?
7. If you had one day left to live, what would be your greatest regrets?
8. Who would you want to speak at your funeral or memorial service?
9. What would you want people to say about you at your funeral?
10. When you die what would you want to be done with your body? Would you want to be buried outdoors or in a mausoleum or...?
11. What would you like your epitaph to say?
12. What outfit would you want to be wearing at your funeral?
13. If you could design your funeral or memorial service, how would you like it to be?
14. What abilities are so critical to your life that you cannot imagine living without them?
15. What are the biggest fears and worries you have about the future of your health?
16. If your health worsens, where would you want to be: in a healthcare facility or at home?
17. Would you share your medical information with others? With whom?
18. How much medical treatment are you willing to go through for the possibility of gaining more life?
19. When you die do you want to be alone or with whom, beside you?
20. Why do we not talk about death and dying?

Concluding Statement:

One at a time, and with no more than 20 seconds, let us share one thing you admire about the person on your right.

I hope that this dinner was a starting point for your family to continue to converse about death and dying, as these are important and challenging issues we all face at some point in our lives.

ITALIAN:

Introduzione Iniziale:

Va bene non essere d'accordo con nessuna delle risposte che danno i tuoi familiari... non c'è alcun giudizio!

Niente di quello che dici è permanente. Le tue risposte possono cambiare, proprio come cambia il futuro, così può cambiare la tua prospettiva.

Cominciamo tutti la cena di questa sera con gratitudine per il pasto che stiamo per gustare e per i nostri antenati. Uno alla volta, alziamo un bicchiere (o accendiamo una candela) a qualcuno che non è più con noi, qualcuno che ammiri profondamente... e in non più di 20 secondi, condividere con tutti perché lo ammiri. Saluti!

Domande di Conversazione:

1. Se sapessi che questa sarebbe la tua ultima cena, cosa vorresti mangiare?
2. Che cibo vorresti che ti fosse servito ad un ricevimento dopo il tuo funerale o la cerimonia commemorativa?
3. Quali cibi ricordi che una persona cara defunta ha cucinato per te?
4. Se potessi far cantare qualcuno al tuo funerale o alla cerimonia commemorativa, chi sarebbe? Cosa vorresti che cantassero?
5. Quanti giorni, settimane, mesi, anni vorresti prolungare la tua vita?
6. Se ti restasse un mese di vita, come trascorreresti i tuoi ultimi giorni?
7. Se ti restasse un giorno da vivere, quale sarebbe il tuo più grande rimpianto?
8. Chi vorresti che parlasse al tuo funerale o alla cerimonia commemorativa?
9. Cosa vorresti che la gente dicesse di te al tuo funerale?
10. Quando morirai cosa vorresti che fosse fatto del tuo corpo? Vorresti essere sepolto all'aperto o in un mausoleo o...?
11. Cosa vorresti che dicesse il tuo epitaffio?
12. Che outfit vorresti indossare al tuo funerale?
13. Se potessi progettare il tuo funerale o il tuo servizio commemorativo, come vorresti che fosse?
14. Quali abilità sono così importanti per la tua vita che non puoi immaginare di vivere senza di loro?
15. Quali sono le paure e le preoccupazioni più grandi che hai riguardo al futuro della tua salute?
16. Se la tua salute peggiorasse, dove vorresti essere: in una struttura sanitaria o a casa?
17. Condivideresti le tue informazioni mediche con altri? Con cui?
18. Quante cure mediche sei disposto a sottoporsi per avere la possibilità di guadagnare più punti vita?

19. Quando muori vuoi restare solo o con chi, accanto a te?
20. Perché non parliamo della morte e del morire?

Dichiarazione conclusiva:

Uno alla volta, e in non più di 20 secondi, condividiamo una cosa che ammiri della persona alla tua destra.

Spero che questa cena sia stata un punto di partenza per la tua famiglia per continuare a parlare della morte e del morire, poiché queste sono questioni importanti e stimolanti che tutti affrontiamo ad un certo punto della nostra vita.

APPENDIX E
GOOGLE FORM/SURVEY
ITALIAN CULTURAL ‘DEATH DINNER’ SURVEY

ENGLISH:

This survey is for those who are of ITALIAN-HERITAGE, specifically from MOLISE and who are of legal age (19 or older). The survey should take no longer than 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The goal of the research is to gain an understanding of how Canadian-Molisans and Italian-Molisans perceive death and dying. This study is taking place as part of graduate research for the Interdisciplinary Studies Master Program at York University.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher, or with York University either now, or in the future.

The data collected will be used to write a thesis paper and for a creation of a theatrical production incorporating drama and music. All participants will remain anonymous, there will be NO potential of identification of the participants in the thesis paper and the theatrical production. The researcher acknowledges that the host of the online survey (Google Form) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses). Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researcher, it will not be used or saved without participant’s consent on the researcher’s system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the FGS Research Committee on behalf of York University and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. The data will be solely used for the purposes described above. For further questions, please contact the principal investigator, Rita Giancola, at ritagian@yorku.ca.

1. I have read the description and eligibility criteria above, and consent to participate.
 - I consent
2. What gender do you identify as? Mark only one.
 - Female
 - Male
 - Non-binary
 - Other: _____
3. What is your age group? Mark only one.
 - 19 to 29
 - 30 to 39
 - 40 to 49
 - 50 to 59
 - 60 to 69
 - 70 to 79
 - 80+
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Mark only one.
 - Less than a high school diploma
 - High school diploma
 - Some college education but no diploma
 - College diploma(s)
 - Some undergraduate education but no degree
 - Undergraduate degree(s)
 - Some graduate education but no degree
 - Graduate degree(s)
 - Other: _____
5. What is your marital status? Mark only one.
 - Single
 - Dating
 - Married
 - Domestic partnership

- Widowed
- Divorced
- Other: _____

6. Other than you, who lives in your household? Select as many as applicable.

- Spouse/partner
- Children
- Grandchildren
- Siblings
- Mother
- Father
- Grandmother
- Grandfather
- Other: _____

7. What best describes your religious affiliation? Mark only one.

- Roman Catholic
- Protestant
- Anglican
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Sikh
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Other: _____

8. How many visits to your preferred place of worship did you make in a YEAR, PRIOR to COVID-19?

9. What country were you born in?

10. What city/town were you born in?

11. What specific city/town in Molise, Italy, do you or your family originate from?

12. If you have heritage in other regions of Italy, indicate the region(s) below. Check all that apply.

- I only originate from Molise Abruzzo
- Basilicata
- Calabria
- Campania
- Emilia-Romagna
- Friuli-Venezia Giulia
- Lazio
- Liguria
- Lombardia
- Marche
- Piemonte
- Puglia
- Sardegna
- Sicilia
- Toscana
- Trentino-Alto Adige
- Umbria
- Valle d'Aosta
- Veneto

13. In what year did you or your family immigrate to Canada?

14. What generation of Italian-Canadian are you? Mark only one.

- Immigrant
- 1st Generation
- 2nd Generation
- 3rd Generation +

15. How often did you visit your doctor in a YEAR, PRIOR to COVID-19?

16. At what age do you consider someone to have “lived a long life”?

17. Would you want to know If you only had a few months to live? Mark only one.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

18. How comfortable are you talking about death and dying? Mark only one.

- Very uncomfortable
- Uncomfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Neutral
- Somewhat comfortable
- Comfortable
- Very comfortable

19. Why are YOU comfortable or uncomfortable talking about death and dying?

20. As a CHILD, do you remember attending a funeral(s)? Mark only one.

- Yes
- No

21. As a CHILD, do you remember talking about death and dying with your FAMILY?
Mark only one.

- Yes
- No

22. As a CHILD, do you remember talking about death and dying with your FRIENDS?
Mark only one.

- Yes
- No

23. As an ADULT, how often do you talk to your FAMILY about death and dying?
Mark only one.

- Never
- Rarely (once or twice a year)
- Sometimes (once or twice a month)

- Often (once or twice a week)
- Always (more than twice a week)

24. As an ADULT, how often do you talk to your FRIENDS about death and dying?
Mark only one.

- Never
- Rarely (once or twice a year)
- Sometimes (once or twice a month)
- Often (once or twice a week)
- Always (more than twice a week)

25. How important do you think it is to talk to FAMILY about death and dying?
Mark only one.

- Very unimportant
- Unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Neutral
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Very important

26. How important do you think it is to talk to FRIENDS about death and dying?
Mark only one.

- Very unimportant
- Unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Neutral
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Very important

27. If you were of sound body and mind, at what age would YOU be happy to live until?

28. How often do you think about DEATH? Mark only one.

- Never
- Rarely (once or twice a year)
- Sometimes (once or twice a month)
- Often (once or twice a week)
- Always (more than twice a week)

29. How afraid are you of DEATH? Mark only one.

- Very unafraid
- Unafraid
- Somewhat unafraid
- Neutral
- Somewhat afraid
- Afraid
- Very afraid

30. How often do you think about DYING? Mark only one.

- Never
- Rarely (once or twice a year)
- Sometimes (once or twice a month)
- Often (once or twice a week)
- Always (more than twice a week)

31. How afraid are you of DYING? Mark only one.

- Very unafraid
- Unafraid
- Somewhat unafraid
- Neutral
- Somewhat afraid
- Afraid
- Very afraid

32. What are YOUR biggest fears and/or worries about death and dying?

33. What image(s) do you associate with death and dying?

34. If you are at the end of your life, where would you want to die? Mark only one.

- Hospital
- Hospice
- Home
- Other: _____

35. What do you think happens after death?

36. Have you planned your OWN funeral arrangements? Mark only one.

- Yes
- No

37. If you could plan your OWN funeral or memorial service, how would you like it to be?

38. If you were to unexpectedly die tomorrow, what would your biggest regrets be?

39. If you were to unexpectedly die tomorrow, what would you want to say to those you leave behind?

40. Do you enjoy sharing a meal with your family and friends? How does it make you feel? Explain.

41. If you were to unexpectedly die tomorrow, what would you hope your last meal to be?

42. If you have any further thoughts/comments you wish to share, please write them below.

Thank you for your time.

ITALIAN:

Questo sondaggio è rivolto a coloro che sono di origine italiana, in particolare del MOLISE e maggiorenni (19 o più). Il sondaggio non dovrebbe richiedere più di 10-15 minuti. L'obiettivo della ricerca è di comprendere come i Molisani e le loro famiglie concettano la morte e del morire. Questo studio si svolge nell'ambito della ricerca universitaria per il Master in Studi interdisciplinari presso la York University a Toronto, Canada.

La partecipazione a questo sondaggio è completamente volontaria e si può scegliere di interrompere la partecipazione in qualsiasi momento. La decisione di non partecipare al sondaggio, di interrompere la partecipazione o di rifiutarsi di rispondere a domande particolari non influenzerà il rapporto con la ricercatrice o con la York University né ora né in futuro.

I dati raccolti verranno utilizzati per scrivere una tesi e per la creazione di una produzione teatrale che incorpora dramma e musica. Tutti i partecipanti rimarranno anonimi, NON ci sarà alcun pericolo di identificare i partecipanti al sondaggio nella tesi e nella produzione teatrale. Il ricercatore riconosce che l'host del sondaggio online (Modulo Google) può raccogliere automaticamente i dati dei partecipanti a loro insaputa (ad esempio, indirizzi IP). Sebbene queste informazioni possano essere fornite o rese accessibili ai ricercatore, non verranno utilizzate o salvate senza il consenso del partecipante nel sistema del ricercatore. Inoltre, poiché questo progetto utilizza tecniche di raccolta dati basate su e-based, i dati potrebbero essere soggetti all'accesso da parte di terzi a causa di varie normative sulla sicurezza ora in vigore in molti paesi e, quindi, la riservatezza dei dati non può essere garantita durante sul web.

Questa ricerca è stata esaminata e approvata dal Comitato di ricerca FGS per conto della York University ed è conforme agli standard delle linee guida sull'etica della ricerca canadese del Tri-Council I dati verranno utilizzati esclusivamente per le finalità sopra descritte. Per ulteriori domande, contattare la ricercatrice principale, Rita Giancola, all'indirizzo e-mail ritagian@yorku.ca.

1. Ho letto la descrizione e i criteri di idoneità di cui sopra e acconsento a partecipare.

Lo accetto

2. In che genere ti identifichi? Segnate solo uno.

Femmina

Maschio

Non-binario

Altro: _____

3. Qual è la tua fascia di età? Segnate solo uno.

19 to 29

30 to 39

40 to 49

50 to 59

60 to 69

70 to 79

80+

4. Qual è il livello di istruzione più alto che hai raggiunto? Segnate solo uno.

- Meno di un diploma di scuola superiore
- Diploma di scuola superiore
- Un po' di istruzione universitaria ma nessun diploma
- Diplomi universitari
- Qualche istruzione universitaria ma nessuna laurea
- Laurea(i)
- Una certa istruzione universitaria ma nessuna laurea
- Laurea(i) superiore
- Altro: _____

5. Qual è il tuo stato civile? Segnate solo uno.

- Singola/singolo
- Esco con qualcuno
- Sposata/sposato
- Domestic partnership Convivenza
- Vedova
- Divorziata/Divorziato
- Altro: _____

6. Oltre a te, chi abita nella tua famiglia? Selezionare quanti sono applicabili.

- Sposa/Compagna
- Bambine/Bambini
- Nipoti
- Sorelle e Fratelli
- Madre
- Padre
- Nonna
- Nonno
- Altro: _____

7. Cosa descrive meglio la tua appartenenza religiosa? Segnate solo uno.

- Cattolico Romano

- Protestante
- Anglicana/Anglicano
- Ebraica/Ebreo
- Musulmana/Musulmano
- Indù
- Buddista
- Sikh
- Atea/Ateo
- Agnostica/Agnostico
- Altro: _____

8. Quante visite al tuo luogo di culto preferito hai fatto in un ANNO, PRIMA del COVID-19?

9. Da quale specifica città/paese del Molise sei nato ?

10. Se possiedi un patrimonio in altre regioni d'Italia, indica le regioni di seguito.

- Sono solo originario del Molise
- Abruzzo
- Basilicata
- Calabria
- Campania
- Emilia-Romagna
- Friuli-Venezia Giulia
- Lazio
- Liguria
- Lombardia
- Marche
- Piemonte
- Puglia
- Sardegna

- Sicilia
- Toscana
- Trentino-Alto
- Adige
- Umbria
- Valle d'Aosta
- Veneto

11. Quante volte hai visitato il tuo medico in un ANNO, PRIMA del COVID-19?

12. A che età pensi che qualcuno abbia “vissuto una lunga vita”?

13. Vorresti sapere se avessi solo pochi mesi da vivere? Segnate solo uno.

- Sì
- No
- Incerta/Incerto

14. Quanto ti senti a tuo agio nel parlare di morte e morire? Segnate solo uno.

- Molto scomodo
- Scomoda/Scomodo
- Un po' scomodo
- Neutra/Neutro
- Abbastanza comodo
- Comoda/Comodo
- Molto comodo

15. Perché ti senti a tuo agio o a disagio a parlare di morte e morire?

16. Da BAMBINO/A, ricordi di aver partecipato a uno o più funerali? Segnate solo uno.

- Sì
- No

17. Da BAMBINO/A, ricordi di aver parlato di morte e di morire con la tua FAMIGLIA?

Segnate solo uno.

- Sì
- No

18. Da BAMBINO/A, ricordi di aver parlato di morte e di morire con i tuoi AMICI? Segnate solo uno.

- Sì
- No

19. Da ADULTO/A, quanto spesso parli con la tua FAMIGLIA della morte e di morire?

Segnate solo uno.

- Mai
- Raramente (una o due volte l'anno)
- A volte (una o due volte al mese)
- Spesso (una o due volte alla settimana)
- Sempre (più di due volte a settimana)

20. Da ADULTO/A, quante volte parli ai tuoi AMICI della morte e di morire?

Segnate solo uno.

- Mai
- Raramente (una o due volte l'anno)
- A volte (una o due volte al mese)
- Spesso (una o due volte alla settimana)
- Sempre (più di due volte a settimana)

21. Quanto pensi sia importante parlare con FAMIGLIA della morte e di morire? Segnate solo uno.

solo uno.

- Molto irrelevante
- Irrelevante
- Un po' irrelevante
- Neutra/Neutro
- Un po' importante
- Importante
- Molto importante

22. Quanto pensi sia importante parlare con AMICI della morte e di morire? Segnate solo uno.

- Molto irrilevante
- Irrilevante
- Un po' irrilevante
- Neutra/Neutro
- Un po' importante
- Importante
- Molto importante

23. Se tu avessi un corpo e una mente sane, fino a che età saresti felice di vivere?

24. Quante volte pensi alla MORTE? Segnate solo uno.

- Mai
- Raramente (una o due volte l'anno)
- A volte (una o due volte al mese)
- Spesso (una o due volte alla settimana)
- Sempre (più di due volte a settimana)

25. Quanto hai paura della MORTE? Segnate solo uno.

- Molto senza paura
- Senza paura
- Un po' senza paura
- Neutra/Neutro
- Un po' spaventato
- Paura
- Molto spaventato

26. Quante volte pensi di MORIRE? Segnate solo uno.

- Mai
- Raramente (una o due volte l'anno)
- A volte (una o due volte al mese)
- Spesso (una o due volte alla settimana)
- Sempre (più di due volte a settimana)

27. Quanto hai paura di MORIRE? Segnate solo uno.

- Molto senza paura
- Senza paura
- Un po' senza paura
- Neutra/Neutro
- Un po' spaventato
- Paura
- Molto spaventato

28. Quali sono le TUE paure preoccupazioni più grandi riguardo alla morte e di morire?

29. Quali immagini associ alla morte e al morire?

30. Se sei alla fine della tua vita, dove vorresti morire? Segnate solo uno.

- Ospedale
- Ospizio
- Casa
- Altro: _____

31. Cosa pensi che accada dopo la morte?

32. Hai pianificato il tuo PROPRIO funerale? Segnate solo uno.

- Sì
- No

33. Se potessi pianificare il tuo PROPRIO funerale o servizio funebre, come vorresti che fosse?

34. Se dovessi morire inaspettatamente domani, quali sarebbero i tuoi più grandi rimpianti?

35. Se dovessi morire inaspettatamente domani, cosa vorresti dire a coloro che lasci?

36. Ti piace cenare con la tua famiglia e i tuoi amici? Come ti fa sentire? Spiegare.

37. Se dovessi morire inaspettatamente domani, quale speri sia la tua ultima cena?

38. Se hai altri pensieri/commenti che desideri condividere, scrivi qui sotto.

Grazie per il tuo tempo.

**APPENDIX F
RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS**

IN CANADA:

Canadian Centre for Bereavement Education and Grief Counseling

80 Carleton Street, Toronto, ON M5B 1L6
(416) 926-0905

Bereaved Families of Ontario -Toronto

80 Woodlawn Avenue East, Toronto, ON M4T 1W6
(416) 440-0290

Canadian Virtual Hospice

Information and support on advanced illness, palliative care, and grief
www.virtualhospice.ca

COSTI

Immigrant services relating to family and mental health, employment, housing, etc...
Sheridan Mall, 1700 Wilson Avenue, Suite 105, Toronto, ON M6M 3Z9
(416) 789-7925
www.costi.org

Turner & Porter: Community of People Extending Support (COPE)

2357 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON
(416) 767-6793
www.turnerporter.ca

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario

2 Carlton St., suite 808, Toronto, ON
(416) 979-9779 ext. 28
www.hpco.ca

Government of Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/options-decision-making-end-life.html>

IN ITALY:

Centro Di Consulenza Familiare
Via Albertoni 4C
0376 323797 - 379 2734157

Federazione Cure Palliative
Via dei Mille 8/10 - 20081 Abbiategrasso
02 62694659 - 3392669982
info@fedcp.org

Psisc Citta

Contatta la Redazione: 0547.28909
tutte le mattine dal lunedì al venerdì 9:00-13:30
<https://www.psiscitta.it/psicologi-psicoterapeuti/psicologo-molise.php>

FILE – Fondazione Italiana di Leniterapia

055 200 1212
email file@leniterapia.it

Hospice Madre Teresa Di Calcutta - Asrem Molise

4, VIA A. MARRA, 86035 Larino
0874 827791 - 346 958 5464

Guida Psicologi

<https://www.guidapsicologi.it/studio/elaborazione-del-lutto/campobasso>

Avvenire

<https://www.avvenire.it/vita/pagine/c-una-cura-che-riconcilia-con-la-morte>

OPI Molise

<https://www.opimolise.it/evento-formativo-le-cure-palliative-percorsi-per-lenire-le-sofferenze-ne-i-diversi-setting-assistenziali-e-migliorare-la-qualita-di-vita-25-maggio-2023-campobasso/>

APPENDIX G ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH EXPRESSED BY PHILOSOPHERS

Philosopher	Attitude Toward Death
Socrates (469–399 B.C.)	Death may be better than life, and the true philosopher is cheerful in the face of it.
Plato (427–347 B.C.)	Death is the release of the soul from the body.
Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)	A brave man is one who is fearless in the face of a noble death.

Epicurus (341–270 B.C.)	So death, the most terrifying of all ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist death is not with us, but when death comes, then we do not exist.
Zeno of Cyprus (335–263 B.C.)	We should never oppose unavoidable evils, including death.
Lucius A.Seneca (4 B.C.–65 A.D.)	The best way to diminish the fear of death is by thinking about it constantly.
Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677)	Death is a punishment to some, to some a gift, and to many a favor.
Georg W.F.Hegel (1770–1831)	A free man thinks of nothing less than of death and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life.
Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860)	Death is the reconciliation of the spirit with itself, a reuniting of the individual with cosmic matter.
Ludwig A.Feuerbach (1804–1872)	Death is the true aim of life and the muse of philosophy.
Bertrand A.Russell (1872–1970)	Life must be lived fully in spite of death.
Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)	When I die, I shall rot and nothing of my ego will survive.
Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)	A person’s life becomes more purposeful when he faces his own death. Constant awareness of death intensifies the sense of life.

Note. Material summarized from *Death and Western Thought*, by J.Choron, 1973, New York: Collier Books and *History of Thanatology* by P.D.Bardis, 1981, Washington, DC: University Press of America. (Aiken 2001,183)

APPENDIX H TOP 100 GROSSING BROADWAY SHOWS

Ranking information taken from Stacker, an online publishing company that issues news, entertainment, lifestyle, sports, finances, travel, and science devised stories from accurate data driven research (stacker.com, 2018).

Yes = 68 and No = 32 (these numbers calculated by the researcher)

Rank	Musical	Total Gross	Total Attendance	Involves Death
------	---------	-------------	------------------	----------------

1	The Lion King	\$1,454,286,493.74	14,300,583	Yes
2	Wicked	\$1,182,786,422.50	10,688,010	Yes
3	The Phantom Of The Opera	\$1,145,223,419.65	18,155,941	Yes
4	Mamma Mia!	\$624,391,684.20	7,566,124	No
5	Chicago	\$611,071,347.95	8,706,407	Yes
6	Jersey Boys	\$558,416,067.20	5,150,298	Yes
7	The Book Of Mormon	\$541,869,143.99	3,201,211	Yes
8	Beauty And The Beast	\$429,158,457.82	7,609,397	Yes
9	Les Misérables	\$406,258,901.85	8,926,089	Yes
10	Cats	\$366,379,566.87	8,652,030	Yes
11	Hamilton	\$328,067,131.25	1,481,005	Yes
12	Aladdin	\$312,530,109.45	2,850,446	Yes
13	Mary Poppins	\$294,558,629.30	3,878,444	Yes
14	The Producers	\$288,361,724.00	3,672,795	No
15	Miss Saigon	\$285,843,974.25	6,161,098	Yes
16	Kinky Boots	\$275,792,770.18	2,507,414	Yes
17	Rent	\$274,248,128.25	5,026,616	Yes
18	Hairspray	\$252,181,270.39	3,418,653	No
19	Spider-Man Turn Off The Dark	\$212,406,016.80	2,068,468	Yes
20	Beautiful	\$211,351,937.64	1,687,322	No
21	Matilda	\$198,165,845.05	2,087,293	Yes
22	Billy Elliot: The Musical	\$183,514,364.50	1,787,108	Yes
23	Monty Python's Spamalot	\$168,067,351.34	2,075,781	Yes
24	Aida	\$165,928,398.00	2,714,193	Yes

25	42nd Street (2001 Revival)	\$133,018,977.90	2,228,839	No
26	Rock Of Ages	\$128,956,074.03	1,476,025	No
27	Avenue Q	\$121,918,908.29	1,731,068	No
28	School Of Rock	\$120,021,724.93	1,226,659	No
29	Cabaret (1998 Revival)	\$119,389,411.88	1,919,198	Yes
30	Motown: The Musical	\$115,002,540.25	1,063,474	No
31	Once	\$110,306,772.41	1,082,027	No
32	Newsies	\$109,000,708.97	1,156,757	No
33	Les Misérables (2014 Revival)	\$108,535,573.28	1,210,117	Yes
34	In The Heights	\$105,302,931.92	1,322,889	Yes
35	Memphis	\$104,453,820.70	1,380,731	No
36	The Color Purple	\$103,992,555.74	1,369,564	Yes
37	Movin' Out	\$99,919,700.57	1,436,759	Yes
38	Dear Evan Hansen	\$97,907,867.52	540,262	Yes
39	Waitress	\$97,225,917.76	789,673	Yes
40	Hello, Dolly! (2017 Revival)	\$96,706,509.57	540,317	Yes
41	South Pacific	\$96,488,869.00	965,647	Yes
42	West Side Story	\$93,028,431.00	1,074,462	Yes
43	Crazy For You	\$92,554,841.00	2,090,822	No
44	Show Boat	\$89,171,712.00	1,585,144	No
45	Smokey Joe's Cafe	\$88,346,877.00	1,904,856	No
46	Cinderella	\$88,166,612.85	1,039,923	Yes
47	The Addams Family	\$86,677,067.25	920,997	Yes
48	An American In Paris	\$85,539,226.32	882,254	Yes
49	On Your Feet!	\$83,571,596.20	879,193	Yes

50	Sunset Boulevard	\$83,327,962.00	1,490,342	Yes
51	The Little Mermaid	\$82,993,598.69	986,179	Yes
52	Annie Get Your Gun	\$82,148,713.00	1,415,850	No
53	Ragtime	\$79,947,693.92	1,432,872	Yes
54	Me And My Girl	\$79,655,591.00	2,061,437	No
55	Jekyll & Hyde	\$78,056,880.30	1,403,224	Yes
56	Thoroughly Modern Millie	\$75,616,509.00	1,193,581	No
57	War Horse	\$74,975,253.00	726,281	Yes
58	A Gentleman's Guide To Love And Murder	\$73,749,113.73	749,169	Yes
59	Something Rotten!	\$73,500,365.77	870,214	Yes
60	Grease	\$72,344,100.00	1,450,252	No
61	Fosse	\$68,997,052.09	1,121,921	Yes
62	Pippin	\$68,840,076.48	659,865	Yes
63	The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time	\$68,321,429.36	712,343	Yes
64	Cats (2016 Revival)	\$65,624,072.00	691,637	Yes
65	Guys And Dolls	\$65,388,544.00	1,282,292	Yes
66	Come From Away	\$65,261,039.11	461,668	Yes
67	Kiss Me, Kate	\$65,051,743.00	1,056,908	Yes
68	Finding Neverland	\$64,214,522.00	723,370	Yes
69	La Cage Aux Folles (1983)	\$64,214,287.00	1,958,853	No
70	A Chorus Line	\$63,997,588.00	2,170,828	No
71	The Drowsy Chaperone	\$63,565,087.85	865,975	No
72	42nd Street (1980)	\$61,642,043.00	2,032,198	No
73	Contact	\$60,218,526.15	931,293	No

74	How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying (2011 Revival)	\$59,740,761.32	628,957	No
75	Annie (2012 Revival)	\$59,051,947.70	677,853	Yes
76	Victor/Victoria	\$58,754,023.00	995,827	No
77	Dirty Rotten Scoundrels	\$58,033,862.42	808,025	No
78	Fiddler On The Roof (2004 Revival)	\$57,635,884.00	959,006	Yes
79	Spring Awakening	\$57,441,834.49	767,167	Yes
80	Titanic	\$57,150,546.00	1,065,828	Yes
81	The King And I (2015 Revival)	\$57,045,053.00	494,187	Yes
82	Legally Blonde	\$56,338,126.00	814,072	Yes
83	A Bronx Tale The Musical	\$55,182,500.05	528,669	Yes
84	Will Rogers' Follies	\$54,685,976.00	1,155,341	Yes
85	A Chorus Line (2006 Revival)	\$54,540,020.27	681,614	No
86	Bring In Da Noise, Bring In Da Funk	\$54,448,939.14	1,118,863	Yes
87	Tommy	\$54,390,759.00	1,148,704	Yes
88	Evita	\$52,678,169.50	474,853	Yes
89	Sister Act	\$52,509,229.43	721,574	Yes
90	Nice Work If You Can Get It	\$51,461,741.01	543,472	No
91	Hair	\$50,570,854.00	613,014	Yes
92	Hedwig And The Angry Inch	\$50,259,431.11	459,696	No
93	Paramour	\$50,071,359.67	579,261	No
94	Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet Of 1812	\$50,069,393.21	404,558	Yes

95	Anastasia	\$49,783,058.26	431,457	Yes
96	Fiddler On The Roof (2015 Revival)	\$49,724,448.83	569,518	Yes
97	A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum	\$48,856,284.00	924,216	Yes
98	Priscilla Queen Of The Desert	\$48,763,891.89	616,609	Yes
99	The Full Monty	\$47,862,021.00	764,040	Yes
100	Grease (2007 Revival)	\$47,473,854.00	551,325	No

APPENDIX I
50 LONGEST RUNNING BROADWAY SHOWS
(as of May 22, 2023)

Taken from The Broadway League, an official research and statistical website of the Broadway theatre industry (The Broadway League, 2015).

Yes = 33 and No = 17 (these numbers calculated by the researcher)

Rank	Show Name	Show Type	Number of Performances	Opening Date	Closing Date	Involved Death
1	The Phantom of the Opera	Musical	13,981	01/26/1988	04/16/2023	Yes
2	Chicago	Musical	10,377	11/14/1996	Present	Yes
3	The Lion King	Musical	9,993	11/13/1997	Present	Yes
4	Wicked	Musical	7,533	10/30/2003	Present	Yes
5	Cats	Musical	7,485	10/07/1982	09/10/2000	Yes
6	Les Misérables	Musical	6,680	03/12/1987	05/18/2003	Yes
7	A Chorus Line	Musical	6,137	07/25/1975	04/28/1990	No
8	Oh! Calcutta!	Musical	5,959	09/24/1976	08/06/1989	Yes
9	Mamma Mia!	Musical	5,758	10/18/2001	09/12/2015	No
10	Beauty and the Beast	Musical	5,462	04/18/1994	07/29/2007	Yes

11	Rent	Musical	5,123	04/29/1996	09/07/2008	Yes
12	Jersey Boys	Musical	4,642	11/06/2005	01/15/2017	Yes
13	The Book of Mormon	Musical	4,391	03/24/2011	Present	Yes
14	Miss Saigon	Musical	4,092	04/11/1991	01/28/2001	Yes
15	42nd Street	Musical	3,486	08/25/1980	01/08/1989	No
16	Grease	Musical	3,388	02/14/1972	04/13/1980	No
17	Fiddler on the Roof	Musical	3,242	09/22/1964	07/02/1972	Yes
18	Life With Father	Play	3,224	11/08/1939	07/12/1947	Yes
19	Tobacco Road	Play	3,182	12/04/1933	05/31/1941	Yes
20	Aladdin	Musical	3,163	03/20/2014	Present	Yes
21	Hello, Dolly!	Musical	2,844	01/16/1964	12/27/1970	Yes
22	My Fair Lady	Musical	2,717	03/15/1956	09/29/1962	Yes
23	Hairspray	Musical	2,642	08/15/2002	01/04/2009	No
24	Mary Poppins	Musical	2,619	11/16/2006	03/03/2013	Yes
25	Hamilton	Musical	2,606	08/06/2015	Present	Yes
26	Avenue Q	Musical	2,534	07/31/2003	09/13/2009	No
27	Kinky Boots	Musical	2,505	04/04/2013	04/07/2019	Yes
28	The Producers	Musical	2,502	04/19/2001	04/22/2007	No
29	Beautiful	Musical	2,416	01/12/2014	10/27/2019	No
30	Cabaret	Musical	2,377	03/19/1998	01/04/2004	Yes
31	Annie	Musical	2,377	04/21/1977	01/02/1983	Yes
32	Rock of Ages	Musical	2,328	04/07/2009	01/18/2015	No
33	Man of La Mancha	Musical	2,328	11/22/1965	06/26/1971	Yes
34	Abie's Irish Rose	Play	2,327	05/23/1922	10/22/1927	No
35	Oklahoma!	Musical	2,212	03/31/1943	05/29/1948	Yes

36	Smokey Joe's Cafe	Musical	2,036	03/02/1995	01/16/2000	No
37	Pippin	Musical	1,944	10/23/1972	06/12/1977	Yes
38	South Pacific	Musical	1,925	04/07/1949	01/16/1954	Yes
39	The Magic Show	Musical	1,920	05/28/1974	12/31/1978	No
40	Aida	Musical	1,852	03/23/2000	09/05/2004	Yes
41	Gemini	Play	1,819	05/21/1977	09/06/1981	No
42	Deathtrap	Play	1,793	02/26/1978	06/13/1982	Yes
43	Harvey	Play	1,775	11/01/1944	01/15/1949	No
44	Dancin'	Musical	1,774	03/27/1978	06/27/1982	No
45	La Cage aux Folles	Musical	1,761	08/21/1983	11/15/1987	No
46	Hair	Musical	1,750	04/29/1968	07/01/1972	Yes
47	Dear Evan Hansen	Musical	1,672	12/04/2016	09/18/2022	Yes
48	The Wiz	Musical	1,672	01/05/1975	01/28/1979	Yes
49	Come From Away	Musical	1,669	03/12/2017	10/02/2022	Yes
50	Born Yesterday	Play	1,642	02/04/1946	12/31/1949	No

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