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PRE-DEATH PREPARATION AMONG YOUNG MARRIED COUPLES:
A STUDY OF STUDENTS AND NON-STUDENTS IN MISSOULA, MONTANA

By

Larry Jay Sullivan

B.A., University of Montana, 1971

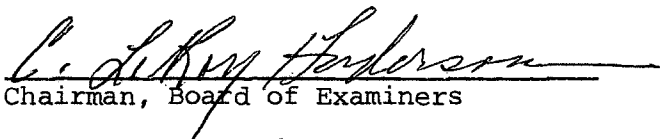
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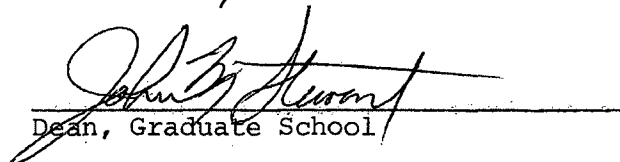
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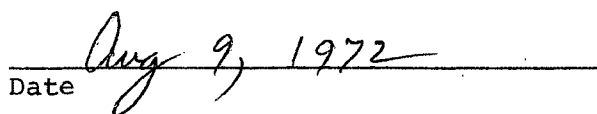
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1972

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this research is to fill a void which presently exists in sociological theory concerning the phenomenon of death--specifically, the normative anticipatory socialization found among young married couples regarding their involvement in pre-death preparation. The concept of "normative anticipatory socialization" is utilized throughout this study to represent the modal characteristics inherent in the interaction of young married couples in regard to their preparations for future events. The phrase "pre-death preparation" is utilized to represent those traits inherent in preparing for death prior to its actual occurrence. The primary endeavor of this study has been to formulate the modal characteristics involved in this type of preparation, plus the factors operating counter to pre-death preparation. Included in this "exploratory" research are the modes of pre-death preparation of husbands and wives in regard to their own ability as members of a nuclear family unit to comprehend, accept, and prepare for the death of themselves and/or each other.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Although the phenomenon of death has existed throughout history, it has only recently become a topic of scientific study in the field of sociology. One of the first sociologists to participate in the study of

death was Summer (1906) during his observation of primitive tribes and their taboos which were concerned with death. Furthering this study of death and its taboos have been the writings of Margaret Mead (1928) who made comparisons between the Samoan and American societies pertaining to the nature of their taboos concerning death. Following the writings of Margaret Mead, the field of sociology and the other social sciences were only sporadically involved with the phenomenon of death until the early 1950's. In 1950 the classic study of suicide by Durkheim gave new emphasis to a phenomenon which had been virtually neglected in the past. The study by Durkheim was first written in French in 1897 and then in English in 1930. The first edition of this classic work on suicide had a great impact on the field of sociology in France, which was renewed with the English version. Although the study of suicide suddenly came of age in sociology, the concept of death as a sociological phenomenon in and of itself was continually neglected. In the fields of psychology and sociology, most of the texts in the 1950's either neglected the topic of death completely, or included only terse comments about it.

In the early 1960's, death became a popular topic of research due mainly to the promotion of this topic over television and the book, The American Way of Death (Mitford, 1963), which stimulated the interests of both sociologists and laymen. Presently, most sociologists believe that an understanding of the processes prior to the termination of an individual in a social system is within the realm of sociology. Accepted within the discipline to date and the subject of much research have been the phenomena of pre-death (the anticipation of dying) and post-death behavior. The first consists of studying the individual's

orientation to his own death, and the second, the involvement of others (family, community, friends, funeral directors, and so on). Other topics having undergone extensive study are the contextual awareness of death in children, the terminally ill, and the aged.¹

A review of the sociological literature in each of the above-mentioned areas obviated the present gap in research and theory concerning preparation for death. It was essentially due to the writings of Fulton² that this author began to research and question this specific area of social preparedness. Fulton proposes that there is considerable support for the abstract idea that individuals should arrange for and finance their funerals in advance of death. He does conclude that there is, however, a difference between the acceptance of an abstract idea and its actual implementation. Feifel and Heller, whose writings have been especially enlightening in the area of pre-death preparation and in the formulation of this author's own ideas, have stated that even before its actual arrival, death is an absent presence.³ It stands to reason, therefore, that each social group which has existed over a period of time in any society must, in some normative form of adaptation, prepare for and confront the phenomenon of death prior to

¹Some general sources on literary treatments of death and the contextual awareness of death within these age groups are--Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, Awareness of Dying (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965), Herman Feifel, The Meaning of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1959), and Robert Fulton, Death and Identity (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1965).

²Robert L. Fulton, "Attitudes Toward Death - A Discussion," Journal of Gerontology, XVI, 1961a, pp. 63-65.

³Herman Feifel and Joseph Heller, "Normalcy, Illness and Death," Proceedings, Third World Congress of Psychiatry, II, University of Toronto Press, McGill University Press, pp. 1252-1256.

its occurrence. According to Vernon, reactions to various aspects of death vary with other social conditions. That is, a child's reaction may be quite different from the reaction of an aged person.⁴ Vernon has studied young and old age groups but not the middle-age range.

One of the most talked-about attributes of man has been his ability to conceptualize both the future and his eventual demise, or, as Feifel has stated, "In human beings, present behavior is dependent not only on the past but even more potently, perhaps, by orientation towards 'future events'."⁵ It is, therefore, the purpose of this research to fill the present theoretical and descriptive void between youth and the aged by studying young married couples and their forms of anticipatory socialization in the conceptualization and preparation for death.

The author's initial interest in the topic of death evolved from a previous study of funeral practices, which was conducted in northeastern Montana. During the course of that study it became apparent that preparation for death among young married couples is a major social process which in the past has been neglected in toto by sociologists. It is true, however, that in certain social settings there are forms of preparing for death, such as in total institutions like the armed forces, where men are taught to die an honorable death for their country. There have also been recent studies within hospitals in regard to death and the awareness of death in different age groups.⁶

⁴Glenn M. Vernon, Sociology of Death: An Analysis of Death Related Behavior (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1970), p. 8.

⁵Herman Feifel, Editor, The Meaning of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959), p. xii.

⁶David Sundow, Passing On: The Social Organization of Dying (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

In the past, both social and psychological researchers have dealt with various aspects of the phenomenon of death. However, there have been no studies involving the preparation of death among young married couples. Throughout this research, the author has utilized the qualitative methods of Glaser and Strauss in order to generate new knowledge, rather than verify any prior knowledge in this area of familial anticipatory socialization toward death. By studying the contents of pre-death preparation of young married couples, it is believed that new empirically grounded data have emerged which may be beneficial for understanding the normative procedures inherent in confronting death. From this data, scientists and laymen alike may better understand the social practices which presently exist in this restricted, and seemingly tabooed, area of study.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

Gathering the Data

Data were obtained regarding respondents' sex, age, religion, socioeconomic status, provisions for child care (if both parents should die simultaneously), attitudes toward "public" and "private" ways of dying, financial preparation, arrangements for disposal of the deceased, and ability or failure to realistically confront the thought of death. Information regarding other forms of preparation for death were uncovered during the course of interviewing. These include various influences which affect the thinking of the informants, such as their familial upbringing prior to marriage, their present residence, and their lack of knowledge regarding the attainment of formal and legal assistance in

order to prepare for their demise. These other insights concerning the preparation for the final social role, or "rites de passage", have been woven into this study in order to mold this information into a comprehensible account of all the inherent social processes involved. It is hoped that this study has achieved that plateau which Herbert Blumer designates as the primary task of any scientific study--to lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one proposes to study.⁷

All data during the interviewing stage of this study were obtained through a series of tape-recorded interviews with young married informants living in Missoula, Montana. The primary sample for this research consisted of young married couples with at least one child, living in the married student housing at the University of Montana. The terminology, "young married couples", has been specifically utilized to denote married persons in an age group ranging from 20 to 40 years of age. In addition to the primary sample of young married students, a sample consisting of eight non-students of the same age group was also interviewed. A comparison of this sample with the primary sample was made to discover if there were important differences in the pre-death preparation of the two groups. It was previously speculated that if there were any differences they would appear as forms of postponement of pre-death preparations which would be attributable to the "temporary" nature of the married students when compared to the more "permanent" nature of the young married non-students who are gainfully employed. The results of this comparison are covered in detail in Chapter 3.

⁷Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 39.

During the course of the interviewing, both the husband and the wife were present in each instance, necessitating the use of the tape-recorder. Also utilized were both a nonschedule standardized interview and a nonstandardized form of interview. The differences between the two forms of interviewing are, according to Denzin, that the nonschedule standardized interview requires the interviewer to obtain specific information from each informant, but simultaneously allows for both the phrasing of the questions and their order to be manipulated throughout the interview to fit the personality of the informants. The nonstandardized interview contains no specific order of prespecified questions, thereby allowing for an informal type of interview which takes on the character of an informal and friendly conversation.⁸ By utilizing these two methods of questioning, the author of this study felt that the tensions attached to being interviewed were reduced to a minimum for the informants involved in this study. The two forms of interviewing were also incorporated to allow for freedom of approach while simultaneously maintaining a certain degree of standardization. By utilizing this method, not only were responses to prespecified questions obtainable, but this process also allowed for incorporation of new avenues of interest and importance which may otherwise have been unforeseen. All questions utilized during the interviewing stage of the study were derived from dominant themes which appeared to be lacking in contemporary sociological literature and topics about which the informants during the pretest stage of this study had mentioned which needed further clarification.

⁸Norman K. Denzin, The Research Act (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 123-126.

Classifying the Data

While in the process of interviewing, the researcher gradually developed a classification scheme from the respondents' own theories and self-concepts. The informants, whether professional or amateur, perform two essential functions--description and evaluation. Upon the completion of interviewing, all the data were transcribed and carefully studied for all classificatory schemes which had developed. It is through such "theoretical sampling" that one is able to discern categories and their properties which help illustrate the relationships existing in the data that may evolve into theory. Hypotheses must be derived from the data obtained and then illustrated by characteristic examples throughout the study. This does not mean that all findings will generate new theories or hypotheses, it is the responsibility of the researcher to maintain an objective outlook in regard to his data and extract not all information but only that which has produced relevant and significant categories within his study. It is from the interviews with both student and non-student young married couples living in Missoula that the categories in this report have been generated. Therefore, it is important to retain the perspective that while the following study is representative of the informants questioned in the two samples, it is not necessarily representative of all young married couples everywhere.

Sampling Procedures

It had been arbitrarily decided to interview 25 to 30 married couples, however, due to the rate and degree of saturation obtained, the interviewing was terminated at 19. In all, there were 23 interviews, but the first five were discarded due to several basic mistakes made

during the interviews which resulted in the lack of complete information from the informants. Primarily, this was due to the author's biasing the informants during the interview, and because of the necessity to delete several questions and interject more relevant ones. During the pre-test stage of this research, three young married couples were interviewed. From these interviews, it was concluded that a combination of the two previously mentioned forms of interviewing provided the most efficient system for gathering the data desired for a study of this nature.

In research of this type, the researcher stops sampling when he has obtained what he considers to be theoretical saturation. Saturation occurs when no new properties emerge from the subsequent data. Instead, similar reoccurring responses are all that emerge regardless of how many additional interviews are carried out. In this study, given the nature of the research, when no new properties appeared it was believed that saturation had been reached. Saturation was obtained in this manner after having interviewed 19 young married couples, however, in order to initiate a check for validation, an additional four interviews were conducted by two other interviewers. This was not only utilized as a check for validation of saturation, but also to see if any new categories would emerge with different interviewers--they did not. It is the contention of Glaser and Strauss that within data there are grounded theories which will not only be of use to the sociologists and laymen, but will also be capable of replication with like results.⁹ It is because

⁹Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Strategies for Qualitative Research (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), p. 51.

of this possibility of replication that Glaser and Strauss deem it imperative that the researcher keep a constant vigilance on the purpose of his study.

Selecting the Informants

In order to choose young married couples to interview for this study, several methods were utilized. It was first decided to question families living in the two 3-story complexes of University housing. One family was arbitrarily chosen in each wing of the two complexes by knocking on their door and asking if they would permit the author to interview them at a certain time and date. The author was especially careful not to interview couples with whom he was familiar so as not to influence the answers received. Surprisingly, not one family refused to be interviewed or in any way attempted to make the interview difficult.

Because the author had very few contacts with non-students in this age group, the task of selecting non-student informants proved to be more difficult. The problem was solved by having four people who are friends of the author write the names of ten non-student families in this age group on slips of paper and then placing them in a box and picking them out one at a time. In order to reduce interviewer bias, the author rotated his interviews between the students and non-students, hoping that this method would also reveal any differences between the two samples should such differences appear. The interviews which were obtained by the two other interviewers were selected randomly from a different University housing complex to preclude the possibility of duplicating interviews.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE RESEARCH

As in all forms of research, the sociologist confronts problems which are both anticipated and not anticipated. In this respect this study is not unlike others. Two major and one minor problem became evident during this research. Primarily, the author was confronted with the problem of a time schedule for interviews. Because all of the informants were living in the married student housing, at least one adult member of the family was attending the University and typically the other member was employed during the day. Therefore, the number of daytime interviews was extremely limited. Secondly, the same problem which Vernon relates in his study of death was experienced during this research. Investigators in this area of sociology report suspicion being directed toward them. A remark frequently encountered is, "What a morbid topic of research,"¹⁰ followed by a period of explanation by the investigator as to why the involvement in such a tabooed topic. This, in effect, placed a stigma on the interviewer which is usually conceived of as being placed on the informant during an interview. The problem of limited interview hours during the week was remedied by interviewing on weekends and limiting the evening interviews to just one per day. The second problem is one which exists regardless of how the title of the study is worded, and persisted throughout the entire study. The minor problem which was previously mentioned was one of insecurity by the interviewer which caused him to recruit two other interviewers and compare his results with theirs. In this manner, interviewer bias was hopefully eliminated.

¹⁰Vernon, Sociology of Death, p. 14.

Other minor problems consisted of informants forgetting to be present for a scheduled interview and a mechanical malfunction of the tape recorder which caused the loss of one complete interview and the postponement of four others while the tape recorder was being repaired. While it is usually conceived of by most persons that all information during an interview comes through language, Cameron holds the opinion that:

Most of the information in an interview comes through language, it might seem at the outset that all of it does, but if this is true, the interviewer is incompetent. In the words of the old jazz record, "It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it!" The important thing for the observer is to become aware of what various behavior might mean and then try to determine what it does mean.¹¹

After conducting this study, the author concurs with the above statement.

The following pages contain three tables which were constructed from the study in regard to data concerning the informants and their responses.

¹¹William B. Cameron, Informal Sociology (New York: Random House Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 26-27.

Table 1
AGES OF THE INFORMANTS

Ages	Male	Female	Total
20-21	0	2	2
22-23	4	5	9
24-25	2	1	3
26-27	3	5	8
28-29	5	2	7
30-31	2	1	3
32-33	1	2	3
34-35	1	1	2
36-37	1	0	1
38-40	0	0	0
TOTAL	19	19	38

Source: Interview Data--1972

Table 2
RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

Religion	Professed Believers
Agnostic	1
Baptist	1
Catholic	4
Congregationalist	1
Episcopalian	1
Jehovah Witness	1
Lutheran	6
Mormon	2
Protestant	2
Unitarian	1
No Preference	18
TOTAL	38

Source: Interview Data--1972

Table 3

ATTITUDES TOWARDS
"PUBLIC" AND "PRIVATE" WAYS OF DEATH

Attitudes	Men	Women	Total
Don't Care	30%	10%	40%
Public	40%	30%	70%
Private	30%	60%	90%

TOTAL	100%	100%	200%
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Source: Interview Data--1972

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF DEATH

In carrying out this study of the conceptualizations of young married couples concerning the physical aspect of death, the social scientist was, in fact, opening the previously closed and personally intimate phenomenon of death. By studying the reactions and feelings of each of the informants in regard to the death of themselves, spouse, loved ones, friends, and people of the same age group, one is able to visualize the emotions and reluctance of the informants during the expression of their individual feelings. Through the process of questioning the informants, not only were they required to consider their eventual demise, but also, they began to question each other. In most instances, it was the first time that the young married couples had actually seriously conversed on the topic of death.

INFORMANTS' VIEW OF DEATH

After several preliminary questions concerning age, amount of education, and self-perceived socio-economic status, the young married couples were confronted with the question, "How do you conceptualize death?" Basically, the responses tended to fall into a similar vein, such as, "Well, it's the end of life; what can you say, that's it. It's just over." Several of the informants did dwell upon the biological aspect of death with responses such as, "It just means biological processes end, that's all."

CONCEPTUALIZING DEATH ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS

There were several responses which conveyed much thought on the part of the individual and his concern over the aspect of his own death.

I think it's just an end to existence as we know it, and I can't really speculate any further than that. I don't have any beatific visions of what will happen after my passing and I think that this is pretty much it, right here, and after this existence is over with, unless there's a great soul pool in the sky or something where I'll come back as a ladybug or something, that's probably about it.

Several of the informants indicated that they found the question of individual death an extremely difficult question to answer, while others said that their minds changed every time they thought about it. According to them, their concept of living and dying differed immensely depending upon the mood they were in. Only once during the course of interviewing young married couples did the aspect of religion enter in any way into the conversation. A young Mormon wife professed, "I believe that we're here on earth for a learning period, and beyond that it's really a short time, really. And after we die I think that there are many more rewarding experiences coming to us."

Another young wife related that she felt just the opposite. For her, religion played no role in the formulation of her belief in regard to a type of after life. She stated that death was, ". . . probably termination of the good life, because I don't believe in heaven or hell--I think that's here. Well, hell is here, but I think heaven is here too."

During the course of this study, it was not uncommon to confront young married wives who refused to think of the phenomenon of death, but after hearing their husband's answers, they, too, began to consider the fact and eventually answered all the questions. There was only one male informant who refused to consider the question of his own demise in any

way. His reluctance to do so was rationalized in the following manner: ". . . 'cause I just can't conceptualize myself as dying. I don't live for death, anyway, so I just don't even think about dying. If I die, that's just the way it goes."

Through analyzing the responses of the informants, it became apparent that the average individual, even though married, was extremely uncomfortable when confronted with having to think of death, especially his own. The responses of this age group are unlike those of older, aged persons who have not found death a difficult topic of conversation. In this study, neither age, education, perceived socio-economic status, nor the status of student or non-student appeared to have any influence when conceptualizing their eventual demise. It is evident that, regardless of the social, economic, or educational makeup of the person, the idea of death is confronted with great difficulty. Much of the difficulty encountered in conversing on this topic can possibly be conceived of as inherent in our society, for it has only been recently that the topic of death has been extracted from the depths of myth and social taboos.

DEATH OF A MATE

In this study, the informants were in fact incapable of separating myth and fear from logic and common sense in regard to preparation for their eventual demise. It was, however, not just their conceptualizations nor their responses to death which caused the young married couples the greatest difficulty. Even more emotion-evoking was the conceptualization of the loss of their mate. As Warner has said, "Within death there is a kinship of kind, too; today's dead are yester-

day's living, and today's living are tomorrow's dead. Each is identified with the other's fate. No one escapes."¹²

For the informants, the aspect of confronting realistically the loss of a husband or wife evoked many emotions, including facial expressions of disapproval and, in most instances, extreme fidgeting of the hands and feet. Many expressed difficulty in thinking of the death of their mate because they themselves expressed feelings of being either immortal or at least wishing to be.

There's no doubt that I do think I'm immortal. We live in extremes, and I'm at one extreme right now. The other extreme is living in the total acceptance of death. That I'm going to die would be the other extreme, of course, and if I was to live that way, I don't think I'd get very much done. I'm a very aggressive person, and aggressive people have to be able to work tomorrow.

Others, rather than wish for immortality, chose the next best thing that they could think of; rather than wish for the impossible, they hoped to prolong their confrontation with death through living to an old age. "I feel like I'm much too young to even consider that for the fact that my child would have to be around watching me die wouldn't enter into my mind yet because I plan to live at least another hundred years. I just want to die of old age."

While many of the wives stated that they found it difficult to conceptualize the death of their mate, those that had considered it prior to being questioned related that this was primarily due to the occupation of the husband. Usually if the husband spent considerable periods of time during the course of the year driving on the highway,

¹²Lloyd W. Warner, The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans (London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 286.

the wife admitted to having had fears and apprehensive thought concerning his possible involvement in an accident of some type. In one instance, the wife of a college student employed part-time as a pilot expressed her previous fears as stemming from her husband's potentially dangerous employment. "I thought about being a widow because he's been a pilot and I worried about his flying a lot and a lot of things; I have a lot of time to dream up all kinds of things happening."

REACTIONS TO DEATH OF MATE

When questioned as to their expected emotional reactions when confronted with the aspect of the death of their spouse, the wives, as a rule, proved to be more emotional than their husbands. One wife responded that if it were between herself and her husband, and she could have her choice, she would rather be the one to die. Another young couple stated the following:

I've tried to imagine what my emotional state would be if Sandy should pass through some sort of untoward circumstances; if she should, like, be killed in a car wreck or something like that, and what I would do in trying to raise my family, or raise Kurt. And, I don't know, it's just not something you can think about very rationally, I don't think. It's purely emotional terms, you think that a void would exist in your life. There would definitely be a short term, excruciating sadness and sorrow, I'm sure, but it's very difficult for me to visualize what the long-term effects of the death of the mate would be like.

The previous statement, which emphasizes the emotional conflict which would arise along with the sadness, was followed by this statement from the informant's wife.

It's really hard for me to imagine any kind of life without Barry, and if we're discussing death in relation to anything, even a dog or anything, I immediately transfer all these feelings to how I would feel without Barry, so I try to avoid it, which is not very intelligent or very smart.

The previous statement by the husband was a common response among those husbands interviewed, as was his wife's when compared to the answers of other wives. Although none of the informants have ever had to face the loss of a mate, all found it to be an extremely difficult question to answer and it is believed that from their responses, the following finding by Geoffrey Gorer would undoubtedly be true.

". . . but for many men the emotional burden of loneliness seems extremely heavy. As men have found it uncomfortable to stay at home or come home, women don't find comfort in going out of their home."¹³

These attitudes found by Gorer do not explicitly relate the purely emotional reactions, as there are certain societal pressures and norms which, under different circumstances, regulate the activities and conduct of the people within that system.

Several of the male informants stated that, should they lose their mate, they would undoubtedly indulge in alcoholic beverages to an excess. Conversely, none of the women stated that they believed they would become dependent upon any type of alcohol or sedatives. This inclination found among males to indulge in alcohol is not uncommon when confronted with this type of "rites de passage," for, as Doughty has pointed out from his studies, "Drinking is associated with virtually all ceremonial events such as rites of passage, and it is essentially a male activity."¹⁴ However, the women did divulge that they believe they would react with

¹³Geoffrey Gorer, Death, Grief, and Mourning (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), p. 113.

¹⁴Paul L. Doughty, "The Social Uses of Alcohol Beverages in a Peruvian Community," Human Organization, Vol. 30, No. 2. (Summer, 1971), p. 189.

varied emotions which could be from a state of shock to a complete reversal of their normative behavior.

I don't know what I would do. I have thought about it, but I don't know what I would do. Maybe I would go out with every guy and do things that I have never done, but then again, I might not want to find anyone for a long, long time.

DEATH OF A CHILD

Following the questions pertaining to their conceptualizations of the death of themselves and each other, informants were questioned regarding their emotional and physical reactions to the loss of one of their children. Most families could not, or would not, even consider their individual responses to such a situation. While some felt that they would become totally irrational, others said that they conceived of themselves as extremely selfish and unable to consider such an event without becoming totally depressed. In one instance, a young wife related her individual emotions when her daughter had been in a hospital for surgery.

Our daughter had a very serious operation when she was three months old, and they had an exploratory surgery on her and the pediatrician said that she should be out by twenty after seven. She didn't come out at twenty after seven, she came out at twenty-two after seven, and that two minutes was too long for this mother--I just thought I lost her and that was all there was to it. Because I figured it took me so long to get a girl and then I was going to lose her. But to me, losing her meant that she was too pure for staying on this worldly earth.

It can be seen herein that, unlike the conceptualizations of the other wives, this mother felt that the loss of this child was not the end of everything, and her rationalizations were woven around her religious concepts of an afterlife and a world which is better than that in which she presently exists. This does not mean that she was without

any form of selfish fear toward her possible personal loss, only that by the utilization of her religious belief, she could justify such an event. She continued:

It took really about six weeks after that surgery for me to quit thinking about, you know, I'm going to lose her yet. And finally now I'm relaxed again to where I think, well, maybe she's going to be with us for awhile longer. But I didn't have any bad feeling other than my selfishness that I wanted to enjoy her as a person. But as far as dying, I didn't feel badly because I felt that when she died, she would be in another world which would be much nicer than this one.

PAST CONFRONTATIONS WITH DEATH

While following through in the same vein, the young couples were questioned as to whether or not they had been confronted with the death of a significant other within the last year and a half. By "significant other", it was primarily intended to mean a member of their immediate family. This category soon expanded to include individuals who were not members of their immediate family, such as close friends who were usually in the same age group as the couples themselves. Of the couples interviewed, 60 percent had lost a member of their family within the last eighteen months. Of this 60 percent, 10 percent had lost a father, 10 percent a sister, 10 percent an uncle, 20 percent a grandmother, and 10 percent a significant other who was within their age group. Of these informants who had lost a member of the family, only one implied that the loss had caused him to think about another's death, and its meaning for himself. Coupled with the meaning of death, the informant expressed the fear which he felt. "When my father died, it scared the hell out of me, you know, it really did. I was never so scared in my life . . ." This individual then proceeded to explain how he ration-

alized the death of his father, and by doing so he was, in effect, alleviating his own fears of death through the reliance in religion which he maintained.

As I understand in a way from various sources then, that I've read and talked to people about, that I kind of visualize that we're here for a trial period and we have work to do in another world as soon as this trial period is over. Now, as far as the actual time of death, as I understand it our spirit separates from our bodies and we stay in the immediate area until our bodies are disposed of or interred or whatever is going to happen. And then we go on, and I guess the only real feeling or proof that this is true is that the night I went into the funeral parlor to see my father and, like I said, I was extremely scared, my father and I were very, very close, and I got in there and as soon as I seen him I knew that that wasn't him, and yet I knew that he was in that room--it really was a weird feeling, I was no longer scared, I was no longer even sad.

While this individual was the only informant to use religion to explain the phenomenon of death and a personal loss, other informants utilized various means of explanation to obtain comfort for their losses. When the person who died was of an older age or had been ill for an extended period of time, the informant found it easier to understand and accept death. Only in one instance did a young couple acknowledge that the loss of an older person caused them to think seriously about death and to even consider their own eventual demise.

Well, I think that any time you experience death or read about the death of someone you know of in the paper, you have a tendency to think about your own ultimate passing . . . Subconsciously, too, I think shortly afterward, shortly after Barry's grandmother died, he immediately came rushing out in the living room and informed me that we had to have more insurance, so we'd better start sitting down and talking about it. So I think maybe Wynn's death and grandma's death had something to do with that.

In another instance, the young family had lost their grandmother only twenty-four hours prior to their interview. It was expected that this recency to the loss of one of their extended family would produce

explicit emotions of some type. However, this couple was considerably more concerned with the death of a close friend who had died last summer. When asked why they seemed more distraught over the death of a friend than that of a relative, they responded: "It had more impact because he's exactly the same age as I am and--it was also totally unexpected, whereas his grandmother had been ill for some time."

It became apparent from several other interviews that the propinquity of death in your peer group, or specific age group, was quite capable of affecting even more severely the emotions of young couples than the loss of someone whom they conceived of as having had a good life, or having lived out their life and died of old age. As Warner said,

The symbols of time (and of space and all other meanings) are not only signs of constructs and logical thinking, but are available and used by the non-logical feeling systems of a people and their culture. Moreover, they are subject to the needs and demands of a still deeper level of being and understanding. The symbols of non-logical or subjective time, on the other hand, are laden with affect. These non-logical feeling systems are not necessarily individual; more often they are social.¹⁵

Each of the young couples involved were asked if the death of this significant other had caused them to do anything in the manner of preparation for their own demise. Other than the one young couple who admitted to considering the purchase of more life insurance, the other families all replied that they in no way were stimulated toward any form of pre-death preparation.

PRESENT THREATS TO LIFE

When asked how they conceptualized their own death in regard to how they thought it would happen, the majority of the informants felt that

¹⁵Warner, op. cit., p. 224.

it would be due to some type of external factor such as an automobile accident. One young couple responded to the question in the following manner:

The biggest threat to us right now is probably an automobile accident. Yes, I think that that's the way we will probably go. That's how most young people go. The only way I can see us going is in an accident or if the world ends.

After hearing this response in over half of the interviews, the author began to think that everyone just commonly associated their death with an automobile. All of the young couples maintained that they were in good health and that an accident, usually by car, would be the most common type of death, such as in the reply of one husband:

In terms of my life, I think it would undoubtedly be by accident. I think the state of my health is good. Car accident is the most likely contingency; I certainly don't expect to be walking down the street some day and drop dead of a heart attack because I know that basically I'm in fairly good physical health.

However, by pursuing this topic during the course of each interview, it became apparent that although many of the informants foresaw their death in an automobile accident there were several explanations for this fear. Each family interviewed admitted that they owned an automobile, and as far as they were concerned, this was the most potentially dangerous mechanical device that they had in their possession. With this in mind, and also the fact that most people in this age category do seem to meet their untimely deaths in such a manner, it would only stand to reason that this would become the primary focusing point when considering death. The responses of several other husbands finally brought the entire picture into focus: "I never really thought about a car accident, but I've had some fairly close calls in the airplane." And, "Nobody in our family has ever had cancer, nobody's ever had heart

trouble, but in the past few years, I've seen a lot of young men go with it, and every time I feel an ache or pain, I think, God Almighty, there she is!"

Through these interviews it became evident that not all young couples do associate their deaths with the automobile even though there is considerable publicity on this type of mishap in the newspapers and other media. The primary source of consideration in regard to a youthful death tended to be dependent upon association, not only with a mechanical contrivance, but socially. Depending upon the circumstances surrounding the individuals in their everyday life, they had absorbed the most common form of death as the type which they would consider to be most likely to occur should they become involved. Each of these conceptualizations consisted of that threat in life which the informants considered the most potentially dangerous to themselves, such as automobiles, airplanes, or biological termination due to some disorder within their system. This common reaction may be viewed much in the same way as considering the laws of probability, the informants visualize a youthful death as determined by fate and chance.

SUMMARY

In summary, it is evident that the young married couples found the conceptualization of death extremely difficult regardless of age, education, and self-perceived socio-economic status. Of all the respondents, only one couple appeared to have been influenced to any degree by the factor of religion. While all of the informants had answers available (or at least gave an orthodox reply) concerning their conceptualization of death, they were no more at ease discussing the subject than those

individuals who claimed not to believe in heaven or hell or any specific type of hereafter. It was only with difficulty that each person was finally able to respond openly to the questions. While all of the couples did, in fact, answer the questions, it was apparent that, with the exception of the one family mentioned previously, they had never given the phenomenon of death any consideration. Through their rationalizations utilizing the factors of health and age, they had been capable of avoiding the subject until being interviewed. Their avoidance through lack of conversation may be seen as primarily due to the age-old idea that to talk about death is tempting fate and will bring the subject concerned closer to reality.

Most of the respondents found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualize either the loss of their spouse or their emotional reactions to the loss of their mate. While some thought that they themselves would become irrational, others felt that, due to their extreme selfishness, they would become totally depressed and despondent. The category concerning significant others revealed that, beyond the nuclear family, extreme loss is felt when a member of the same age group dies. This is, in part, due to the unexpectedness of the event, and also the shocking realization to those remaining that it is not only the aged, but also themselves who are constantly confronted with death. Although these families displayed unstable reactions toward the aspect of death and the loss of their relatives and friends, none of them had accepted the event as an individual threat, therefore, they had refrained from any form of preparing themselves and their families for their own demise.

When considering the individuals' conceptualizations of their own death, each informant reverted to a concept which is commonly utilized

in the field of sociology, "the definition of the situation." In each instance, the informants were defining the aspect of life which they considered most threatening to them at their stage in life.

Chapter 3

FACTORS AFFECTING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

In every family unit there are special events which occur and result in various reactions by the members of that unit. Depending upon the severity of each special event, a marriage may be dissolved between the members of a familial unit. While divorce is a commonly used method within our society, it is not the only method of dissolving marital relations. As Bohannan has stated, "Divorce is only one way to break up a marriage: everywhere, it would seem, more marriages are ended by death than divorce."¹⁶ When the aspect of death causes the dissolving of a marriage, in many instances one partner of that relationship remains. The remaining spouse/parent, beside being confronted with a personal loss and the tragedy customarily associated with it, must assume, for a period of time, the role of the other person in order to maintain homogeneity and perpetuate the functions of the remaining members of the family. In accomplishing this difficult task, the remaining partner is usually accepted and revered for taking on an additional social role.

While the members of each nuclear family purport to avoid thinking of the possibility of losing their mate, it is only plausible that they should, in some overt manner, participate in pre-death communication

¹⁶Paul Bohannan, Social Anthropology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 118.

and understanding. It seems reasonable that the nuclear unit should function in some manner to instill the concept of personal loss and death to their children. By counseling them in the various aspects of death--why people die, what happens when they die, and how the living should accept death--not only will all members more readily accept death without the omnipresence of fear and misunderstanding, they would also be capable of alleviating the socially attached stigma toward conversing in this tabooed area of human reality.

FAMILY UPBRINGING AND ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH

During the course of this research, the informants were questioned regarding the ways in which their familial upbringing influenced their present attitudes toward death. It had been suspected prior to interviewing that their responses would reveal their present attitudes and actions which would probably be congruent with those of their parents. While this did appear to be true, the manner in which the familial upbringing influenced them was indeed unique. While certain informants replied that their familial background had in no way influenced their present attitudes toward death, it appeared from the manner in which they answered that they had, in fact, been influenced by their parents, and that parental information in this area was lacking.

I know that when I lived at home with my family it was something that we just didn't talk about. I don't think that it was ever brought up, because if it was I think that we would have talked about it, but we just never did.

The above informant admitted to never having had conversed on the topic of death within her present domicile for the same reason--"It just never comes up." Her spouse, in attempting to justify his wife's response, added to her statement in the following manner. "From my

view of most middle-class Americans that I've met, you know, from the ten to twenty thousand range, they ahh, well death is something you never talk about."

Another informant expressed his views of the average familial influence on individual attitudes in our society thus: "I know it does, because some peoples celebrate the funeral and that idea does stem from their family." Perhaps in a certain sense this respondent is not totally incorrect; for it is the family which instills the death customs and attitudes within their children; the primary influence of funeral practices and the appropriate responses are undoubtedly regimented by the societal influences which direct the familial unit in its activities and conceptualizations. Nevertheless, as can be garnered from the following responses, while following societal customs and becoming emotionally involved at the loss of a relative, there was an ever present tendency of the parents to evade any discussion regarding this social phenomenon.

At my home we think of the funeral and how we can help the relatives and the arrangements, but we never think after the funeral what we would do if I died or you died; this is something that isn't discussed.

Through the responses of the informants, it became apparent that the influence of the familial upbringing upon the informants themselves ranged from the complete avoidance of the topic of death to the instilling of what may be called "a death fear" within the children. One individual responded that, "I think that perhaps it's the way I was raised. I was raised to be scared of death, I guess." While admitting to still being afraid of death, this informant related that she felt as though her parents had not fulfilled their roles as parents because they had failed to instruct her in the realistic aspects of death. The final

aspect of familial upbringing which appeared during this study would have to be classified as "total avoidance." This classification is best explained by the response of one interviewee where it becomes apparent that, through the total avoidance of the topic of death, the uninformed individual faces not only a conceptual void in that area, but may very easily become emotionally disturbed for a prolonged period of time.

There's been many, many deaths in my family. I've been very close to death many times, not myself personally, but I've lost a lot of people that were very close to me and I think it has changed my attitude. When I was younger, and I lost these people that were very close to me, I resented it and I actually was very bitter and hated for it. I can remember having dreams when I was ten years old of my father returning and then somebody's coming and stealing him again from me, you know, and I think now that I've grown older and I've lost people that were close to me, I've learned to accept it more. But then it was very hard, and I think the more people you lose, the more you learn to accept it.

In this response the informant gave one method of learning to cope with the thought of death, but there must be a better way of learning to understand death than losing many people who are close to you. For as Blumer has said, "The designations and interpretations through which people form and maintain their organized relations are always in degree a carry-over from their past."¹⁷

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN CONFRONTING DEATH

Another aspect of life which could be seen as stemming from early childhood socialization in the family is religious preference. Each of the young couples was asked about their religious preference and the frequency of church attendance, plus the past and present influence of

¹⁷Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 60.

religion which enabled them to understand and accept death and the hereafter. It was not with surprise that the data revealed a large number of young couples who in no way relied upon religion to comfort their fears or supply them with an answer to this great mystery of life.

It is part the unbearable tensions that developed in connection with the Christian answer to death that have not only led to the undermining of the Christian answer, but contributed to the decline of the absolute domination of Christianity over Western thought. The hereafter has become, through the efforts of the church, a source of terror and not consolation. Despite the constant reassurance that mor melior vita, the horror of death was all pervading and the moment of death became of the utmost importance.¹⁸

With respect to their religious preferences, table number two on page 13 displays the formal nomenclature and the number of persons admitting to each. While many of the informants did not claim any formal type of religious preference, further questioning revealed that many individuals justified their feeling that they needed the formalized institution of religion in name only, as did the informant in the following:

I guess we're ostensibly Congregationalists, Protestants. Well, basically my feelings tend toward Unitarianism or agnosticism, probably, but in terms of writing, you know, when you have a form and have to put religion down, I put Protestant for the sake of expediency.

Another informant, who had been raised under the influence of one religion and later in life converted to another, stated: "I don't believe in either one of them, so what am I? I'm not an atheist, but I don't really believe that any one religion has got the answer, let's put it that way."

¹⁸Jacques Choron, Death and Western Thought (New York: MacMillan Ltd., 1963), pp. 91-92.

Through the questioning of religious preference, most couples continued to expound on their concepts on religion and, when questioned as to their frequency of attendance in a church, the informants gave both their rates of attendance and the reasons for their lack of attendance. It was readily apparent that in the marriages where the young couples were of different religious denominations, their frequency of attendance was extremely low or nonexistent. These couples were not found to be exceptional, however, for within the entire population of this study, only two young couples admitted to frequent attendance at religious services. From their responses it would seem that Fulton was correct in concluding from his research: "There is an increasing tendency for modern man to believe that sacred ceremony is out of date. It is, he believes empty, artificial, and wasteful of time and money."¹⁹

Whether or not the results of this study are typical of all ages would have to be dealt with in a larger study. However, for this sample, church attendance was readily admitted to be unimportant for the majority, or seemingly distant from their concept of what religion really is. One young couple admitted that they used to attend church frequently but presently attend very seldom; the rationalization for their behavior was that they found fault with the "establishment."

I don't know where Karen sits on it, for sure, but I don't believe in the establishment. I think we basically believe in the beliefs of the church, but the concept of religion as it is now, as far as going to church and sitting there saying the same words and listening to a dull sermon Sunday after Sunday isn't very--isn't my concept of worshipping. We spent Easter driving through Pattee Canyon listening to a sermon on the radio.

¹⁹Robert Fulton, Death and Identity (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1965), p. 101.

The logic behind their responses and their present attitudes may best be explained in the following statement made by one young wife when asked if she attended church frequently. "No--I don't really feel you have to go to church to worship God. And even if you go every Sunday that doesn't mean you actually believe."

Many of the young couples admitted that they had "strayed from the flock" and several couples had not attended church since they were married which included time spans exceeding five years. Another familiar phrase, often stated by the husbands was, "There's more bigots in church than there are anywhere else," or, "The last time I was at church was when we were married." Several times when the men made the latter statement, their wives would correct them by mentioning that they had attended another wedding or a funeral which the husband had forgotten. In this regard, the present study has produced results similar to those found by Gorer during his research on religious attendance.

The greater number of respondents for 'never' in the present survey may be accounted for by the fact that quite a number of those interviewed did not count weddings or funerals as 'attending a church service'.²⁰

While it cannot be said that the reasons given for the informants' apparent lack of religious attendance were valid in any sense other than for the individuals concerned, the fact remains that the majority of these young couples, regardless of whether or not they believed in religion, did not find attendance in a formal church as a necessary factor for facilitating and maintaining religious beliefs. Perhaps

²⁰Geoffrey Gorer, Death, Grief, and Mourning (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 188.

religion in an organizational setting will in time again become a major concern for these young couples, but presently they exhibit resentment toward the formal structure representing religion within our society and, for the most part, avoid it. It is plausible that when these individuals leave the age group that was being studied and become pre-senior citizens, they will return to the institutionalized method of religion and services. It may be, though it cannot be proven from the data of this study, that the propinquity of death in terms of age may encourage people to attend church.

For most men, actions stand in no necessary connection with any theoretical convictions of theirs, but are, on the contrary, independent of the same, and are dominated by inherited and acquired motives. The antagonism between the principles of our religion and our actual behavior, even of the faithful, as well as the great difference in the ethical views of different peoples who profess the same religion, sufficiently proves that the motives of our acts, and our judgments on the acts of others, proceed primarily from practical life (i. e., from the current mores), and that what we believe has comparatively little influence on our acts and judgments. Religion and philosophy are components of the mores, but not by any means sources or regulators of them.²¹

While this pattern of infrequent or non-attendance in a church may not be representative of all members of our society, it persisted throughout the majority of the sample being researched. Both the student and non-student samples of young married couples maintained similar attitudes toward religion. The primary problem, as the young couples conceived it, may best be explained in the response of one young husband. "The trouble with religion as a word is that it is an institution. But the belief of Christianity and the belief of God is a different thing."

²¹William Graham Sumner, Folkways (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1911), p. 475.

In effect, the problem for those couples who believed in Christ and not in religion as an institution became one of individual versus group beliefs. This finding is similar to that of Laumann who studied religious beliefs in a metropolitan community.

It is variously noted that much of religion has become a matter of private ethical convictions; that churches are active in secular affairs; that religious observances have been losing their supernatural or other-worldly character. It is said that religion in America tends to be religion at a very low temperature.²²

After answering the questions pertaining to the type and frequency of church attendance, the informants were asked if their convictions toward religion in any way comforted them or affected their outlook toward death. The responses fell mainly into two categories, those who felt that religion helped them to face the phenomenon of death, and those who said it had no influence whatsoever on their ideas. Most of the couples who admitted to being influenced by religion did not care to delve extensively into this topic. It sufficed for them that they held their own particular beliefs. The ideas or similarities of the beliefs of others were not important to them. While some couples thought that, "Religion helps you to accept death better than someone who hasn't had any religion," they were unable, as a whole, to explain why they felt this to be true. One couple did conceive of religion as comforting and something to lean on. "I think that only through religion can you kind of look at death with a happy grin on."

One unique difference encountered was through an informant of one particular religious sect. He attributed his disbelief in any type of

²²Edward O. Laumann, "The Social Structure of Religious and Ethno-religious Groups In a Metropolitan Community," American Sociological Review, Vol. 34, No. 2, April, 1969, p. 183.

hereafter to his training in this religion. Even though he received no comfort through the phenomenon of religion, he likewise was void of any fear regarding death.

I might have picked up through Jehovah Witnesses, too, that there is no heaven because Jehovah Witnesses believe that death is death. I mean, after death you just go to the grave; there is no heaven or hell. So unconsciously maybe that's where it (my idea) came from, but to me it just stands to reason.

The wife of this informant, being of a different religious background, expressed herself in a different vein.

I really can't think that religion has changed my attitude about death one way or another--a religion per se, because I believe there is a God and I believe there is a heaven but I had a strong religious background when I was small, while I was being raised, but looking back, I can't really say whether it changed my attitude on death one way or another.

Other informants professed to having been influenced by their church and its religion when they were young, but that presently they were no longer as strongly convinced of their beliefs as they previously were. One wife responded to the question of religion helping her face death in the following manner: "Not now, I don't think, it probably used to. I'm sure I used to as a child always believe in this beautiful place with angels." Another informant of the same convictions stated, "Well, I think it has made us think about, you know, what might happen after we pass from this world and right now I'm not of the belief that anything is going to happen."

Most of the young couples readily admitted that as youths they were required to attend church; some of them thought this aspect of mandatory religion caused them to be less religious today.

I have to say that my knowledge of religious affairs and the fact that I was brought up in a religious atmosphere and religious surroundings and was more or less compelled to attend both church and Sunday school in the course of my

upbringing, has sort of had a negative influence on my view of what you might term, in quotes, an afterlife. I just feel that what I learned about religion and when I apply the practical knowledge of the world that I've gained to that learning, I just can't see that it holds much water. I wouldn't characterize it as an oversaturation, but I think that my exposure was more than adequate, and just from my exposure with people who are religious, again, in quotes, you know, people who profess to be religious, I certainly wouldn't model my life after the people that I have known who profess to be very religious individuals.

When asked if he thought that the people who attend religious services in church were best classified as bigots, he replied, "Not only bigots, but people whose ethical values aren't that high, and their standards aren't that high, but somehow everything is sort of exploited by the fact that they go to church."

Other young couples felt that the aspect of mandatory religion during their upbringing had no negative effects on their attitudes toward religion in their present situation. "I was never forced to go. I went on my own as a teenager for the social life a little bit, for a little while." Another informant was reluctant to admit that religion in any way comforted him in confronting the aspect of death.

No, I can't say comforted; I can say affected. The way I feel about religion has definitely affected the way I feel about what's going to happen after I die. I don't believe in a heaven or hell per se. I don't think I'm going to burn forever or go to some great paradise in the sky.

For a few informants, the concept of religion did seemingly promote a sensation of comfort, even though many of them admitted that they didn't really understand religion.

It helps you accept it (death) better, I think is the way I feel about it. I don't know that anybody's got any concrete ideas on what it's going to be like or things like that. It gives you something to look forward to.

In this sense, the above informant and several of the others who professed a belief in religion and the comfort that it affords them

realized, at least minimally, that they were answering one unknown aspect of life (death in relation to the hereafter) with another unknown concept of society (religion). The individuals who professed a non-acceptance of contemporary religious beliefs and were not influenced by religion as youths also have certain means of justifying their life on this earth and what they expect will happen to them upon their demise. This can best be demonstrated by the response of a young wife.

I don't think there's a hell. I think life on earth is your hell, and whether you're good or bad and what you do or don't do says whether or not you are going to heaven or hell. I don't believe in that. People go through constant turmoil, tension, anxiety through their whole life, you know, and they have periods of happiness, granted, more than they do the unhappiness, but a person goes through enough unhappiness in a lifetime--to me, this is their hell. Once you've died and you go to heaven, then hell on earth is over and you are finally at peace with yourself and with God. You know, then you're at peace, but not until you've died.

Apparently what this informant is saying is that one has to work one's way through hell to get to heaven. This is in contrast to the concept of the following informant who expresses a belief in nothing other than a physical type of death without any spiritual connotations.

Well, I don't really know right now. I mean, I used to think that but I don't think that any more. I am beginning to feel like there isn't anything after death, you know, death and that's it. I used to think that there was a heaven and hell and the whole bit, but I don't believe that any more. I just think that once you're dead, you're dead; you're in the ground and there is nothing else.

Between those informants who professed being influenced by religion and those who maintained that religion held nothing for them in regard to death or anything else, were the individuals who realized that their present views are not congruent with the dictates of the church. However, they persist in maintaining these beliefs.

I know the church wouldn't think too highly of this approach, but like I said we are kind of getting away from all that, you know, the beliefs that we were taught and we are just forming our own beliefs. And you have to go with something that you believe. Just because I was baptized a Catholic, that doesn't mean that I go along with everything that they say.

Throughout the course of interviewing, the young couples all maintained that they believed in some type of God or supernatural power which they would have to place themselves before eventually. Although many of the informants did not agree with religion per se as an institutionalized setting, they continually maintained that there was more to life than just being. It is perhaps much in the way that Cameron conceived of religion and God that these young couples are affected.

There is always a temptation to see history as unfurling in a single line, even when we are looking at the history of ideas. There is continuity, but diversity is nearly as much the rule. Yet we have a great deal of similarity and a Great God theory and trace all events to the hand of deity. Happily for them, inconsistency on the part of God is already accounted for: 'the Lord moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.' However, a revived enthusiasm for theological explanation may be what John Dewey and Sidney Hook decried as 'the new failure of nerve.' It has always been difficult to distinguish the awe which is reverence from the awe which is plain fear, and man has much to fear.²³

"PERMANENT" VERSUS "TEMPORARY" TYPES OF RESIDENCE

Following the questions regarding religion, the young couples were questioned as to their ideas concerning the differences between a "permanent" and "temporary" type of residence situation and its effects upon the individuals living within each type of situation in regard to their willingness and ability to prepare for death. The "temporary" situation

²³W. B. Cameron, Informal Sociology (New York: Random House Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 44-45.

was given to be representative of the married student housing, as the individuals living there are usually leaving within a short period of time (2-3 years). "Permanent" residence is exemplified by individuals who are non-students, gainfully employed, and owning their own home.

Of the young couples interviewed, all except two individuals thought that living in a permanent residence would prove to be a deterrent in preparing for death. Both of these individuals based their responses on their own personal experiences, as they were students and had lived in housing similar to that in question here, and had not prepared then, even though gainfully employed. The second informant also believed that the "temporary" situation had little influence upon pre-death preparation. He based his opinion on the fact that he felt it was primarily dependent upon the age of the individual and not the permanence of the situation.

I think students or young people as a whole don't have as much of a stake in life, especially when they're not out making a living for themselves. In the student's status, it's just waiting until they get into the world and on their own, so they don't have that much of a stake in living or dying. For instance, reading the paper, only 8 out of 671 students registered to vote who actually voted (on the University campus). So I think they just don't think about the more important or the more permanent aspect of life. Students are just in a transient status, but if they have more of a stake, like if they have a home of their own, they feel like they've settled down; then they're gonna think about these other things.

At the end of his statement, the informant did admit that students, due to their residence, would also be less prone to make any type of pre-death preparations. The husband who submitted the following was also a student. Thus, he was able to see the effects of a "temporary" situation and, while so doing, conceptualized the effects of "permanent" situations on others in his age group.

It would be sort of difficult to characterize students in general as being the type of people that would have a permanent residence for one thing, but I think as a class they're probably ill-prepared. Our age range of people, in the 25-30 age range, we're still students, take our contemporaries that didn't go to college, they're people who probably have accumulated some substance now if they're a plumber or a mill worker or whatever, they probably have their own home--they're thinking ahead in economic terms a little bit more than us. They're not maybe thinking ahead more, but they're financially capable of preparing themselves more.

Another husband who was a non-student replied that he felt as though he was more prepared now than when he was a student--at least financially. "When all you've got is macaroni and beans, why you don't think much about buying a \$20,000 life insurance policy. And younger, you don't have the responsibilities, no family, in our case, anyway."

One student living in the "temporary" situation said that he felt his present situation was worse than that of people of the same age group because, ". . .you're in a state of flux here and being hassled and things are changing every day." The main factor in the pre-death preparation of young married couples evolved from the questioning of the temporary versus permanent housing situations, this being the financial aspect. While many of the informants felt that having children would cause the parents to prepare, even more individuals felt that it would be dependent upon the economic state of the family. The married students and non-students alike emphasized the economic factor over all others, and of primary importance to most of those interviewed is, "If a person has enough to worry about." One non-student living in a permanent situation carried the economic aspect one step further than the rest when he replied to the question, "I do, if you buy a plot or something, I see it as kind of a way up the social ladder also."

ECONOMIC INFLUENCE AFFECTING PREPARATION

Because the majority of the respondents conversed in economic terms, they were asked if they thought that the economic status of married couples would determine the amount of preparedness or non-preparedness for death. The following comments were received during the course of questioning along this line.

I think the fact may be that financial reasons of trying to force your way through school, people can't afford to get the right insurance policy and stuff like that they would like to have. Where somebody that was just out, established, and had their job and everything, I think they would be better prepared that way.

"I guess we don't feel like we have any land or house or anything now; we had one for two years." And, "Ya, I think that property tends to anchor one to material things. Then there becomes a need for security. Even including the mortgage."

One student, when asked if he based everything on material wealth, responded:

Ya, but look, if I die right now, who's going to fight over what we got; we don't got nothing. If I had money it would be different. We don't have anything that anybody wants.

Although the majority of young couples stressed the economic factor involved in preparing for death, one young couple who had seriously considered this aspect answered in the following manner: "We are better prepared financially, although not emotionally." This couple drove home the point that money is neither the sole or primary necessitating factor involved in all families (even though most of the respondents felt that with money they would be capable of sufficient preparations). With the exception of the respondents above, the entirety of this population purported the need for "money" and "things" prior to pre-death preparation,

much in the manner which William James explained the personality of people. He pointed out what he called the "Material Self," by which he meant that we identify ourselves with our personal possessions.

SUMMARY

The informants indicated that there was in fact no difference between their attitudes toward death and those of their parents. The type of parental avoidance or reinforcement toward death seemed congruent with that of the children of the young married couples. Although most responses and actions by the informants were seen as "individual," they were in fact influenced by both the parental and societal conditions which persisted during their youth. For the informants involved, the topic of death within their family was never directly confronted, yet death remains in actuality one of the few universals. If families should desire to prepare for the future and become realistic in regard to the phenomenon of death, they should, in some manner, confront this phenomenon as a nuclear unit in order to displace the many myths, fears, and uncertainties which presently exist among those families which have failed to give information regarding death.

Religious affiliation and the frequency of attendance illuminated the persisting conceptualizations of young married couples today. While less than 10 percent admitted to frequent attendance of religious service, this does not mean that the rest of the population did not believe in some form of supernatural being. It only expressed the current behavior and attitudes among the young couples toward the contemporary type of "institutionalized religion." Basically, the question for these young

couples is not one of belief in religion, but rather, as they conceptualize it, one of Christian belief (God, Christ, and Savior) versus religious rituals (institutionalized, artificial, and establishment). Rerre has stated that these contemporary attitudes and beliefs may change, for:

When and if their attitudes should change, it is plausible that they will eventually return to the customary type of religious worshipping in its present setting for, in reality, religion is one's way of valuing most comprehensively and intensively, not just an institution or physical structure.²⁴

Religion appeared to be important only to those individuals who saw it as such. Concerning their outlook toward death, it was evident throughout that some reinforcement was needed by the informants, even if they were incapable of explaining it. The need for a displacement of their fears was usually met through their individual beliefs, regardless of the similarity or contrast between theirs and the beliefs of others. Apparent also was the fact that mandatory church attendance as a youth did not always continue to influence the informants in later life. For many, their previous religious training did not seem an adequate explanation for the world they live in.

The differences between the "temporary" and "permanent" types of situations were seen by over 80 percent of the informants as having an influence in pre-death preparation. The majority concurred that those individuals living in a "temporary" setting would be less able and, thus, less openly concerned in preparing for their eventual demise. The "temporary" situation was conceptualized as inhabited by persons who were financially incapable of preparation, while those in the "permanent"

²⁴Frederick Rerre, Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1967), p. 69.

situation could, if they so desired, meet the expense of preparing, and they also had the material goods which might cause them to consider this type of action.

Chapter 4

PREPARATION OF YOUNG MARRIED COUPLES

HUSBAND-WIFE CONVERSATION CONCERNING DEATH

In order for a married couple to make preparations for an inevitable event such as death, they must first be mentally prepared, and, second, they must be able to converse on an unemotional level with one another in regard to that event.

Husband-wife communications are considered because verbal communication is no doubt the most common form of interaction between people. As a form of interaction, it is the basis on which positive feelings of husbands and wives towards each other are created and sustained. Furthermore, the frequency of interaction is a determinant and indicator of the degree to which the husband-wife relationship is 'group like', that is, communications represent a dimension of family integration.²⁴

The previous chapters (1 and 2) illustrate how the informants both as individuals and as a nuclear unit had not prepared themselves mentally regarding death.

In order to discern their ability to prepare for death and the amount of interaction involved, the informants were asked if they had ever conferred with one another concerning death and its various implications. A majority of the respondents admitted to never having conferred with one another regarding this topic; the remaining few who responded that they had talked about death (less than 20 percent) but had not done so in what could be considered a formal manner. By this it

²⁴Robert E. Mitchell, "Some Social Implications of High Density Housing," American Sociological Review, Vol. 36, No. 1, February, 1971, p. 25.

is meant that while they did indeed confront the topic of death in a conversation, it was usually related to an external factor which acted as a stimulus. An example of this would be when a young couple is out for a leisurely ride in their automobile and meet a funeral procession. Immediately upon recognizing the type of event in progress, one of the couple states, "I sure don't want all that fuss made over me--all those flowers and stuff." In this example, it was the external event which activated a type of one-way or pseudo-conversation regarding the topic of death. A formal conversation on the topic of death would involve the mutual agreement of the couple to seriously consider what they should do to prepare themselves and their children for such an event and then to converse with one another until agreements in all the areas of preparation which they deem as pertinent to themselves and the family are achieved. It must be stated here that the above example of a formal conversation concerning death is just that--an example. During this study there was not one instance where the informants admitted to having conversed in that manner. Of the several families who stated they had talked about death, none had actually sat down together and made it the main topic of conversation. As a rule, conversation appeared only momentarily and was quickly abandoned. In this respect, the findings of this study are similar to those of Babchuck and Bates who have stated from their research, "Apparently, people in our society can develop very close attachments to others, maintain frequent contact over the years, and yet in many instances never recall having exchanged intimate confidences with such persons."²⁵

²⁵Nicholas Babchuck and Alan P. Bates, "The Primary Relations of Middle-Class Couples: A Study of Male Dominance," American Sociological Review, Vol. 38, No. 3, June, 1963, p. 382.

Lacking within each nuclear unit was the basic social process which is normally utilized in the familial confrontations of all other facets of life--conversation. Many of the informants found the idea of talking about death and making preparations a disdainful subject. Because of their inherent repugnance toward conversing about death, many informants exhibited either total reluctance and/or indifference toward the idea of talking about "it." The following responses were frequently encountered during the course of this research: "We're not concerned with the problem, we just don't think it's going to happen," and, "There's some things you just don't talk about." It appeared that the couples felt that by not conversing on the subject of death, its occurrence was less likely, at least for them. This again brings to fore the idea that to talk about something will cause it to happen--a superstition that has existed for decades.

Those couples who admitted to having conversed on the subject revealed, upon further questioning, that their degree of involvement was at best of a minute scope. Responses such as the following were frequently encountered: "I told Dayle once, well, several times that, you know, it doesn't matter to me after I die . . ." or, "The only thing that he's told me is that he doesn't want a funeral. He doesn't want-- what is it you don't want, flowers?" Several of the couples did not know what the mate thought regarding death, however, as a rule, they had not been married for over three years. From the majority of respondents a consistent pattern soon emerged. Through participation in everyday living and the previously mentioned stimulation by certain special events, the couples, over a period of time, understood what each other would prefer and dislike in regard to their own post-death services. This

mutual understanding toward a future event appeared to be reinforced through temporal coexistence. Those couples who had been married for five or more years had acquired, to a greater extent, mutual conceptualizations of each other's thoughts regarding death and the manner of disposal they would prefer upon their demise. "I think probably it's just because we understand each other--our feelings are pretty much the same towards death." Therefore, without ever having engaged in a formal pre-death conversation, a certain amount of "knowledge of mate" was apparent.

DEATH - A TABOOED TOPIC OF CONVERSATION

When asked if they found death a difficult topic to talk about, most of the couples insisted that it was not. After having denied any difficulty in conversing about death, many of them continued their responses by eventually admitting to having encountered difficulty. "I don't think it's difficult. I never talked about it--I couldn't talk about it in the face of seriousness or trouble." One young wife readily admitted to the difficulty she thought she would encounter if required to converse on the topic. "But it's really a hard subject; what do you do? You sit down in your chair and say, okay, let's talk about death and dying. You know, it's just not something that you want to . . ."

Although none of the informants admitted to having conversed on the topic of death in order to prepare for it, when asked if the topic of death was a taboo topic in their homes and in their family, the response was similar among all of the couples involved--"No."

It appeared that the usage of the word "taboo" caused many of the informants to immediately acquire a defensive position. Many of the

responses indicated that there is a type of social stigma attached to this word which people find uncomfortable to confront. "It's not taboo, I just don't like to--it's unrealistic to think about it this way, but I don't like to talk about it (death) very much." One young husband, while attempting to prove that it is not a taboo topic, responded, "About the only time it's come up is when we discuss life insurance or that type of thing--mortgage insurance, that type of thing, and then very briefly." In this statement, the individual, like most of the others, revealed an extreme reluctance to confront the topic of death while maintaining that it is not taboo. Even when the word "taboo" was omitted and another word such as "secrecy" was substituted in its place, the responses were similar in nature. "I think there's a reluctance in our relationship," or, "I think that maybe when we get middle-aged we might think about it, but as long as most of my hair is black . . ."

One wife maintained that death was not a topic of secrecy in her family or something that was talked about only among adults. She stated that she had not answered any questions posed by her children in the past, but would if they should ever ask her. "No, I'm just saying that we've never said, now someday you might not have a mommy or daddy. I don't even want to have to worry about as far as some day he might have to be without us." This statement was also indicative of the restricted parent-child interaction concerning the topic of death. The amount of socialization and interaction which occurred between the parent and children was basically nonexistent in regard to death.

Socialization seems to be an individual, interpersonal process. Children enter the world as barbarians, as blobs of protoplasm with great potential, but they do not become adequately functioning adult human beings by simply being fed. People are most effectively socialized when children

and adults identify with one another and are responsible for one another.²⁶

PARENT-CHILD CONVERSATION CONCERNING DEATH

In our society, the role of a parent in regard to the child, besides being that of a comforter and provider, is one of an educator. This study was designed in such a manner as to collect data which would determine if parents do instruct their children in regard to death and, if so, in what manner this is accomplished. Unforeseen in this aspect of parent-child interaction concerning death was the factor of age. The majority of the children of those couples interviewed were less than seven years of age, thereby considered by their parents as too young for "death education." This resulted in a large number of negative responses which had to be conceived of by the author of this study as indicating a reluctance on the part of the parents to communicate with their children on this topic. In order to obtain responses which would be indicative of a true parent-child relationship, only those families with children who were seven or older were utilized. The parents of these children were asked if they had ever tried to explain or converse in any manner about death with their children. As would be expected from the negative responses encountered on the topic of parental conversations regarding this phenomenon, the rate of parent-child death-related conversations was even lower.

Of the parents who replied that they had tried to explain death to their children, none admitted to having posited all the facts of death;

²⁶ William J. Goode, "Individual and Corporate Responsibility in Family Life," American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 15, No. 3, January-February, 1972, p. 426.

only a sufficient amount of facts were supplied in order to answer each individual question encountered. As one wife replied to the question, "The boys have talked about death occasionally, and death's like sex at this age, you answer what you think they need and let the rest go until they ask." The boys in this instance were seven, eleven, and twelve years of age. Another mother, whose son was eight years old, replied, "I think he's at a bad age. I think probably when he gets older we'll try to talk to him about it, but right now, I think as young as he is, I think it would just frighten him." Again, the fears of the adult may be seen as controlling their actions and, undoubtedly, the child involved will mature having the identical fears and responses which are presently being evidenced by his parents.

One young mother maintained that she had tried to explain death to her children upon their request. However, the method she utilized was not one of explaining the entire sphere of this phenomenon, as may be seen in her response regarding their awareness of death.

Well, ya, and they have been (aware) I think since they were six or seven years old because occasionally a child will see a cat or a dog that's been hit on the highway or something, and well, it's a good way to teach them to stay off the street or watch where they're going with their bikes. It's something you can impress upon them if that's what they want to have happen to them they can go ahead and goof around. It's a pretty hard impression on them, but it does help and then it makes them begin to investigate and wonder more about death.

This method of utilizing death not only as a fear factor, but in order to teach them to stay off of the street, is not what may be considered real parent-child conversation regarding death. Rather, the children here conceived of death as something that happens to you when you are bad or "goof around." As to her statement that it makes them investigate and wonder more about death, the only problem which occurs here is that, while

they do this, they are not receiving any bonified answers to their questions. In a particular instance such as the above, it is indeed difficult to conceive of this parent as fulfilling the obligations conceived of as being those of a parent. Perhaps, as speculated by some individuals, the present heterogeneous society has caused the parent to shirk those duties which are seen as difficult or cruel. Where, then, does that leave the young people within such a society; where do these individuals learn the real meanings of death? Hauser sees the problem as lying within our present chaotic society.

Among the most serious consequences of the failure of contemporary American society to keep pace with the social morphological revolution is the deficiencies in the process of socialization. In the United States, the child is so little the recipient of a sense of membership in, and responsibility to, the social order that, although he develops great initiative and creativity, his attitude is essentially one of concern with how he gets his and unconcern with others. We have yet to achieve the golden mean in order to produce a harmonious mass society consisting of people with a balance of initiative, creativity and social responsibility.²⁷

In only one instance did the parents respond that they had talked with their children and tried to explain what death is and what the post-death effects include. They had explained to their children that the temporary life and work involved on earth is followed by more important work in a better world. While this may resemble a carry-over from certain religious concepts, the young couple involved did not utilize the aspect of religion in explaining death to their children. However, the non-utilization of religion was not atypical when compared

²⁷Philip M. Hauser, "The Chaotic Society: Product of the Social Morphological Revolution," American Sociological Review, Vol. 34, No. 1, February, 1969, p. 12.

to the rest of the population involved, as there was not one instance of a family utilizing religion in the parent-child conversations regarding death.

The ages of the children in this sample ranged from several months up to seventeen years old. According to their parents, not one of the children had ever attended a funeral. "He's seen it on television but never attended a funeral." This response may not be considered atypical, as in our society it is a common practice to exclude children from the ceremonies and functions surrounding post-death activities. However, the following statement by a young wife may be considered atypical in regard to the child's educational and social development dealing with this phenomenon. "If I have my way, they won't ever go to a funeral." Appearing again is the unhealthy attitude of an adult which cannot help but be internalized by the child involved.

All young couples involved implied that their children would become aware of death and its ramifications if allowed enough time. A specific age or time in life when the parent-child relationship would confront the topic of death was never given. Instead, the parents felt that without directly confronting the topic, the child would learn through outside agencies (peer group, news media, and so on), much in the manner of sexual education in the past. None of these children had been versed in the temporal aspect of life, therefore, they were not capable of understanding the process of aging and living toward death. This apparent lack of instruction by the parents was also noted by Piaget during his studies of child-parent relations involving the conceptualizations of time by children. Piaget argued that time is not an a priori intuition but must be constructed. The child must learn to coordinate motions of different velocities based on reversibility of thought. This being true,

it is without question the responsibility of the parents to instill within their sibling this concept of time and its ramifications on the social being.²⁸

PREPARATION THROUGH WILLS

Within the nuclear family the lack of conversation concerning death is readily apparent between parents and also between the parents and their children. This being the case, one must pose this question: In what ways do young married couples prepare for death? If avoidance rather than acceptance is the normative pattern regarding conversation, are there other normative patterns of pre-death preparation which are utilized instead? If so, are they conceived of as such by those individuals involved? Several methods of pre-death preparation which may be considered as such do not involve solely the family as these are contractual documents which are acceptably recognized throughout our society. These formally written contracts include both individual and joint wills, and/or life insurance.

A "Will," or the "Last Will and Testament" as it is formally and legally recognized, is a legal document which is usually composed with the aid of an attorney at law. A will, as it will be called during this research, is a document which is normally constructed by an individual of legal age in order to explicitly regulate the disposition of all personal artifacts upon his demise. A stereotypical concept of a will is that it is that document which is utilized in bequeathing the personal property of an elderly individual upon his demise. Conversely, because

²⁸Jean Piaget, "The Child's Conception of Time," American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 8, No. 1, January, 1971, p. 172.

of this concept of elderly utilization of wills, this research was involved in observing the utilization of wills among young married couples for both the care of their children and the disposal of their personal property. While most of the couples in this age group were not expected to be extremely affluent, it was anticipated that the aspect of child care (if both parents should die simultaneously) would stimulate the acquisition of a will regardless of the individual financial situation of each young married couple.

The acquisition of a will proved to be of minimal interest among young married couples. The majority of informants, regardless of whether or not they were students, and regardless of domicile, did not possess a will. Various excuses were utilized in an effort to rationalize their non-possession of such a legal document by both the student and non-student populations. Primarily, the lack of personal property and economic assets were the deterring factors. A typical response was, "We really don't have that much we can really call ours." Most young couples who had been questioned earlier during the interview in regard to their self-conceived socio-economic status replied that they were in the lower middle class category (80 percent), while the rest of the population (20 percent) conceived of themselves as in the middle class. Therefore, one may readily accept their excuses for not having purchased wills, based on economic terms. "We have too many other things to spend our money for, and we're young."

Of the young married couples who admitted to having wills (40 percent), it was interesting to note that half of these young families had acquired their wills free of charge. The distribution of owners and non-owners of wills was even between the student and non-student popu-

lations, therefore it may not be stated that being of a student status alone causes less consideration in regard to the obtaining of wills. Many of the informants implied that they had considered acquiring a will but had not as yet done so. "I've thought about all this in my own mind, but the will is the only thing that I think we should get." One young couple admitted to having talked about a will, however, at the time of their interview they had not acquired one. "You know, we should have a will. We talked about it but I urged Will to draw up a will because I'm afraid, so it's something that we've thought about, anyway."

LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP FOR CHILDREN

Various reasons were reported by those persons possessing wills as to why they had acquired them. However, all families had primarily the same basis for their acquisition--the distribution of personal effects and child care. "It stipulates what would happen if either or the other of us dies before the other does, or jointly." One curious factor which did arise from this study was that most families were concerned with their material wealth and the distribution of it prior to taking into consideration the care of their children. This does not mean that all the families felt that their property and economic assets were to be considered before their children, only that during the course of conversing on these different topics, the financial aspect always arose prior to the child care aspect. One individual who possessed a will declared that, in his opinion, this was not a method of preparing for death. "On my part it's not preparing for death, it's preparing for those who remain after death." Another young husband, although he did not have a will, stated that in the future he planned to obtain a will,

and gave the following reason for this acquisition.

I think it's minimum necessity--prepare for death in the minimum way possible. Only write out a will because it's a minimum necessity. You write out a will because all of it suddenly becomes legal and you buy insurance, life insurance, because it's the minimum necessity--you don't usually buy more. To me, it's strictly a legal document.

His meaning here is that the will is nothing more than a legal convenience for those left behind. This pattern of thought was also expressed by one of the young wives who stated:

Well, I think that like making a will, especially if you have a lot of personal possessions, can stop one heck of a lot of fighting between the children afterwards. It happens all the time; you hear about it all the time--these brothers and sisters just at each other's necks trying to get something that belonged to their mother and father. While if they're told who has what in their will, there's not anything they can do about it.

This young wife seemed extremely worried about the legal aspect of who is entitled to what. Nothing at all was mentioned about the aspect of child care in this instance either. A young husband with a five month old daughter was the only informant who expressed the aspect of child care without being questioned in regard to it.

She's five months old now, and it's been on my mind a lot lately, mainly because of her. It doesn't have to be anything detailed at our age. I mean, something could happen tomorrow, but just to get the estate straightened out so things would go to her rather than into the estate.

When questioned in regard to child care in an instance where both of the parents should die simultaneously, all of the informants, even those without a will, felt that there should be something in writing. Those individuals having wills all professed that the main reason for their drawing up a will was so that they would be certain as to the care of their children (who would take care of them, where they would be, if two or more that they would not be separated, and that they received

everything that they had coming to them from the estate). Their responses as to this primary reason for the will, with the one exception mentioned, came after being questioned about child care, and after they had all mentioned the economical aspect first.

Many of the parents who had two or more children expressed extreme concern about their children remaining together should the parents die prior to their being of legal age. "The main reason for the will is just so that there won't be any mix-ups as to where the kids are going." "The only thing that I would make a will for is just for the kids; I don't have anything to leave anybody." Even though all of the parents expressed this concern for their children, many of them did not know who would take care of their children upon their demise. "Well, I know it wouldn't happen automatically, but nothing ever does, but I would want one of our parents to take the children. But we have made nothing in writing in regards to their care." Another response to the same question brought out the fear that has constantly reoccurred during this study: "We would assume that, well, I would say relatives would come over here. Certainly my parents would be all right to take care of him. We never think about that." During the course of the interviewing very few of the informants knew what would happen to the children if they should become legal wards of the state through a court of law even though this social process is extremely old.

It has been suggested that the concept of the state acting as parens patriae of all children originated in the medieval practice which recognized the sovereign's right to a profitable guardianship of the property of incompetents.²⁹

²⁹ Foote, Levy, and Sander, Cases and Materials on Family Law (New York: South-Western Publishing Co., 1966), p. 394.

Usually those informants who knew about the courts and of children becoming wards of the court, already had a will in order to alleviate such an occurrence.

If something would happen to both of us at the same time, then the will would mainly say who would get the children so that they wouldn't have to become wards of the court first to be appointed legal guardian.

Those individuals who did not have a will seemed very poorly versed in regard to legal guardianship of children and what would happen to the estate. "I am sure that one of our families would take care of them." Often the reason for not having the will was one of apparent disinterest by the couple being questioned. "I've thought about that but not to the point of doing anything about it." In one instance the couple being interviewed related that they would like the state or court to take care of their children. "I would give anything for them--I would like the state to take them but to keep them together." In an instance where the court becomes the legal guardian of the children, it is up to the judge to make the final decisions as to the final disposition of the children.

The judge in a guardianship proceeding is guided by the 'best interest of the child.' In the absence of parents to choose from, the court is often guided by statute as to preference. Preference may be in this order: (1) to one who was indicated by the wishes of a deceased parent; (2) to one who already stands in the position of a trustee of a fund to be applied to the child's support; and (3) to a relative.³⁰

Another reason that kept reoccurring for those in favor of having a will was the idea that if one of the married partners survived the other, then she or he would be aware of what to do and how to go about it. One of the reasons for this need of knowledge was so the remaining

³⁰Thomas A. Coyne, "Who Will Speak For The Child?" Annals, May, 1969, p. 42.

partner would not lose any of the personal assets of the deceased. "When you have things such as a house and cars and so on, you kind of get concerned about the right person getting the children so they won't beat them out of whatever you have." Of these couples owning a will, only one revealed the fact that he thought his will was outdated and should be reviewed.

The fact of the matter is that our will is probably woefully outdated now because it speaks in very general terms and it was drafted probably three or four years ago, and it needs sorely to be updated. In fact, just as a matter of principle, I think everyone who has a will should update it periodically.

This is indeed a point of importance, as all of the couples who had wills have improved their living conditions and increased the amounts of personal possessions since their will was initially written. Questioning revealed that those couples possessing wills have not updated them mainly because of the expense involved. While it must be stated that having a will is in fact being better prepared than not having one, if the document has become outdated and non-inclusive of many new aspects of the couples' lives, it is actually a potential problem and hindrance for those left behind.

Because the subjects in this study were young adults, many of the informants were not of a high economic status; even those who had their own homes were in the process of paying for them. Therefore, the results which indicate a low number of persons having wills are to be expected.

According to Mayhew and Reiss:

Education, occupational status, age, and sex have a moderate to strong effect but none is as discriminating as family income or home ownership. The best predictors of contact with attorneys are family income and property owner-

ship as indicated among classes of income and home ownership, even when race and sex are controlled for.³¹

PREPARATION THROUGH LIFE INSURANCE

There is another manner in which young couples prepared for death--the possession of a life insurance policy. Most of the young couples interviewed had at least a life insurance policy on the male partner, while one of the families went as far as to insure the entire family.

Well, we've put most of the insurance on me. We've got different policies. We've got \$25,000 on me and we've got \$5,000 on her and \$1,000 on each kid. What I've got mostly for her is just covering the immediate cost of death and a few other things.

In the above instance, the amount of insurance on the male of the family was extremely high in comparison to the rest of the husbands in the study. Most of the husbands, while having an insurance policy, admitted that it was small in regard to the amount of money that the spouse would receive upon his death, usually \$10,000 or less. The reason that all of the policies were seemingly of little value was that they were acquired by the males prior to their being married. One young husband stated, "I've got life insurance for myself in case I should die, so she would be set up for a year or so--so she could get set up again." It seemed ironic that in the case of the student population, as a rule, the wife was presently the sole breadwinner for the family as the husband was a full time student, and yet she was not covered by any type of life insurance. This fact could be attributed to the traditional and stereotyped

³¹ Leon Mayhew and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "The Social Organization of Legal Contacts," American Sociological Review, Volume 34, #3, June, 1969, p. 311.

concept of the husband as the sole breadwinner, or perhaps, as with the students, the potential breadwinner, thereby necessitating his insurance. In one instance, a young couple admitted to having had life insurance and then letting it terminate. Their reason for not having insurance was that it became too much of a financial burden as they presently have three children to support. "For us, it just isn't a worthwhile investment." While this family anticipated that they would in the future again purchase some type of insurance, they felt that presently they were not in a situation where it was important for them due to their age.

One aspect of life insurance proved to be similar to the wills in that none of the sample had recently updated their life insurance policies or considered this to be important. While most of the insurance policies were small in monetary terms, at the time of their purchase (usually five or more years ago) they had seemed to be adequate. Although one would speculate that married couples would increase their insurance policies to meet the rising cost of living (and aging) this apparently is not the case; at least not in this age setting. The primary reason for having a life insurance policy proved to be not one of support for those remaining, instead it was conceived of as a means of meeting the funeral expenses.

OTHER PRE-DEATH PREPARATIONS

Because of the acknowledgement by the young couples that insurance was, in fact, what could be termed "disposal money," they were questioned regarding other forms of preparation for disposal. This entailed asking the informants if they had made preparations insofar as the purchasing of

plots, headstones, coffins, and the like. None of the informants in this study had gone to this extent of preparation and, likewise, none admitted to having considered such methods. Some felt that the purchasing of such items was foolish or morbid, while other informants felt that it was, in fact, admitting that they were going to die, which was one thing that they did not care to admit. One husband felt that when he died it was the responsibility of his next of kin to make all the arrangements and finance the ceremony. "Oh, let somebody after me worry about that. That's the last thing in the world I want to go buy. I paid bringing him (his son) into the world, he can pay to put me out." A common response among the couples was, "I don't really care what happens when I die," or, "Somehow that's not a very great concern."

After interviewing the manager of a large mortuary firm, it became apparent that the previous responses by the young couples were not atypical when compared to other peoples of their same age group. The fact is that many young people do not purchase plots and the like prior to their demise; the purchasers of such items are usually members of our society who are concerned with their health or of a much older age. Again, the financial aspect enters into the possibility and feasibility of making such preparations. "It's a little hard to think about buying a plot when you can't buy a quart of milk." Many of the young couples could not conceive of the large expenditures of money for something that seemed to be in the far distant future. "We are not going to keep everybody happy and spend three thousand dollars. No matter who pays for it, it is just a waste of money."

ATTITUDES TOWARD CONTEMPORARY FUNERAL PRACTICES

Although the informants had made no preparations toward their eventual demise concerning the purchase of special items related to interment, all had explicit ideas concerning the aspect of the funeral itself. A topic which occurred quite frequently was the concern of the informants regarding wakes. Many of the informants come from an area where wakes were conducted upon the demise of every individual. To them, the present wake proceedings were not to their liking. "I don't agree with them; they're too hard on the family. There's no purpose, really, to a wake." Others felt that it depended upon the way in which the wake was conducted.

Well, it depends on what kind of wake it is. Now the old Irish wake served a purpose. Some of them, they kind of went away from them and took them to the funeral parlors. I don't think it's the family's fault if wakes turned out the way they are. I think they are commercialized.

This attitude toward commercialization and, as one wife termed it, "a type of status symbol," was consistent throughout all of the responses. The present type of wake was seen as a social affair in which concern with the deceased is not the prime objective of the festivities.

It's kind of a social thing; everybody goes. It doesn't matter if you go to the funeral, just as long as you go to the wake and you have to sign the little book. Your name has to be in the book.

Responses concerning the contemporary existence of various means of human disposal displayed not only the entire group acknowledgement of such phenomena, but also the individual preferences regarding types of disposal or "funerals" each informant would prefer for themselves and for significant others (spouse and children). Although each informant had a response regarding the type of funeral they would prefer for themselves, a majority felt that this special occasion was not an event in which

their special wishes and dictates would be carried out. This feeling, that the type of funeral conducted would be in accord with the sentiments of those remaining rather than the wishes of the deceased, was expressed by many individuals. Because of this, they felt that it was unnecessary to stipulate or even converse with their mate as to the type of funeral they would prefer.

No, I don't think that's necessary because who is ever left behind, it's up to them to determine what kind of funeral to have. The funeral is for the people who are left, it isn't for the guy in the box. So the pretty flowers, the songs, and the whole bit don't mean a thing to the guy who is dead.

The attitudes toward contemporary funeral procedures and the expenses involved were concurrent with those found by Jessica Mitford.³² None of the informants in this study responded that they would like to have an elaborate or expensive funeral. For them, it represented a waste of money which could be utilized for more appropriate manners, such as for the subsistence of those remaining. The majority of responses were concurrent with the following remarks: "I think it's ridiculous to spend a lot of money on it," and, "I want to be buried in absolutely the poorest fashion possible." One informant displayed his disgust toward contemporary funeral proceedings in the following manner:

I'm too cheap to spend any money on a funeral. I think we both are pretty much anti the typical funerals nowadays. I think it's just terrible. I just really got disgusted at these friends of ours--what she had to go through and how much money she had to dish out for a funeral. It's really senseless. For a person who really desperately needs that money to have to spend it for that, it's ridiculous.

³²Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (Connecticut: Fawcett Publishing, Inc., 1963).

While most of the informants did in fact become very explicit in regard to the type of funeral they wanted for themselves, many realized that a funeral is for the living and therefore, the few casual remarks they had made concerning their disposal, such as, "I'd like to just be thrown in the ocean," or "Scatter my ashes to the four winds," were probably received by their mate as a type of dark humor, and would not be followed anyway. Only two of the informants were concerned over the type of disposal they would prefer and went to great lengths to explain their wishes. The first informant specified that she wanted to be placed in perpetual care, mainly because she felt that her husband would never visit her grave after the funeral ceremonies.

I want to be put in a vault and I want to be put in perpetual care and that's all. He doesn't have to ever visit my grave; I don't care about flowers--I don't particularly believe in that. Just as long as I'm cared for and in a vault, that's all I care about.

The other informant having specific instructions did not carry the plans to such an extent. However, this individual wanted a normal funeral designed to show respect for the deceased.

When I think of a funeral, you don't have to have a super-duper casket or anything like that, but not a wooden box, either. Because I don't think that's showing much respect. As far as cremation goes, I don't go along with that, either. But just a fairly nice service and a halfway decent casket and buried in the family plot.

Both of the informants above, exhibiting their concern toward the type of funeral they would want, were women. In no case did any of the male informants specify a certain type of funeral or proceedings which they wished their mates to follow. In one instance, a husband did state that he didn't want a large amount of money spent on his funeral, yet, he didn't want to be different from everyone else.

Many different means of disposal were suggested by the informants, including cremation, donating their body to science, having the armed forces perform the ceremony, being buried beneath a tree, in a wooden box, and being thrown in the ocean. The request for cremation was made by several Catholics, even though it is not an accepted means of disposal in this religion. They justified their want for cremation in economical and ecological terms--the first being an inexpensive way of disposal, and the second because they were concerned with wasting productive soil for the use of cemeteries. Not one of the informants questioned had made explicit preparations in regard to where they wanted to be buried. Most felt that this would be taken care of by the remaining partner.

All of the individuals involved realized that a funeral is not for the person being disposed of, rather that it is for those remaining. "Funerals are for the living, just put on a nice show and send the body on to heaven." It is this "nice show" mentioned above that caused most of the informants to disagree with the contemporary type of funerals in our society. The idea that, "It's an American ceremony, just like the primitives," was prevalent throughout the entire sample. Even though the funeral is a type of ceremony or ritual, this could be accepted by most of the individuals involved if it were not for the commercialized aspect of this ritual and the expenses involved. The funeral is for the people who are remaining, and because they are within a specific social setting, they must follow the socially accepted and expected norms regarding human disposal. These methods of disposal may fluctuate depending upon the financial situation of those remaining, therefore, the ceremony may be a modest and sincere gesture of and for the family, or, through financial manipulation, a public display of status. For the

respondents in this study, the lack of economic affluence was a strong contributing factor causing the numerous responses which were negative toward funerals in the contemporary American manner. It is plausible that, in the future, as these individuals become more affluent and rise in social status, their conceptualizations and attitudes will mellow and change toward funerals and all post-death phenomena which they presently condemn.

MENTAL PREPARATION FOR DEATH AND REMARRIAGE

Prior to any forms of evaluation or depiction as to which forms of human disposal are chosen for the individual and his or her mate, the young couples involved in this study would have to first prepare themselves mentally. "I think that one should prepare themselves at least in their own mind as to what they would do if they did lose their partner." This would necessitate the ability to conceive of their own death and that of a significant other and rationally prepare for those socially acceptable post-death functions. By being prepared, the emotional burden would not interfere with the logical processes and economic investments entailed in such ceremonies.

Although none of the young couples had made any preparations concerning the type of funeral service or what they would do without the other mate, they could predict their actions and emotions after the effects of losing the mate had worn off during the course of time. In our society, as in most others, there is a socially acceptable amount of time to display personal emotions and mourn the personal loss of a loved one. The informants in this study admitted thinking that they would be extremely affected by the personal loss of their mate. However, after a

certain amount of time, they would consider remarrying. Likewise, they all felt that if they should die, the remaining mate should marry again.

She could find someone else after I die 'cause I know that if she died that I wouldn't forget her but in two years I would be married again. I wouldn't let her ruin the rest of my life by sitting around and moping about it.

The reason for this expected remarriage was basically because the informants felt that once they had been married it would be difficult to live alone.

I don't necessarily think it's our age. I think after you've been married for any length of time, say even over a year, your whole state of mind, and your whole way you want to live is geared toward another person, and it would be horribly lonely, and I think, regardless of your age, you'd probably have a tendency to marry again. Especially if you had a happy marriage--you'd want to marry again.

Another factor which would cause some of the informants to remarry would be that the children would need two parents and economic support.

I think that there's a good possibility that any time, you know, if you experience a death and if either one of us passes, I think at this age, and particularly the fact that we have a child, I think there's a good chance that I would probably ultimately remarry.

Only one factor was mentioned by the informants as a deterrent regarding remarriage--age.

Oh, I'd fully expect him to marry again--I think anybody unless they're past forty. Probably past forty they're not going to marry again. I think once a person's been married, it would be hard to go back to a completely single life.

One young wife, after hearing that her husband would want her to remarry after his death, replied that she also would want him to remarry but, with the following stipulation. "Definitely, I would want to pick the woman, but I would want it." However, when asked if they had done any pre-death preparations in regard to this aspect of remarriage, they replied negatively. From the responses concerning remarriage, it was

apparent that the young couples were capable of planning their future up to and exceeding the time of their death but were not capable or willing to consider and prepare for that one inevitable event. At one end of the living spectrum they are willing to prepare for birth which is considered a positive human function, but not for death which carried extremely negative connotations for the living.

NON-PREPAREDNESS DUE TO LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Following an extensive amount of questioning, a majority of the young couples acknowledged that they were not prepared for death. When queried as to why this situation exists, they primarily attributed their lack of preparation to this lack of knowledge about death, how to prepare for it, and whom to see for professional guidance in such matters, i.e., lawyers, morticians, and so on. One husband explained his lack of preparedness in the following manner: "I think in my case, lack of knowledge, I think I'd have to just sit down with somebody and go through it--learn myself." When asked who he thought he would have to consult for such advice, he replied, "Probably a lawyer, which we don't have right now. My hardest part would be what to say--it's tough." The previous response was not atypical of the other young couples involved in this study as none of the others had a family attorney, although the father of one young man was an attorney and another young husband interviewed was a senior in law school.

The primary concern of the wives was their lack of knowledge in regard to financial and other affairs if their husband should die. Most felt that their lack of such knowledge would jeopardize their possibilities of obtaining everything that they, as widows of the deceased, would have coming to them. This attitude may be garnered from the following

statement: "Glenn would know what to do after my death, but I really don't know what would be the first thing I would do." Also apparent in this statement was the common feeling that the male would know what to do in such an occasion. Not only were the wives concerned with their present lack of knowledge, but they also felt that they would possess more material wealth in the future with less knowledge in regard to obtaining it.

I'm looking to the future; as the longer we're married and as our income goes up, a number of these things will probably be added (trust funds, stocks, and so on) that I'll have to know about. Like my mother knows nothing about the affairs of my father.

Many of the young wives exhibiting this fear of losing everything they have coming to them had seen someone else experience a similar situation, or could foresee it happening.

Dad has always been the one to take care of that, and I'm sure he thinks that women don't need to know about things like that, and when he dies she's just going to be up a creek--she really is. She doesn't even know if he has insurance and . . .or anything. She knows nothing about it.

Although the young wives involved were aware of this lack of knowledge and realized that, in order to insure their future they must become aware of all aspects of their married life, none had tried to overcome present shortcomings. One reason given by many of the informants for their lack of preparation is well explained in the following response. "We just honestly don't think that it's going to happen to us now. We want a good life together for a while--a few years, at least." In effect, what they were trying to say is that death is conceived of by them as occurring only to the elderly or someone else. Due to their age and good health, they don't want to accept the idea that this type of permanent phenomenon may happen to them.

Well, I don't know. I wouldn't want to make too much preparation for death cause that would almost be like saying that we're pretty near death and we might be, but you want to think you've still got a long life ahead of you.

This response, which was typical of the majority of the informants, indicates that they feel by not acknowledging the fact of death and not preparing for it, they are postponing it. As one young wife stated, "We don't just live for today, but we've made long-range plans for living, not dying." Through the responses of the informants, it became apparent that only if they felt, for some reason, that they were close to death, would they prepare. "We are both pretty healthy. I am sure that if one of us had a disease, then we would have a will." Therefore, it is apparent that only when confronted in close propinquity to death did the individuals feel that they would be forced to converse and prepare themselves both mentally and economically toward such an event.

SUMMARY

The nonexistence of any normative anticipatory socialization among young married couples in regard to pre-death preparation is due primarily to their lack of mutual involvement in accepting an abstract concept such as death, and implementing means of familial preparation. The extreme reluctance of the young couples to converse with one another and their children has allowed the aspect of death to remain a topic clothed in myth and mystery. Through temporal existence, a certain amount of "knowledge of mate" did prevail though none had realistically confronted the phenomenon by exchanging intimate confidences through normal conversation. The amount of socialization and interaction which occurred between the parents and children was basically nonexistent regarding

death. Rather than attempting to interact with their children on a mature and educational level, the parents had, because of their fears and ignorance toward this phenomenon, failed to convey anything other than their own unhealthy attitudes for the children to internalize.

Equally uninformed and unprepared in this study were the students and non-students. Their lack of formal wills, coupled with the possession of only very small life insurance policies, indicated that they are not yet willing to accept death on a personal basis. Although the financial status of the young couples was the primary deterrent in the acquisition of such legal documents, likewise, their lack of knowledge regarding the obtaining of professional assistance was conceived of as a major hindrance. Although the informants had made no attempt to acquire plots, headstones, and the like, they all felt that any expenditure in regard to their funeral should be very minimal. Vehemently expressed by the informants was their dislike for the contemporary American funeral rituals and the expense involved in such ceremonies.

Although the young couples interviewed expressed their desire to remarry if their mate should die, none of them had considered preparing themselves to the extent of mutual understanding of the financial and other responsibilities which would occur upon the demise of a spouse. They rationalized their reluctance and lack of preparation for such an event through the utilization of age, health, economic expense, and their inability to accept this phenomenon as one which could involve them in this early stage of their lives. This reluctance to accept death as a potential occurrence due to individual age and certain social factors surrounding the person has also been observed by Warner.

We relate objective time to our social life and regulate much of our existence by clock and calendar. The individual,

being part of this action context, learns and internalizes it and makes it part of himself. Such 'objective' time concepts are then applied to social age status, to biological change, and to the transitional activities of the individual through the age statuses and the events of his life history. Days, weeks, months, and years, anchored to a birthday, produce a person forever measured by 'objective' time, but by a time to which he and others also attribute human values. By this means the time of the individual and the society can be named and numbered.³³

³³Lloyd W. Warner, The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans (London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 224.

Chapter 5

ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH

During this study each informant revealed various attitudes toward death and its implications for himself. "As a uniquely personal experience, the expectation of death qualifies and differentiates each self, and remains a continuous challenge to it, to make of its life what it can and must."³⁴ Although it is an individual phenomena, death involves both the interest and actions of significant others, such as the members of the family, public institutions (hospitals and funeral homes), professionals (medical personnel, morticians), as well as many other persons living in the social system in which it occurs. The degree of concern and involvement of significant others varies due to their propinquity of association with the person involved in the "death act." Reactions, feelings, and involvement differ for each social being as it does, likewise, for any individuals closely associated, but not in immediate contact with the phenomenon of death.

"PUBLIC" VERSUS "PRIVATE" WAY OF DEATH

For the purpose of this study it was stipulated that there were only two ways of confronting death--"privately" or "publicly." A "private" confrontation with death was stipulated as a death which occurs within the home and with close friends and relatives present. The

³⁴Frederick J. Hoffman, The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination (Princeton, New Jersey, 1964), p. 431.

"public" type of death was designated as occurring within a public institution such as an old peoples home, a mental institution, or a hospital. The "public" way of dying is presently predominant within our society. The responses of the husbands and wives were eventually broken down into three distinct categories: public, private, and those who did not care where they died. These three categories are illustrated in Table 3 on page 14.

Those individuals who claimed to have no preference comprised 20 percent of the entire sample; 30 percent were male and 10 percent were female. A private type of death was a category which 30 percent of the males and 60 percent of the females designated as their preference. This constituted 45 percent of the entire sample. Preference for a public type of death was chosen by 40 percent of the men and 30 percent of the women, or 35 percent of the entire sample. From these results it is noted that the majority of women (60 percent) would prefer to have a private type of death in their home. "I love my home. If I'm going to die someplace where I want to, I want to be around what I love." Or, because of their dislike of the public institutions, they made such remarks as: "In my home. I hate hospitals." Two consistently appearing reasons for disliking hospitals were the economic factors involved and the fear that, through medical technology, the hospital would prolong the phenomenon of dying.

I can't see the sense of spending that money in a hospital. I mean, I'm not attached to my home, I'd just as soon die anyplace, but a hospital--if a hospital is going to help you and cure you, then fine, but if they're just going to prolong you until you die, it's silly.

Several traditional stereotypes appeared in connection with the different ways of dying. The first concerned a public way of death.

This was the response of a young husband who felt that being in an old people's home was, in essence, admitting that death was eminent.

I don't think I'd like to be in an old person's home, though. People there are waiting to die. They have this atmosphere of death and no matter what you think of it being just a biological process, you don't want to think about your life being snuffed out and being around people who are one foot in the grave.

The second stereotype involved the private way of death; this was by associating the room a person dies in with death.

I don't know, I guess I have this thing about people associating a room with the people who die. I would think that if you died at home, the people who would still be living would always associate the bed with your body and stuff like that.

Another factor which caused the informants to dislike dying in a private situation was the idea of having their loved ones finding them after their death. Because of this, many who chose the public type of death saw it as a form of separation, thus reducing the suffering which others would have to endure in such a situation. Therefore, the public way of death is, in essence, a form of pre-separation if the aspect of death may be considered the final form of separation. Through this manner of pre-separation prior to an individual's demise, those persons remaining behind find it easier to remember the deceased as he was instead of his present state. While many of the male informants stated that it did not matter where they died, further questioning revealed that this was because they felt that instead of worrying about where they were dying, they would be concerned only with the aspect of death itself. "What I love and what I don't love is going to be the last thing on my mind. I'm going to think about me, just me." Or, as Hoffman stated from his study:

The foreknowledge of death uniquely defines the self, as distinguished from the other, if only because one's death is a uniquely individual experience. No one can die my death, nor can I die anyone else's.³⁵

DEATH OF A SIGNIFICANT OTHER OR SELF

As previously mentioned, the death of a significant other was also conceived of by the informants as a cause of extreme emotional stress. As one informant responded, "It's the part of not having this person that I want to have--and that bothers me. I don't know how long I could hold up." Present was the realization that an individual must continue to exist in a society after a loss of mate. "You don't have to die along with the person; you should have something to do, travel or something, to deaden the pain." Several of the informants felt that because they knew nothing in regard to procuring the appropriate funeral proceedings, this would also be an added emotional burden. Therefore, if such preparations were previously stipulated, much of the emotional strain would be reduced and the individual remaining would primarily have to confront a period of bereavement and readjustment.

Well, to me, the most immediate thing would be just the funeral arrangements, and after that, I don't know. It's just as if you're supposed to act as if the person that passed away never was and you gotta adjust your life again. So I wouldn't think about anything, you know, after the funeral. I would think it would be just a process of getting readjusted to living without a wife, just as if it was a divorce or something like that.

Because the informants felt that preparing was, in essence, admitting that death was going to happen to themselves and other individuals that they loved, the tendency for them to remove any such thoughts from their minds persisted throughout all of the interviews. One informant, when

³⁵Ibid., p. 430.

asked if he could realistically visualize his own death or that of his mate and children, responded:

Hell, no. No way. Oh, I know it's there, but I'm not going to work at it and this isn't considered realistic. If I was looking at it realistically I'd probably be a hell of a lot more prepared and I'd probably be going to church right now to ease my mind a little bit. It's just one of those things that you think, I'll live forever.

This informant was typical of the others involved in this study in regard to his attitude of refusing to accept that aspect of death as a personal finale. Because of the responses received in such a vein, this author feels that the findings of Choron are not valid for this age group. He states:

Investigations carried out in recent years, although limited in scope, are conclusive enough to show that the average person thinks of death much more frequently than has been generally assumed heretofore.³⁶

If Choron is considering the journalists and other contemporary writers who have indeed begun to expound more frequently and in greater depth on this topic, perhaps he is correct; as for individuals, however, this statement could not be considered valid. The age group involved in this study either refused or failed to consider such an event; their primary method of coping with the aspect of death was a firm denial of such a possibility, or, as Fulton has stated concerning conversations on this topic:

Except among the aged, death is not considered an open topic of conversation. Euphemisms and techniques of avoidance, however, are not the sole prerogatives of the general public. Complementing these evasions and euphemisms is society's expectation of stoical acceptance of death. The

³⁶ Jacques Choron, Death and Western Thought (New York: Mac-Millan Ltd., 1963), p. 272.

expression of grief or sympathy for a death is limited to time and place.³⁷

Their primary defense mechanism in coping with death is also best described by Fulton, who stated:

How do we cope with death? As never before we choose to disguise it and pretend in the meanwhile that it is not the basic condition of all life. There is no doubt that along with this temporal mindedness and scientific scepticism in America is the suppression of the idea and presence of death.³⁸

ATTITUDES TOWARD PROFESSIONALS CONCERNED WITH DEATH

Because of the informants' feelings of dislike and disgust toward contemporary funeral proceedings and their expressions of wanting to die in a private place, they were asked to give their evaluation of both doctors and morticians. Because both physicians and morticians are concerned with the aspect of human death, it was expected that the informants would have specific attitudes toward them, which they did. The majority of the responses fell into two categories, these being either admiration or contempt regarding the two types of professionals in question.

Many of the informants felt that physicians were overpaid and "out to make a fast buck," yet admitted that in certain situations they were willing to sacrifice everything they had for the services of a physician. However, the majority of the informants were of the impression that physicians should be respected for the services they perform. "For every culture has its healers, and in every culture they heal. But in every culture, the meaning of disease, health, function, and death is

³⁷Robert Fulton, Death and Identity (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965), p. 101.

³⁸Ibid., p. 100.

defined in terms of that culture."³⁹ Regardless of whether it is a shaman or a contemporary physician, how they perform, and the extent of their abilities are accepted by those in need of such services as an upper class phenomenon which is to be revered. One young wife who was a nurse felt that doctors were being unfairly accused of high prices and should command more respect from the public because of their skills.

Doctors are put in life and death situations every day of their lives, and whether or not they make a right or wrong decision is going to determine the life of that person. You know, it's not just going to teach in a school or doing an embalming and performing a ceremony or whatever they do, they're (doctors) making decisions every day of their life that can cause somebody's life or death. They're under a lot of tension, constantly--doctors in surgery spend eight or nine hours a day in surgery.

For most of the informants interviewed, doctors were not conceived of as dealing with death, but rather with postponing death. Everyone felt that it was the vocation and skills he possessed which were to be utilized to save people and that death prevailed when situations occurred which were beyond the human capabilities of the doctor. The common feeling of the informants may be seen in the following statement by one young husband.

Personally, I feel admiration toward a physician because I don't think of a physician in terms of death, well, obviously they face death in their occupation, but their purpose should be to give life or save life--prevent death.

Attitudes towards morticians fell into two distinct categories--disgust and respect. The disgust towards morticians was primarily due to the fact that they charged what the informants felt to be extremely exorbitant prices for the services that they provide. As one young wife stated, "I think for most people that I talk to, and for me, my first

³⁹ Eric J. Cassell, "Death and the Physician" Commentary, Vol. 47, No. 1, January, 1969, pp. 73-79.

reaction is, ick. How could anyone stand to be a mortician. The typical picture of a mortician is standing out there with his black outfit and his hand outstretched." This constant reoccurrence of extreme monetary expense was mentioned by all of those interviewed as the primary reason of dislike for this socially accepted profession.

I think that morticians are parasites. I really do. I think that the cost of death could easily be a hundred dollars or fifty dollars or something, and it's eleven hundred dollars now. It should be dropped back down to that fifty or one hundred dollar bracket. I think morticians are in existence as strictly parasites. I see no use for them.

Not only was the fact that the morticians were capable of extracting large sums of money for their services the cause of the informants' dislike, but also because the morticians are seen as taking this money from people who are emotionally upset and unable to reason correctly at that point in time. "Morticians, of course, have very emotional people to deal with, and that makes it very easy for them to bleed all the money out. I realize there's exceptions, but I really think it's the majority."

After most of the informants had mentioned the extreme expense and the morticians' utilization of emotional distress for their own gains, they then admitted that the mortician had to be a special type of person. Admittedly, the mortician had to possess a special makeup that allowed him to deal with distressed persons every day of his life. One informant who had personally known a mortician stated the following: "I did a research paper with a fellow who has worked as a mortician, and he enlightened me a great deal. It's just like any other job; it's a job that has to be performed in society; it's a doctor or baker." Or, as one wife said, "Without them, where are you?" It became apparent that most people conceptualized physicians and morticians as existing at opposite ends of

a continuum; doctors are seen as saving lives, while morticians are conceived of as dealing with the dead and becoming rich for their services. Through the responses of the informants, it also became apparent that, while they were aware of the services that physicians perform, they were ignorant as to the services provided by morticians. This form of ignorance had caused them to form stereotypes which were not always valid, thereby attaching a type of stigma toward this special secret society within our society.

FEAR OF DEATH

The dominant attitude prevailing throughout the responses of the individuals interviewed was the innate fear of death. Fear of death includes several attitudes such as wanting to live a long life, and, when confronted with certain death, that it be a sudden and rapid occurrence. For the age group interviewed, death is seen as a threat to their potentially productive future and is therefore ignored. As one informant stated: "We know that it can happen, but you just try to ignore it. It's kind of a threat; you can't spend a lot of time worrying about death; it's just going to happen when it happens." The majority of the informants preferred to think of their death as happening "When I'm old," therefore reducing their present fear of death through this temporal postponement. The following responses shows how one informant tried to cover his fear by the use of old age.

I don't fear, well, yes I do fear it up to a point because I know it's coming sometime; it's going to happen. I don't fear it but I would like to hold it off. I want to be 70 or 80.

Those individuals who did not utilize the factor of old age usually expressed a preference for a "quick death." "I want to go real fast. I wouldn't want to have a sickness for a long time, you know." Or, "I just hope that when it happens it will happen so fast that I just don't know that it is happening. I want to get it over with in a hurry." This individual fear expressed by the informants is, in part, another reason for their non-preparedness for death. As one informant stated:

I'd like to get it over and done with as soon as possible but, of course, you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow so once you start doing things and preparing for death, then you're acting as though it's close and you don't want to feel it's close.

What these individuals are failing to accept is that death itself is a part of the life cycle. As Choron has stated:

The argument that concern with death leads to the neglect of the concrete and urgent task of improving the human condition and promoting human welfare overlooks the fact that death too belongs to the 'human condition.'⁴⁰

ATTITUDES CONCERNING EUTHANASIA

It is perhaps the individual fear of death that has in the past caused the heated controversy over euthanasia as a socially acceptable method in medicine. All of the informants in this study maintained a positive attitude toward euthanasia, although they felt that there must be some type of control enforced by our society. Euthanasia, or mercy killing as it is more commonly known, was seen by the informants as a method of allowing a terminally ill patient to die rather than to prolong the human body in a "vegetable state" while incurring large financial

⁴⁰Choron, loc. cit.

expenses. For them, mercy killing was not the actual killing of a person, but a way of allowing them to die. The primary debate found in this topic was that it has to have some method of control, and who is going to say when a person should be allowed to die or live. A typical response is illustrated by one young wife: "Depending upon the situation, in some cases, I do. And I realize, you know, that you're not God and you can't judge, but yes, I do believe in it." It may be considered a factor here that, because of their age and present health, the informants felt that this also is not something with which they have to be concerned and therefore are not as conscious of prolonging life as an older aged group would be. Also, perhaps the fear of these individuals toward death has caused them to give answers that are not representative of considerable and deliberate thought on the subject of death, for it is true that people find certain things in life difficult to converse about. As Cameron has stated:

Despite all our conventions about modesty, most people will more readily discuss their health or their sex life than their financial affairs. It is anyone's guess whether they lie more about sex or money.⁴¹

It seems that from the responses of the sample questioned in this study, they would rather talk about any of the above rather than discuss the topic of death.

⁴¹W. B. Cameron, Informal Sociology (New York: Random House publishing Co., 1969), p. 19.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This "exploratory" research project has been conducted to study the normative forms of anticipatory socialization present among young married couples in regard to their preparation for the phenomenon of death. Those modal characteristics inherent in this type of preparation as well as the factors operating counter to pre-death preparation have been researched. Garnered from this study, besides the forms of preparation, were the conceptualizations, attitudes, and social reinforcements of stereotypes concerning social, physical, and spiritual death which existed among this youthful sample.

Through studying the responses of the informants regarding their conceptualizations of the phenomenon of death, it became apparent that this sample was unable to present considered opinions. Because of the lack of any prior consideration of this topic, as well as the lack of previous conversations on it, they had no ready responses as to their conceptualizations of death. One aspect which caused an extreme and shocking realization of death was the death of significant others of the same age group. Because of a death in this age group, the individuals interviewed admitted to sensing a nearing propinquity of such a phenomenon for themselves. Each informant, when conceptualizing his own eventual demise, did in fact define that aspect of life which they considered the most threatening. For many individuals this study initiated the first conversation regarding death that they had ever had.

During such conversations it became evident that there is a specific way in which to converse on such a topic.

When conversing about death, the interviewer and interviewees assume certain roles which facilitate in reducing their reluctance to converse on this specific topic. Simultaneously, they become extremely cautious in the formulation of words and meanings so as not to exceed the boundaries of what they believe is socially correct and acceptable. Mannerisms appear which not only guard expressions and ideas, but create an atmosphere of pseudo-ceremony. Throughout this differentiating procedure of explanation appears what Van Gennep discerned in his studies.

During most ceremonies and especially during transition periods, a special language is employed which in some cases includes an entire vocabulary unknown or unusual in the society as a whole, and in others consists simply of a prohibition against using certain words in the common tongue.⁴²

Most frequently appearing throughout this present study was the utilization of the word "it" in place of the word "death." Not only was the phenomenon of death disdained by the individuals involved in this study, but likewise any death-related terms or concepts.

Complex societies must have a common core of basic understanding known and used by everyone or their complex and diverse symbolic superstructures will not stand. They need general symbol systems that everyone not only knows, but feels. The increasing structural diversity and social complexity of contemporary society, the greater development of individual autonomy, the proliferation of specialized symbol systems--these and many other factors raise serious difficulties for communication and collaboration.⁴³

⁴²Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 169.

⁴³Lloyd W. Warner, The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans (London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 233.

It is apparent from this study that certain traditional institutions have not been utilized in performing their social functions within our society, the major contributor in this neglect has been the nuclear family. All of the informants in this study evidenced that their present attitudes and beliefs toward death were, in fact, initiated by both their social and parental upbringing. The parental influence has been caused by not conversing about death, or what may be properly called an accepted topic of omission. Because of this lack of parent-child conversation regarding death, it is evident that what is needed is a type of formal education for all family members, as the family unit in the past has been unable to fulfill the socially important role in order to dispel the contemporary myths, fears, and uncertainties which exist in our society.

Because of technological innovation, family members often cannot use their personal history as a base of handling all problems (e.g., newest techniques for handling children, how to deal with new norms on dating, etc.). In a rapidly changing society, it is not enough for two adults to have only each other to draw upon.⁴⁴

Therefore, it is not only the function of some agency of education to perform this neglected role concerning death and its related phenomena, but also that of the sociologist to research and then communicate with the society it has studied in order to alleviate misconceptions and instill a valid concept of death.

The utilization of religion to dispel fears of death was a factor which was not implemented by those young couples interviewed. Less than

⁴⁴Eugene Litwak and Ivan Szelenyi, "Primary Group Structures and Their Functions: Kin, Neighbors, and Friends," American Sociological Review, Vol. 34, No. 4, August, 1969, p. 469.

10 percent of those interviewed admitted to attending religious services frequently, therefore, the factor of institutionalized religion was not utilized by them to explain death or to relieve its fears. This does not mean that they are anti-religious, only that they are against the present form of "institutionalized religion" which they have observed in contemporary society. Religion, for the young married couples in this study, was seen as a type of reinforcement even though they were incapable of explaining exactly what it was or in what manner it was utilized to help them individually confront the aspect of death. The findings of this study are not basically different from other studies which have found similar attitudes toward attendance of religious services. Hastings and Hoge found that from 1948 to 1967 the college students' religious beliefs had become liberalized and their religious practices had, at the same time, diminished.⁴⁵

The "temporary" and "permanent" types of residence were conceived of by those interviewed as having an effect on both the type and the amount of pre-death preparation. Over 80 percent of the sample felt that persons living in a temporary setting would be less capable of and concerned with pre-death preparation. Conversely, those persons living in a permanent situation were seen as capable of affording the expenses involved and also as interested in such preparation due to their financial acquisitions. Although the informants in this study stated that the permanent type of residence would be a major contributing factor for pre-death preparation, there were virtually no differences between the young

⁴⁵Philip K. Hastings and Dean R. Hoge, "Religious Change Among College Students Over Two Decades," Social Forces, Vol. 49, No. 1, September, 1970, pp. 16-28.

married students and non-students, as none had extensively prepared themselves for their eventual demise.

The primary reason for the lack of any form of normative anticipatory socialization was due to their refusal to accept death as an immediate threat and thereby institute any form of preparation. It is due to this reluctance to accept the phenomenon of death on a personal level that the families had never conversed regarding this topic. Although none of the couples had exchanged their attitudes and concepts of death through normal conversation, after a time span of five years or more they were aware to some extent, through "knowledge of mate," what the other would prefer should death occur. Unfortunately, this "knowledge of mate" did not involve their children who were left on their own to learn or internalize the unhealthy attitudes and fears of their parents. Because the young couples admitted to acquiring their present fears and myths regarding death from their parents, it is plausible that their children will learn in a like manner from them through the everyday functions of the nuclear family.

At first the child does something or refrains from doing something only at the express command or admonition of his parents. What is internalized in the early years of life are the attitudes and behavior configurations of the parents. This is the deepest layer to which are added others from peers and other people whom he meets and likes. However, the basic strength of this socially tabooed phenomenon may be conceived of as initiated and reinforced through the parent-child transmissions. Throughout the period of growth and learning, the child, by being close to the parents and through their propinquitous relationship, becomes socially hardened in such an area. Although the society in

which the child is raised is not a biological part of him, it does persist in being a constant imposition upon him; from this it is apparent that those functions, ideas, and so on are all socially inherited. While direct expressions are always easily discernible within a society, this does not hold true for those that are indirect and covert. Each society provides multitudinous forms of interaction for the individual and the group, so that they may ultimately maintain and sustain themselves. If not, it must be surmised that a society will have to inherently provide more satisfaction than frustration for its members, or contrive secondary satisfactions which will exist in major frustrations. In this situation, children must filter out their own solutions to problems in largely unconscious fashion from the societal material which is available to them, or, basically from the representations by the individuals with whom they interact most intimately. If, however, certain societal phenomenon are evaded or glossed over rather than explained, it is only natural that there be a combination of bewilderment, fear, and resentment toward such an event even though it persists daily within the immediate surroundings of each individual.

According to Queen et. al.,⁴⁶ it may be safely assumed that children during the Roman era learned of death at a much earlier age due to the brief life span of the average individual at that time. In our society with a long life span it becomes apparent that information regarding certain social phenomenon may well be deferred until a later date in life. In the course of this study not one family had actually sat down with

⁴⁶Stuart A. Queen, Robert W. Hubenstein, John B. Adams, The Family In Various Cultures (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1961), pp. 163-179.

their children and discussed any factors involved in death. While some parents did make attempts to explain that it is the ultimate social and biological process of living things, they consistently evaded any explicit discussion of human termination and the possibilities of such a phenomenon occurring within their nuclear family.

It has been said that thought is talk and it is true that communication is essential to the development of intelligence. This thinking involves other than the bio-mechanical functions of man, his affective organization, or, rather, his emotional life. Any form of effective intellectual functioning requires the harmonious flow of his emotions. As a man in society expresses himself and his emotions, he is at the same time expressing that society of which he is a member. It then arouses us to consider the option: If man can now evade communication in regard to a social process such as death, is that man and the society in which he exists truly rational? It does seem acceptable that if man were able to conceptualize and discuss his eventual demise without the stigma attached that is similar to that found regarding sex twenty years ago, he, through his intellectual processes, would be capable of obtaining a meaningful justification and simultaneously obtain a deeper realization of life as a whole. Or, as Warner has stated, "The limitations of the species, and the actual extension of its capabilities into experience and environment (accepting available stimuli), provide the limits of knowing."⁴⁷

Not only was this sample unprepared to consider or converse on the topic of death, they were also equally uninformed and unprepared in

⁴⁷Warner, op. cit., p. 225.

regard to obtaining legal and/or professional assistance. As the financial status was the primary deterrent of the sample in this study, it was also the primary consideration of the individuals in regard to obtaining the type of funeral proceedings they would prefer. It appeared that even if they should possess the financial assets to provide themselves with an elaborate and expensive funeral, they would refrain from such a purchase. One reason for this is that they maintained an aversion toward funeral directors without possessing a true conception of what it is that the funeral director does. The role of the funeral director has, in the last few generations, developed very rapidly and is likely to continue to increase in the social area it controls. Contemporary funeral directors have developed a special social role by satisfying a need for which those in distress are willing to pay. Basically, he is a private entrepreneur who will do the ritually unclean and physically distasteful work of disposing of the dead in a manner satisfying to the living, at a price which they can pay. He hires employees, drivers, and other skilled workers, and by steadily increasing the size of his work force and the effectiveness of his sales organization, enlarges his business, profits, and importance in the community.⁴⁸

It is evident, therefore, that it is not only in regard to death but also toward phenomena associated with the "death act" that people have conjured many myths and falsehoods. Only through the continuing efforts of sociological research in tabooed areas such as death will our society acquire the factual knowledge which will displace fear and myth with understanding and reason. T. H. Huxley once wrote:

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 512.

'It is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies and to end in superstition.' Many of the alleged 'truths' or more accurately 'pretensions' about the development of American public education would seem headed for the scrapheap of superstition in the Huxlian sense.⁴⁹

It is one of the duties of the sociologist to displace such superstitions within our society, by informing professionals and laymen alike of all new findings which may, if incorporated into the social order, provide a smoother functioning society. If such a task is undertaken and fulfilled, then at least half of the often-quoted dictum by La Rochefoucauld will be disproven, for the benefit of our society.

"Neither the sun nor death can be looked
at with a steady eye."

La Rochefoucauld - 1613-80

⁴⁹Frederick E. Ellis, "Adult Education," The Annals, March, 1969, p. 181.

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SAMPLE INTERVIEW

Interview #10

Age: M-29 F-28

Education: Second year of graduate school

Socio-economic Status: Lower middle

- I: Have you been in immediate contact with death within your family within the past year--or a close friend?
- M: Not within my immediate family; my grandmother passed away within the past year, three or four months ago--and Uncle Wynn.
- I: Did this in any way cause you to think about your own eventual demise?
- M: Well, I think that any time you experience death or read about the death of someone you know of in the paper, you have a tendency to think about your own ultimate passing.
- F: Subconsciously, too, I think, shortly afterward, shortly after Barry's grandmother died, he immediately came rushing out in the living room and informed me that we had to have more insurance, so we'd better start sitting down and talking about it. So I think maybe Wynn's death and Grandma's death had something to do with that.
- M: There's an impact on your own thought in regard to death every time you--I even think about it occasionally when I just read about somebody passing away that I knew.
- I: What is your concept of death?
- M: I think it's just an end to existence as we know it. And I can't really speculate any further than that. I don't have any beatific visions of what will happen after my passing and I think that this is pretty much it, right here, and after this existence is over with, unless there's a great soul pool in the sky or something where I'll come back as a ladybug or something, that's probably about it.
- F: I agree, basically.
- I: Have you ever sat down and talked it over with each other as far as say, like, have you got a will?
- F: Yes.
- I: You both have?
- M: We have a joint will.
- F: But it stipulates what would happen if either or the other of us dies before the other does or jointly. We also have an insurance policy on Kurt's life and on my life and on Barry, of course.

- I: Then at some time or other you've probably talked about what you'd like to have done to each other if you die; if you'd like to be shipped back home or buried here or what type of burial.
- F: Right.
- M: Yes, well, it's not a subject that comes up in our conversation all that frequently, but I think we talked about it, I know, at my grandmother's funeral we talked about how we'd like our bodies to be disposed of, you know, the fact that we both would prefer cremation, to be planted on some desolate prairie somewhere.
- I: This cremation would involve--
- M: I think in my case I would much prefer cremation and then just having the ashes scattered to the four winds.
- F: Yes, I agree. Or buried beneath the tree. I wouldn't mind that.
- I: I know one woman said she wanted to be buried and put into a vault with perpetual care because she knew her husband would never come back to a grave when she was buried. And she said she'd want him to remarry but she'd want to pick the woman out before she died. Do you think that if anything should happen now that either one of you would remarry again?
- M: I think that there's a good possibility that any time--you know, if you experience a death and if either one of us passes, I think at this age, and particularly the fact that we have a child, I think there's a good chance that I would probably ultimately remarry.
- F: I don't necessarily think it's our age. I think after you've been married for any length of time, say even over a year, your whole state of mind and your whole way you want to live is geared toward another person, and it would be horribly lonely, I think, and regardless of your age, you'd probably have a tendency to marry again. Especially if you had a happy marriage, you'd want to marry again.
- I: What are your religions?
- M: I guess ostensibly Congregationalists--Protestants.
- F: Well, Barry can say that, I'm going to say agnostic because I don't--
- M: Well, basically my feelings tend toward Unitarianism or agnosticism, probably, but in terms of writing, you know, when you have a form and have to put religion down, I put Protestant for the sake of expediency.
- I: Do you attend church frequently or infrequently?
- M and F: How about, not at all?

- I: It's not uncommon. Do you think that your basic knowledge of religion has influenced your outlook towards death in any way, as far as going to heaven and the hereafter, comforted you in any way?
- F: No, I can't say comforted, I can say affected. The way I feel about religion has definitely affected the way I feel about what's going to happen after I die. I don't believe in a heaven or a hell per se. I don't think I'm going to burn forever or go to some great paradise in the sky.
- M: I have to say that my knowledge of religious affairs and the fact that I was brought up in a religious atmosphere and religious surroundings and was more or less compelled to attend both church and Sunday school in the course of my upbringing, has sort of had a negative influence on my view of what you might term, in quotes, an afterlife. I would, I think basically because of my upbringing, I just feel that what I learned about religion and when I apply the practical knowledge of the world that I've gained to that learning, I just can't see that it holds much water.
- I: Do you feel that you had an oversaturation of religion when you were young that almost gave you an adverse attitude?
- M: Oh, I wouldn't characterize it as an oversaturation, but I think that my exposure was more than adequate, and just from my exposure with people who are religious, again in quotes, you know, people who profess to be religious, I certainly wouldn't model my life after the people that I have known who profess to be very religious individuals.
- I: Bigots?
- M: Not only bigots but people whose ethical values aren't that high, and they're standards aren't that high, but somehow everything is sort of exploited by the fact that they go to church.
- I: Do you think that your family in any way has influenced your attitude towards death? I've had some people say that death is a taboo topic--you don't talk about it, and I've had other people who say that they feel as though they're willing to accept their own death--conceptualize their own death.
- F: That's kind of a hard question to answer, I guess maybe my family has influenced me. Death wasn't exactly taboo, but in the whole time that I was growing up, nobody that I was ever close to has ever died so the occasion has never really arisen. Oh, my grandfather died when I was about five, but other than that, all my close relatives, and my family is really small, are still living, so the occasion has never arisen or my parents haven't made it arise to discuss.
- M: I can't recall ever having any extended discussions in my family, just the kind of thing you talk about in sort of hushed tones; it doesn't ever become philosophical, usually it arises because of an

- M: (continued) occasion of a death in the family, and then it's in the context of that person's life who's passed, and you don't ever philosophize about what's going to happen when you go or Dad goes or Mom goes.
- I: Do you think that you're capable of conceptualizing your own death or that of your mate?
- F: That's a hard question. I don't know--I never really thought about it that much.
- M: I've tried to imagine what my emotional state would be if Sandy should pass through some sort of untoward circumstances, if she should, like, be killed in a car wreck or something like that and what I would do in trying to raise my family, or raise Kurt. And, I don't know, it's just not something you can think very rationally about. I don't think--it's purely emotional terms, you think that a void would exist in your life; there would definitely be a short-term, excruciating sadness and sorrow, I'm sure, but it's very difficult for me to visualize what the long-term effects of the death of the mate would be like.
- I: I think you can mentally stipulate what you'd do now, and after the occasion arose you'd be overtaken by emotion anyhow. In your will, then, you have stipulated as far as care of your son in case both of you should die simultaneously? Is that someone in your family--like one of your mothers?
- M: Both mothers. In the event of their demise before our demise, it's stipulated that the living parent will take him, or our living parent will take the child. My mother first, then her parents.
- F: We wrote it that way because my parents are a lot older than Barry's. Then if both parents die there'd be Linda and Fred--that's my sister and brother.
- I: Now, would you say that in your family death was a taboo topic, held in secrecy, or when the situation arises do you talk about it?
- M: You mean within our own immediate family? I think there's a reluctance in our relationship to discuss death; I know Sandy doesn't like to talk about it.
- F: It's really hard for me to imagine any kind of life without Barry, and if we're discussing death in relation to anything, even a dog or anything, I immediately transfer all these feelings to how I would feel without Barry, so I try to avoid it which is not very intelligent or very smart. But it's really a hard subject, what do you do? You sit down in your chair and say, okay, let's talk about death and dying. You know, it's just not something that you want to---
- I: In terms of a mortician, though, you should get these things planned ahead of time in terms of buying plots, etc., and I don't suppose you've done any plot buying.

- F: No. If we're being cremated we don't need---
- M: Somehow that's not a very great concern.
- I: Not when you're trying to figure out where you're going to get your next dollar for food.
- F: It's a little hard to think about buying a plot when you can't buy a quart of milk.
- I: What are your attitudes towards physicians, morticians, and executioners--persons who are in close contact with death all the time? How do you feel towards them?
- M: Personally, I feel admiration toward a physician because I don't think of a physician in terms of death. Well, obviously they face death in their occupation, but their purpose should be to give life or save life--prevent death. I think everyone has sort of a morbid concept of a mortician or a coroner, or someone who is associated with this kind of a task, but I had a relationship this past summer with a fellow, I did research on a paper with a fellow who has worked as a mortician, and he enlightened me a great deal. It's just like any other job, it's a job that has to be performed in a society. It's like collecting doctors and having a lawyer, and a baker and a butcher.
- F: Then too, you had close experience with one, but I think for most people that I talk too, and for me, my first reaction is, ick. How could anyone stand to be a mortician. The typical picture of a mortician is standing out there with his black outfit and his hand outstretched.
- M: I think the most personally repugnant capacity that I can think of would be to be a physician who performs autopsies for the county or for the state or whatever. Frankly, I don't think I could perform that kind of function nor study eviserated people.
- I: If you had your choice, would you rather die at home or in the hospital?
- F: Oh, wow, hard question!
- M: Like the Texas cowboy, I'd like to die with my boots on. I'm not particularly concerned with where.
- F: I don't care. I don't think it would make that much difference to me. If you're going to die, what difference does it make where you die, really.
- I: Well, when you think about that, a lot of people would rather die in the hospital, away from the home where their children would see them and the rest of the relatives would be moping around. And other people would rather be at home because they feel they'd be a burden on the hospital attendants even though that's their job.

- F: And a burden on your family, too, financially, if you're going to think about it that way. That question is another question that's really hard to project because then you have to think of yourself as dying, and I feel that I'm much too young to even consider that for the fact that my child would have to be around watching me die wouldn't enter into my mind yet because I plan to live at least another hundred years.
- I: Most people think that they're immortal at least until they're ninety and then they've got at least a good ten years yet. When you say that you're too young to die, what's the age of death?
- F: Oh, no. That just goes back to the theory of what you said. You know, everybody thinks they're immortal.
- I: I know, but when do you think a family or a person should prepare for death?
- F: In terms of wills and things like that? I think shortly after you're married; that's when we did it, shortly after we were married and we were anticipating the birth of a child.
- M: It's my feeling that the most important time to make financial arrangements for death should be when your family is young. I'm certainly not going to be very concerned about what happens when we're in the post 55-60 year age range, because I figure if I should die and pass out of the picture when I'm 60 and Sandy's near 60, her life expectancy is another 10 years, and hopefully by that time we'll have enough insurance and an accumulation of property to take care of her. To me, the major concern would be right now, but we're just not in the financial position to be prepared like we should be.
- I: Do you think it makes any difference at all between having a temporary and a permanent residence. Like temporary is in the student housing or for a person in the same age range who has his own home, as far as their preparing for death--wills?
- M: It means you think there's a correlation between being more prepared and having a home and less prepared--
- F: I think so. I would say yes, probably.
- M: It would be sort of difficult to characterize students in general as being the type of people that would have a permanent residence for one thing, but I think as a class they're probably ill-prepared. Our age range of people, in the 25-30 age range, we're still students, take our contemporaries that didn't go to college, they're probably people who've accumulated some substance now if they're a plumber or a mill worker or whatever, they probably have their own home--they're thinking ahead in economic terms a little bit more than us. They're not maybe thinking ahead more, but they're financially capable of preparing themselves more.

- I: I wondered about this when I started and I took a sample of non-students in our same age group, and what seemed to be the basic reason for having insurance or even thinking about a will were the material things--color TV, house, car, and way down on the list were the children, and I thought that children would be one of the main things, and I thought that students living in student housing, because they're scraping for money anyway, wouldn't be able to afford wills, and most of the people I've talked to that have had wills got them free.
- F: We didn't.
- I: It seems to be an economic factor as far as can you afford a will, or are you willing to part with the money at that time--fifty dollars.
- M: The fact of the matter is that our will is probably woefully outdated now because it speaks in very general terms and it was drafted probably three or four years ago and it needs sorely to be updated. In fact, as a matter of principle, I think everyone who has a will should update it periodically.
- I: Can you think of any way that a young married couple should prepare for death? Tell me how you think they should prepare for death.
- F: You mean other than the will and the plot?
- M: I kind of think it goes back to our previous discussion about it. It's not the kind of thing you sit down and say, well, let's talk about death this Saturday night because we don't have anything else to do, and, you know, the ultimate disposition of our bodies and what we're going to do with everything. In economic terms, I think everyone should think about the potentiality of one of the partners passing and I think insurance is important, too.
- F: Another thing I think a lot of families don't do, the husband will die and the wife knows nothing of the financial affairs, nothing of the insurance arrangements, nothing about anything. The only thing she knows is that her husband is dead and she doesn't have any money and she doesn't know how to make sure the insurance company isn't cheating her or how to make sure that her credit life on all her things are paid up or how to get the money for the trust funds for her children, and that's one area where I think Barry is really very good. He always wants me to understand everything about our insurance policies or how to go about collecting them with the minimum amount of trouble; how to go about collecting things like our credit life, things like that.
- I: Do you have a lawyer or anything like this that you can go to?
- M: No, we don't have a family attorney as such.
- F: But I at least know enough about how to go about getting an attorney, and really, it's amazing the number of people that don't.

- M: Our property really isn't substantial enough to warrant an attorney's attention. If I should die, obviously my estate is going to have to be probated, but what it's going to amount to is a couple of life insurance policies which are not that difficult to collect on and the credit life paying off both our home and our car, so that's all it comes down to and we certainly don't have any great trust funds laying around or--
- F: But I'm looking to the future as we're married longer and as our income goes up, a number of these things will probably be added that I'll have to know about. Like my mother knows nothing about the affairs of my father.
- I: Well, that happened to my mother, too.
- F: Absolutely nothing. Dad has always been the one to take care of that and I'm sure he thinks that women don't need to know about things like that, and when he dies she's just going to be up a creek, she really is. She doesn't even know if he has insurance or anything--she knows nothing about it.
- I: I just wondered why people can't sit down and talk about it. I know that my wife and I haven't sat down and talked about it, until within the last year. I'd thought about it a lot myself because I've never thought of myself--I don't think I'm going to have a very long life, you know, I don't feel lucky. And I often thought about these things that she'll have to do and what lawyer to contact and wills, but I wonder why it is that people can't sit down and talk about it and inform each other what to do.
- M: And you know it seems like it's sort of a natural concomitant of life. There are two things sure in this world--death and taxes, and you certainly talk about taxes frequently enough and I think in my own personal circumstances, I'm not afraid to sit down and talk about it, in fact, I broach the subject occasionally, but Sandy doesn't like to consider the emotional impact it would have on her and on the family if I should get killed.
- I: How do you visualize a death right now? How do you think you would go?
- M: In terms of my life I think it would undoubtedly be by accident. I think the state of my health is good. Car accident is the most likely contingency. I certainly don't expect to be walking down the street some day and drop dead of a heart attack because I know that basically I'm in fairly good physical health.
- I: It's not uncommon--most of the women that I've talked to just don't want to talk about death, and they'll come right out and say I'm afraid of it; I don't like to talk about it; I don't like to think of it. And by the time the interview is over, I usually can't turn them off.
- M: Yes, great emotional catharsis.

- I: Yes, it really builds up. Funerals are for the living anyway, and there's a certain amount of status attached to the coffin, so it's very hard to speculate.
- M: I think it's something that has to be discussed in every family unit, and probably isn't discussed routinely in the average family and I guess we're probably no exception.
- I: What do you think a person should do to stimulate people to think about it and talk about it?
- M: I suppose in terms of financial preparation for passing, probably the best thing you can do is consult an attorney, I suppose, would be one good method of preparing and making sure of your life insurance and if it is adequate for your young family and that you have some diversity of income and that you have some means of providing for your children's education, and this kind of thing. But just in bare terms of getting across to the general public at large that they should just sit down man to woman and talk the matter out and say, in the event of my death I want you to do A, B, C, D, I can't think of any real . . .