Please note that your proposal assignment does **NOT** require a Title page.
The Effect of Culture on The Perception of Death

Section 1: Thesis

Thesis: The way individuals perceive death and dying is affected by culture, which manifests itself in systems of shared beliefs in an afterlife, rituals for the dead, and the meaningfulness of life.

Section 2: Psychological Theory

The Ecological-systems approach, as proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in chapter one of the textbook, suggests that human beings are influenced by the systems around them and how those systems influence each other. This relationship implies that ideas put forth from the various systems (Microsystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem) cause specific behaviors and perceptions, such as those concerning death and death rituals, and influence the individual to react in certain ways to concepts, such as death. Also of importance is the theory put forth by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in the epilogue of the textbook, concerning the five stages in which dying people experience and express emotions. These stages reflect the consistent and universal in which human beings cope with their own mortality and the value of cultural perception in allowing a person to progress smoothly through the five stages, ultimately leading to acceptance.

Section 3: Research Articles

Part 1: References List


**Part 2: Article Information.**

**Article 1:** Enjoying life in the face of death: East–West differences in responses to mortality salience.

- **Research Question:** The researchers sought to determine if culture influenced how an individual responded to thoughts of death. The hypothesis is that East Asians respond more positively to life at the thought of death, striving to enjoy their daily lives more in the face of their own mortality due to their holistic view of life and death as linked things, rather than separate entities to be loved or feared. They propose that the response is cultural in nature and is a by-product of culture-specific epistemologies.

- **Method:** The researchers performed five studies to observe the individual aspects of culture’s effect upon the perception of death and the subsequent effects on thoughts of life. In the first study, the participants consisted of sixty-three individuals, thirty-four European Americans, and twenty-nine East Asians. The participants were randomly placed into one of two groups (the experimental or the control group) and asked to write down their thoughts regarding death or dental pain. After that, they were given a PANAS test to assess their current mood. Then, they were given a series of words with two letters missing from each and could result in neutral or death-related words. After they completed the exercise, they were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, debriefed, and thanked.
The second study included fifty-five participants, consisting of twenty-nine European Americans, and twenty-six East Asians. The participants were divided into two groups (experiment and control). The experiment group was asked to write about what came to mind when thinking about their own death; the control group was asked to write about what came to mind when thinking of dental pain. After that, they were given a 20-item test to assess their current mood. As the second part of the study, the participants were given a set of six tasks to choose from and then rate the appeal of each activity from 1 (not at all appealing) to 7 (very appealing). Three activities included actions with immortality-based themes, while the other three activities were simple day-to-day experiences that involved enjoying life. After all six activities had been rated, the participants filled out a demographic questionnaire and debriefed.

In the third study, the participants consisted of twenty-eight European Americans and thirty East Asians. Each participant was given the same essay prompts from the earlier study (experimental group received the question about death; the control received the question about dental pain). Afterwards, they were given a set of six humorous comics to read and then rate on a scale of 1 (not funny at all) to 10 (very funny). Once they completed the ratings, they filled out a demographics questionnaire.

In the fourth study, the participants consisted of thirty-two European Americans and twenty-eight East Asians. Before the experiment began, the participants were given a test designed to evaluate an individual’s belief in causality and the interconnectedness of the universe. Upon arriving at the lab, the participants were given the same essay prompts as before, then given a delay test. After that, the participants were asked to write down the funniest joke they know, and finally debriefed. Two coders unaware of the culture were used to rate the humor of each joke on a scale of 1 (not funny at all) to 5 (very funny).
In the fifth and final study, the participants consisted of seventy-one European Americans and thirty-five East Asians. The participants were randomly given an article to read that promoted a linear theme, or a holistic theme. After they read the article, the participants were asked to write a couple paragraphs supporting the article they had read using their own experiences. After this, they were given the task from the second study involving enjoyment of either immortality or daily life themed activities and asked to rate their interest in said activities.

- **Discussion:** Across all five studies, the researchers observed a consistent trend among East Asians feeling a greater enjoyment in life activities after being reminded of their own mortality; conversely, the European Americans had reduced interest in life activities when faced with mortality, but rather, leaned towards activities that promoted either a literal or symbolic concept of immortality. Although groups showed more interest in daily activities after being primed with holism before being exposed to the concept of mortality. The research suggests that there is a link between cultures with holistic beliefs and enjoying life when faced with death, as opposed to cultures with linear beliefs, that often expressed less interest in life activities after being primed with mortality.

- **Importance:** This study shows a link between cultural perceptions on death and how it changes the way an individual reacts in life. A culture with a holistic belief may hold a stronger belief in the interconnectivity of all things and thus value life more when reminded of their own mortality, whereas a culture with a linear belief system may value activities that promote the concept of legacy or immortality, enjoying mundane life activities less when faced with their own mortality.

**Article 2:** Spirituality and religion in experiences of Italian American daughters grieving their fathers.
• **Research Question:** The researchers’ goal was to examine the relationship between Italian American women and their fathers, and then how those women grieved their father’s death and whether religious beliefs/spirituality were or were not part of the process. There was no pre-established hypothesis, and the researchers conducted the study simply to observe how a select group of people handle grief through the lens of their specific culture.

• **Method:** The participants consisted of 51 Italian American women ranging in age from 33 to 86 years of age. The participants were self-selected by responding to listserv or poster calls for research participants. The participants were from a variety of occupational and educational backgrounds but were asked to opt out if they had been abandoned or abused by their fathers. The researchers conducted interviews with the participants through personal interviews, each being between one and two hours long. The participants were asked a series of general open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share stories, memories, experiences, and pictures of their fathers if they so desired. Other questions focused on the experience of father’s death, and how, if at all, the participant’s belief systems helped with the grieving process. The interviews were conducted flexibly, allowing the participants to share their experiences without being led, and not all of the questions were asked to each participant. The processing of the data was done in three steps, each one narrowing down references and quotes relating to spirituality or religion, and then the various experiences were grouped together and examined to establish common themes throughout the women’s experiences.

• **Discussion:** The researchers found a connection between the importance of religion/spirituality throughout the women, some of which was related to their fathers,
some was not. Although there was a range in the belief systems claimed by the women (either traditional or nontraditional), it appeared to play an important part in how they dealt with the death of their father’s, whether the father had been religious or not. Beliefs in an afterlife were frequent, but inconsistent in their form. Some were traditional, some were nontraditional, and some were simply personal beliefs that were not attached to a specific belief system.

- **Importance**: This study reflects the personal belief systems of a small, select group of individuals and how their own cultural beliefs shape the way they deal with death and grieving. It shows the importance of religion, traditional or non-traditional, in the grieving process, and the rituals associated with death that allow the individuals to grieve. It explains the value of unique ways of dealing with the death of a loved one, such as perceived connections with the deceased through dreams and omens, or a maintained connection through physical manifestations, such as a shrine or continued memory and conversation about the deceased.

*Article 3: Rituals alleviate grieving for loved ones, lovers, and lotteries.*

- **Research Question**: The researcher’s hoped to understand if rituals psychologically alleviate the sense of loss by re-establishing a sense of control within an individual who has suffered loss. The hypothesis is that by engaging in rituals, an individual is able to cope with the perceived lack of control created by the loss by re-establishing a sense of control.

- **Method**: Three separate experiments were performed to establish three tiers of thought associated with the hypothesis. Experiment 1 sought to establish the influence of rituals on perceived control and grief. The participants consisted of two hundred forty-seven
individuals, and this study was conducted via written survey. The participants were randomly given one of four questions that encompassed two types of loss (end of a relationship vs death) and two conditions (ritual or no ritual after the loss). Those given one of the ritual conditions were further asked to explain the ritual they performed to cope with the loss. They were asked four questions afterwards that provided a general perception of how in-control an individual felt after the loss. Lastly, they were asked another series of questions that pertained to their feelings about the person they had lost.

The second experiment was performed in a laboratory and sought to determine if assigning new rituals to a person could help reduce grief after a loss, and to see if rituals benefit people who do not have a belief in rituals or use them in situations of loss. Participants included one hundred nine individuals, from a pool of subjects managed by a private university in the United States. The participants were paid a $15 show-up fee, and told they had the opportunity to win $200 more. An online survey was conducted 3 days before the in-lab portion, and the participants were given a series of demographic questions (age, sex, race, etc), filler questions (“Which description suits you?” Athletic, intelligent, outgoing, etc), and a few questions measuring the frequency in which the participants used rituals in their daily lives. The lab portions consisted of 9-15 participants being told that one of them would randomly be selected to win $200 and allowed to leave the session early. They were then asked to write a short essay about why they cared about winning the money. After one of the participants was randomly chosen and given the money, the remaining participants were separated into cubicles and given one of two series of instructions to follow: one group given a ritual to perform (drawing out their feelings and tearing it up), while the other group was given a filler task for the allotted time.
They were then given a five-question assessment about how they felt after performing the actions prescribed to them.

The third experiment sought to determine whether the perception of a ritual as a ritual was important, or if merely performing the actions of a ritual with no association attached would suffice in relieving grief. The set-up of the experiment was the same as the second (minus the pre-lab survey), and the participants consisted of one hundred seventy-two individuals. After the money was given to the winner, the remaining participants were randomly assigned one of four possible conditions: information plus action/ritual; information plus action/sitting in silence; information only/ritual; and information only/sitting in silence.

**Discussion:** Between the three experiments, the researchers concluded that according to the collective results of the three experiments, that engaging in rituals helps mitigate grief by returning the feelings of control that a loss (whether life-changing or mundane) creates. The results also showed that the rituals are of a purposeful nature, created to achieve a desired outcome in the face of an undesired experience.

**Importance:** The research shows that rituals are a purposeful behavior that create a sense of control in an individual suffering from a loss, and that by engaging in these rituals an individual can cope with the loss better than if they had not engaged in rituals. Although the rituals described were not cultural in nature, it can be used to reflect on the importance of rituals within cultures for various milestones in life, such as death.
## Originality Report

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Comment 1

Kübler-Ross has been criticized for assuming that everyone goes through these stages in the same way. Current research suggests that the progress is inconsistent, unpredictable, and may not be universal.

Text Comment. Reference entries should be double-spaced. Otherwise, good job!

Comment 2

was

Text Comment. were

Missing ","

Missing comma:
Though it may not always be grammatically necessary, a comma can often help to prevent a misreading. When a sentence opens with an introductory element (a phrase, clause or word that is logically related to another phrase or clause in the same sentence), it is a great help to your reader to place a comma after that introductory element. Such phrases will often begin with words like "because," "while" or "although," as in the following example: "While everyone was fighting, the bear wandered away." As you can see, without the comma, the sentence would be
confusing.

Text Comment. observe how

Text Comment. led

Text Comment. of

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Text Comment. 247

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