This research was stimulated by a report by Case & Deaton (2015) on declining life-expectancy among white non hispanic Americans over the past decade. “Although all education groups saw increases in mortality from suicide and poisonings, an overall increase in external cause mortality, those with less education saw the most marked increases.(2015, pp. 15078). No other developed nation has shown a similar phenomenon. An excess of nearly 100,000 deaths took place between 1999 and 2013. Many will be familiar with the impact of the opioid crisis in the United States, but the phenomenon is more widespread and predates the current surge in deaths. Our focal point is the cohort of individuals referred to as Generation X. In fact, some have suggested that we rename Generation X as Generation Despair. We found distinctive patterns of self-perceptions of development in happiness, the impact of stress, relationship quality, and satisfaction with well-being. These clusters can be thought of as dramatic arcs and I look forward to help from my humanist colleagues in understanding their history. These patterns were found to predict a number of characteristics related to stress and well-being including a lifetime history of drug abuse and recent frequency.

Joseph Fitzgerald is Professor of Psychology. He has been at Wayne State since 1979. Dr. Fitzgerald served as Associate Dean of the Graduate School from 1991-1996. He has published in the area of autobiographical memory since 1979, working with both normal and memory impaired individuals. His work on the reminiscence bump and the self-narrative has been frequently cited and continues to influence researchers in the area.