

What will death look like in 2050? Perspectives from Dying2Learn 2017

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Background

The Dying2Learn course has run successfully for three years (2016 -2018), with a total of 4,718 people joining the 5 week course. The Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) considers how society engages with death through language, rituals, media, and art, the role of medicine in death, and the implications of the digital world for dying.

For the 2017 course, the investigators created "death futures" as a reflection activity. In the *Future of Death Activity*, MOOC participants were asked to imagine it was the year 2050, and review nine potential scenarios relating to the future of death in Australia.

Aim of the Activity

To explore participant attitudes to emerging issues in contemporary death and dying.

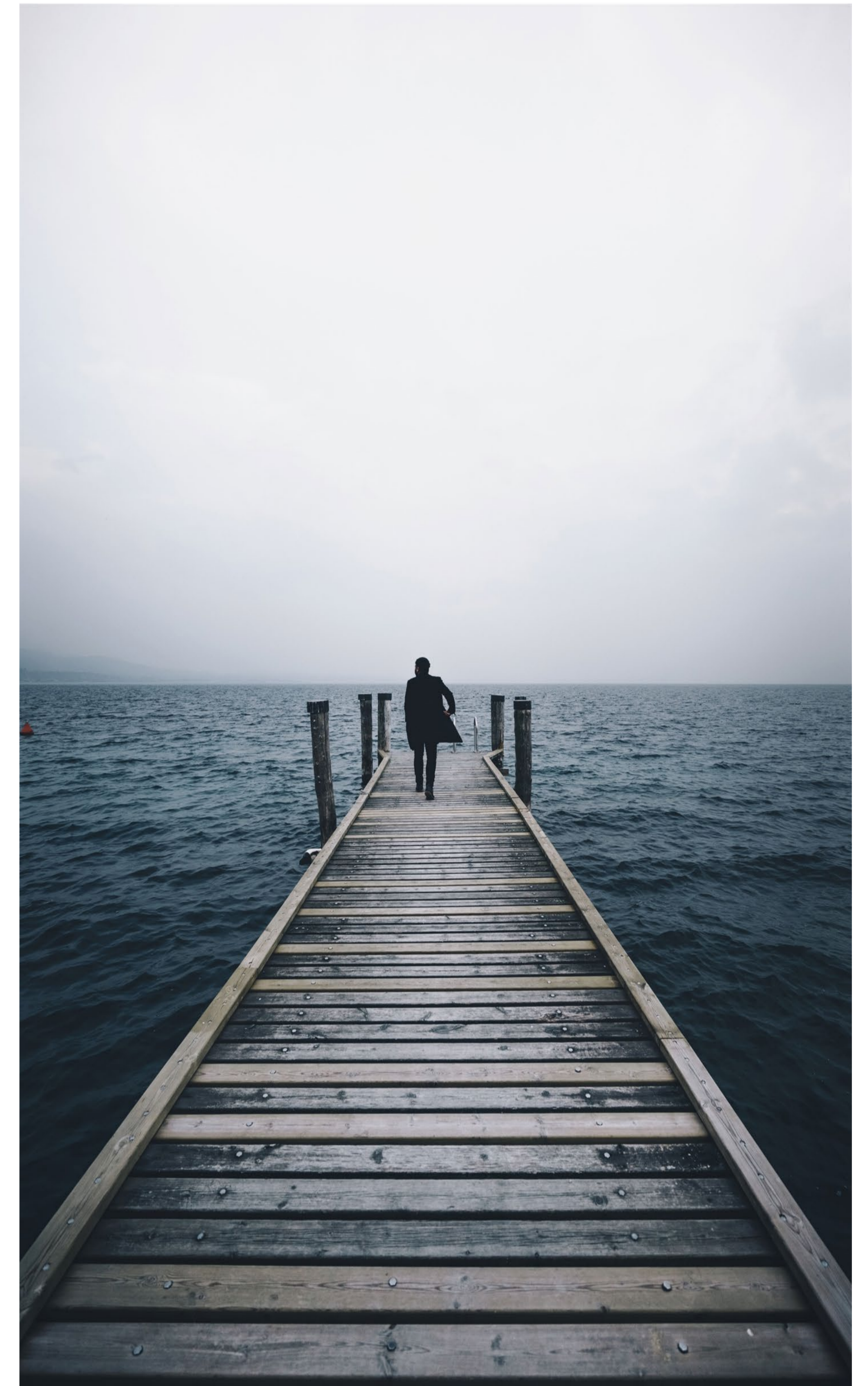
Ethics approval was received for the research study and for the use of de-identified educational content (Flinders University HREC No: 7247).

Findings

405 participants completed the Future of Death Activity. The participants were predominately female (92.6%). The mean age of participants was 49.63 years (SD = 11.90) and ranged from 19 to 81 years. Participants also predominately self-identified as health professionals (76%), and 66.7% held a university qualification.

The most likely future chosen by around 32% of participants was voluntary euthanasia. It was also seen as the least likely future by the smallest proportion of respondents. A compulsory checkout date was selected as the least likely future with nearly 40% of respondents rejecting it as a likely future.

The comments demonstrated the wide range of views, opinions and emotions experienced when thinking about the future of death. Respondents were concerned with considerations around economics and financing, equity and social justice, and retaining "humanness".



By the Year 2050 9 Future Scenarios

Future 1 – Extending Life with Spare Parts and Gene Repair

Future 2 – Compulsory Check-Out Date

Future 3 – Death as a Sacred Peak Experience

Future 4 – Voluntary Euthanasia

Future 5 – Social Death Broadcasts

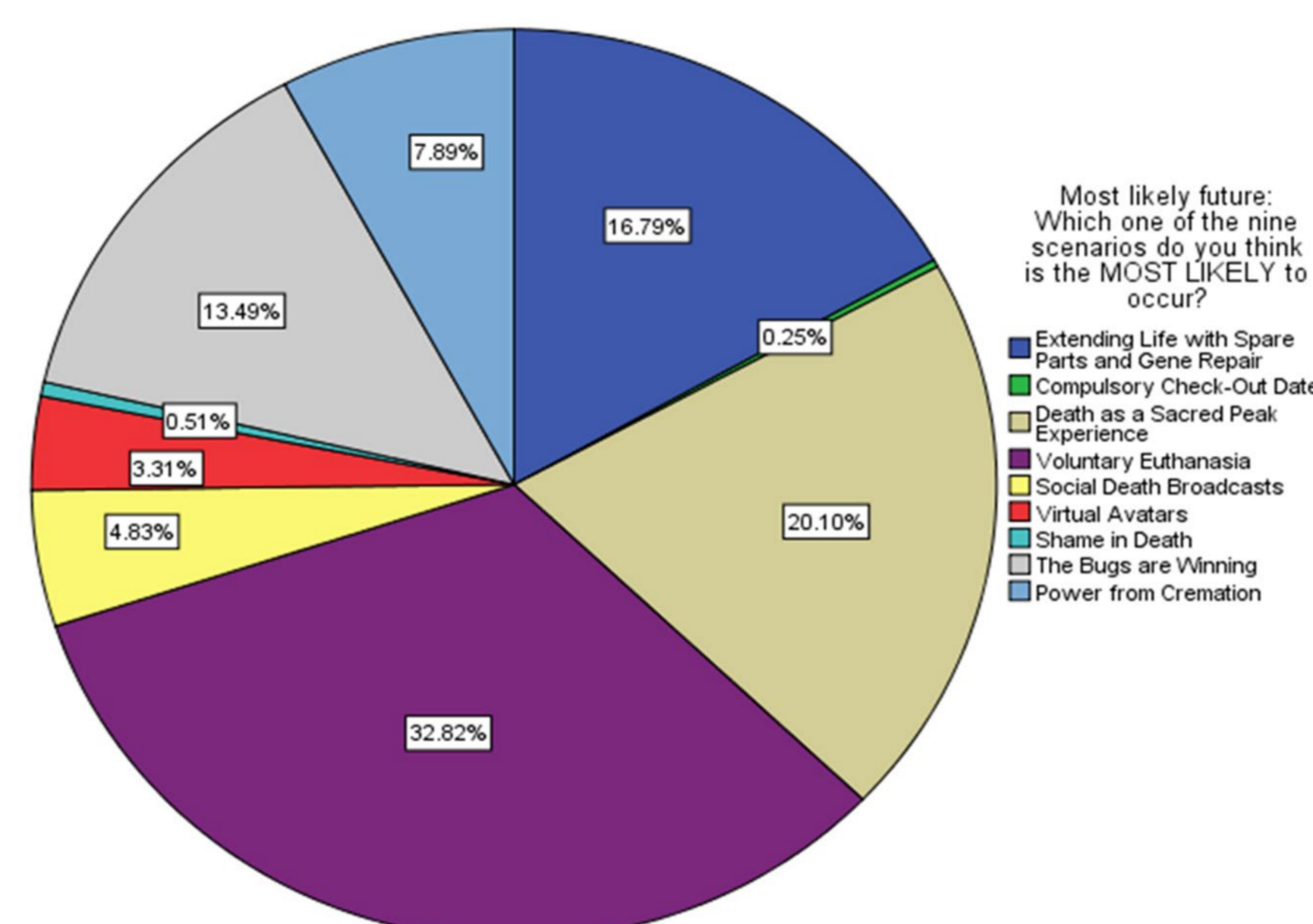
Future 6 – Virtual Avatars

Future 7 – Shame in Death

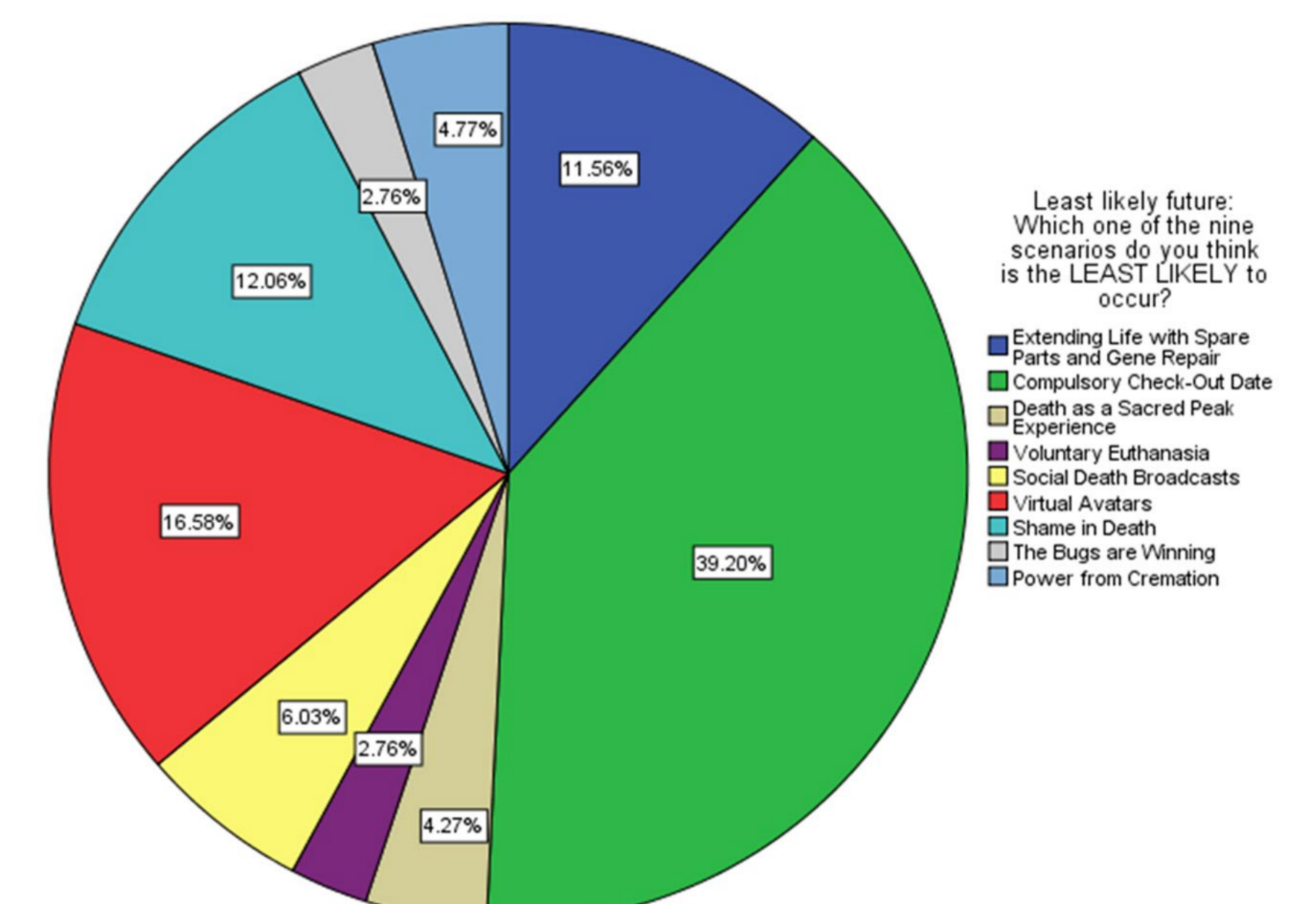
Future 8 – The Bugs are Winning

Future 9 – Power from Cremation

Which 'Future of Death' is the MOST LIKELY to occur?



Which 'Future of Death' is the LEAST LIKELY to occur?



Dying2Learn
MOOC ON
DEATH AND DYING

We are all going to die...
so why don't we talk about it?

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Conclusion

Participants have shown that there are different perspectives on what the future of death could look like in Australia. It also challenged participants to think about the impact on individuals and the whole society.

Publications

Tieman, J.J et al (2018). The contribution of a MOOC to community discussions around death and dying. *BMC Palliat Care*, 17(1):31

Miller-Lewis, L.R et al (2019). Correlates of perceived death competence: What role does meaning-in-life and quality-of-life play? *Palliat Support Care*. 2019 Jan 22:1-11

Sanderson C et al (2019) "I want to die in my sleep"-how people think about death, choice, and control: findings from a Massive Open Online Course. *Ann Palliat Med*. 2019 Mar 28. pii: apm.2019.03.07.