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Natural death in The West Australian newspaper

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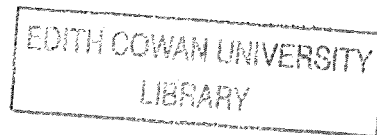
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Natural death
In
The West Australian
newspaper



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12th June 2006

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the way *The West Australian* presents natural death to its readers.

Previous research involving death notices and obituaries has focused on gender and numerical analysis. There are hundreds of books dealing with death, covering legal, biological, physical, sociological and spiritual aspects of death, but books on death in the media tend to skirt around natural death. The diverse areas of death research fail to postulate a common definition of natural death. A similar diversity of views exists on the good death and the concepts surrounding life after death. This encourages the analysis of material from daily life, such as death notices, obituaries and editorial content, to add a contemporary interpretation of the way death is presented in *The West Australian*.

As a research basis, 24 consecutive issues of *The West Australian* in February 2005 have been used. This yielded 33 obituaries, 57 articles dealing with natural death, 4046 death notices and led to the categorising of 11216 text elements under fourteen headings. During the collection of the data four major themes emerged: the “good death”, the loss suffered by the family, the social context and the hope for a life after death.

Confirming previous studies, males receive more attention after death. Death notices, which are placed by friends and relatives of the deceased, focus on the person. Obituaries focus on the life and achievements of the deceased, whilst editorial content dealing with natural death focuses on the manner of dying, the disease that has caused death. Society’s preoccupation with longevity is not reflected in death notices – the older a person dies, the less they are missed, and the less death notices they receive. The difficulty of accepting death is manifested in the high proportion of death notices that address the deceased as if he or she were still alive, or notices containing reference to religion, suggesting widespread hope for a life after death.

Neither death notices nor obituaries or articles dealing with natural death give clear indications if the people die a good death. Where obituaries mention death at home, it is invariably in a positive tone. The material reveals death notices as describing *who* a person is; they describe, in varying degrees, position in the family, friends, personality and enumerate the ways in which a person is missed. Obituaries and editorial material dealing with natural death describe people in terms of their achievements, their jobs, and their position in society. They describe *what* a person is.

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“Our talk about death has a very real impact on how we die”

(Bradbury, 1999, p.2).

1 Introduction

In today’s society, natural death, just like natural birth, is largely ignored, if not denied. Yet we will all die. Both birth and death have moved from the home to institutions. The media, this most persuasive channel of information, influence the way we live and the manner of our death. The way birthing is reported as a medical rather than a natural event has led to most women giving birth in an institution, subject to unnecessary medical interference. If natural death is sparingly reported, the understanding of death is decreased and chances of dying a good death are reduced.

This thesis analyses the way *The West Australian* presents natural death to its readers. It will look at the death notices, editorial content and obituaries to investigate how *The West Australian* deals with natural death. Death notices and obituaries can express local characteristics (Kastenbaum, Peyton, & Kastenbaum, 1976, p. 358), but some of the findings of this study could be useful beyond the local context. The thesis investigates how often death notices, obituaries and editorial content dealing with death appear in the paper, and scrutinises how they are worded and what information they contain. Robert Kastenbaum (1976) states that “obituaries might be regarded as a ... conservative representation of social values, relatively untouched by emerging trends or passing fashions” (Kastenbaum et al., 1976, p. 356). Death notices, obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death are part of our funeral rites, and it is relevant to observe how these rites evolve. Bradbury (1999) identifies the placing of (death) notices in papers as a “significant social custom in contemporary London” (1999, p. 189). Kastenbaum (2004) suggests that absence of funeral rituals leads to increased violence amongst the living (Kastenbaum, 2004, p. 259). He also indicates that “neglect [of the dead] easily fuzzes over into abuse. And abuse of the dead tends to fuzz over into abuse of the living” (Kastenbaum, 2004, p. 191).

To examine the issues surrounding the presentation of natural death in *The West Australian*, this introductory section argues that the concept of natural death is denied not only in much of the print media, but also in society at large. The literature review (chapter 2) looks at previous

studies in related areas, reviews research material surrounding natural death and attempts to define the term “natural death”. The methodology (chapter 3) outlines the approach taken in collecting and analysing the research material. The content of the material, the death notices, articles and obituaries are then tabulated and examined quantitatively (chapter 4). Chapter five observes the material from a qualitative view point, focusing on the good death, familial and social context of the deceased and references to life after death. To facilitate convenient comparisons between the quantitative and qualitative components, chapters four and five have the same structure. Chapter six summarises and reflects on the findings.

In the light of the wide-spread cultural denial of natural death, and the invisibility of natural death, it is relevant to examine how these issues may influence this thesis.

1.1 The denial of natural death

Everybody dies, and for most people it will be a natural death.¹ Each month about one thousand people die in West Australia². Most people have an uneventful birth and a similarly uneventful death; neither of these events is normally recounted in a daily newspaper. The selection of stories in the daily press generally follows news values³. Natural death could be included in the newsworthiness category “human interest”, but the final mix of stories selected for publication included in a paper will reflect the policies of a newspaper and the choices of its editors (Gans, 2003, pp. 64 - 65). In today’s world, it is the media that tells us how to live. Communication is seen as the core process of cultural change, creating and reflecting cultural values (M. Anderson & Taylor, 2006, p. 78). The print media informs us about what is normal or exceptional within the community we are living in. Birth and death are the most basic cultural events in our life, and the denial of natural death in the print media leaves us poorly prepared when we approach our own deaths.

In the daily press natural death is visible in paid death notices, the occasional obituary and sometimes it is editorialised. Seale (2002) talks about the hiding away of death in late modern societies and asserts that “media images of death acquire a particular importance as sources of information about what causes death and what it might be like to die” (Seale, 2002, p. 45). When Walter, Littlewood, & Pickering (1995a) look at the extraordinary deaths of otherwise ordinary citizens, they assert that “when it comes to death, journalists and photographers are in

¹

About 6% of people in Australia die from external causes (accidents, poisonings and violence) (ABS, 2006).

² 11404 people died in WA in 2005 (Department, 2006)

the forefront of psychological instruction". In the same publication, which deals with death in the news, he states:

Given the centrality ... of the media for any understanding of death in modern society, the new sociologists of death should speedily put cultural representation and responses on their research agenda, as should media researchers. ... Until such research is done, theoretical assertions by Aries, Giddens, Mellor and Shilling on the repression of death in modernity should be treated with considerable caution. (Walter et al., 1995a, p. 579).

Beyond casual conversations – and death is not a riveting topic at parties - death notices, obituaries and the occasional article affect our views on natural death and are the main sources of public information available about ordinary people dying an ordinary death.

1.2 Natural death is unseen

Material relating to natural death is not only hard to find in the printed press; it is also hidden in our society. Referring to death, Kenneth Iserson (1994) comments: "It is always disturbing when important areas of human existence are hidden away from public view" (Iserson, 1994, p. 2). Many people can live well beyond middle age and never actually see a dead person. Death is an unknown, and distant, event, not of consequence today or tomorrow. There is concern with living and health, and a predisposition to ignore the certainty of death. Professor Kellehear (2001) states that Australians see death as a failure of health and suggests that they are "empty of ideas" about how dying is to be done (Kellehear, 2001, p. 508). In an interview in *The Bulletin*, Associate Professor Ian Dadour, of the University of Western Australia, talks about the Australian attitude to death and suggests that: "We are not educated as kids in death. As we go through life and approach death, it's like: 'What the hell is going on?' Our culture doesn't talk about it" (Carlyon, 2006, p. 26). Death needs to be hidden even in those institutions where it is a common occurrence. In a recent private conversation a funeral director recalled how their employees pick up bodies from nursing homes. The nursing staff would turn the wheelchairs of the residents to make them face the wall while the dead person was wheeled past to avoid them having to observe the event. Kastenbaum talks about the deceased sometimes being exorcised from the surroundings as if he or she had never existed, and the institutions using distancing rituals beyond what would be necessary for medical reasons (Kastenbaum, 2004, pp. 187 - 188). Kastenbaum (2004) has his own anecdote about a resident in a nursing home, who wakes up one morning and at breakfast misses his best friend in the home. Wandering around the wards, he sees the staff avoiding the area around his friend's bed, and avoiding any mention of him. "Mr.

³ The factors in newsworthiness include: timeliness, proximity, exceptional quality, possible future impact, prominence, conflict, the number of people involved or affected, consequence, human interest, pathos, shock value and titillation component (*Twelve Factors in Newsworthiness on(Cyber_College_Internet_Campus, 2006)*

G [the resident] knew the drill. When a resident died, one must behave as though that person had never lived” (Kastenbaum, 2004, pp. 186 - 187).

Arguably, the printed press mirrors the attitudes of their readers when it pays little attention to natural death, relegating it to the back pages and the paid line advertisements. At a subliminal level, natural death is associated with bad deeds and sin, making it a topic to shun. As Kübler-Ross states: “In our subconscious mind we can only be killed, it is inconceivable to die of a natural cause or old age. Therefore death itself is associated with a bad act” (Kübler-Ross, 1992, p.16). Christianity brought in the idea that disease, and by extension death, is connected to sin and is a punishment. The Bible teaches that prayer and laying on of hands will cure sickness and remove sin in the same procedure. Consider James 5:14 – 15: “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven” (*Christian Workers Holy Bible*, 1895). The association of death with sin and punishment is supported by statements by the physician Georg Groddeck: (“The sick man himself creates his disease”) and the author Franz Kafka (who had tuberculosis) said “I am mentally ill, the disease of the lungs is nothing but an overflowing of my mental disease” (Sontag, 1991, p. 55). If disease is the fault of the person who is sick, then death is the ultimate punishment.

Is death hidden in our society? Dr. Tony Walter discusses the academic material about death and describes it as “death at a remove, death abstracted, intellectualised, professionalised and depersonalised” (Walter, 1991a, p. 295). He cites Gorer’s 1955 comment on the pornography of death: “A society that refuses to talk of death personally becomes obsessed with horror comics, war movies and disasters” (Walter, 1991a, p. 295). He sees the exclusion of humanity as a chief characteristic of pornography (Walter et al., 1995a, p. 581). Conversely, Prior (1989) argues that there is a well established public realm surrounding death, with death made visible through the work of medical practitioners, coroners and police (Prior, 1989, p. 1). Death is visible and understood once it has happened, but the conflicting emotions of the survivors create a fog around the act of dying. Death notices in a standardised, stereotypical form may be an expression of this refusal to let death touch us personally.

Academic research about death is extensive, and is useful for examining death in an intellectualised way. In the next chapter, some of that research is used to discuss academic material relating to natural death. This will prepare the way to investigate the ordinary expression of death in the death notices, obituaries and editorial content in *The West Australian*.

2 Review of Literature

The review of the available literature starts by looking at studies involving death notices conducted in 1976 and 1981. It then expands to look at material relating to media and death, and general literature on death. Attempts to define natural death are addressed in a separate section. The “good death” and resurrection are two themes relating to natural death that recur right through death literature from medical, humanitarian, moral and legal perspectives. These items might find expression in death notices, obituaries or editorial material, and are briefly explored in separate sections in the literature review.

While there is a large body of work on death⁴, there seems to be little work done on the portrayal of death in the media. Walter (1995) states: “Neither media researchers nor sociologists interested in death have looked at its portrayal in the media; careful content and textual analysis ... has not been done” (Walter et al., 1995a, p. 586)⁵.

2.1 Previous studies

In 1976 the *Omega journal of death and dying* published a study by Kastenbaum, Peyton and Kastenbaum (Kastenbaum et al., 1976). 3762 death notices and 487 obituaries published in March 1975 in the *New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* were examined for possible sex bias. The study found that males were 4 times more likely than females to be honoured with an obituary (80.5% versus 19.5%). While death notices in *The West Australian* are normally placed by relatives and friends of the deceased, death notices in the two American papers were typically placed by the funeral director in a highly standardised form, one advertisement per deceased. This enabled Kastenbaum et al (1976) to establish the gender relationship of the deceased (51.5% males versus 48.5% females in the sample period). Kastenbaum et al (1976) examined obituaries for gender bias, measured their length and looked for the presence of a

⁴ The LISWA Catalogue has 584 subject categories and 12730 key word entries dealing with death, but none of them deal with death and the media (or press).

⁵ I contacted Dr. Tony Walter, who reads at the University of Reading and is course director of the MA in Death and Society taught there, and Tracey McIntosh who lectures sociology at the University of Auckland and has a special research interest in death and dying. I explained my topic of research to them, quoted the main sources I had been reading and indicated that I had difficulties finding literature that dealt with the representation of natural death in the printed press. They both responded that my research and the sources I was using were relevant (McIntosh, 2003, ; Walter, 2003). Neither of them could point to literature that dealt with the representation of natural death in the printed press.

photograph. The conclusion was that in 1975, males received more obituaries, which were also longer. More recent follow-up studies confirmed the gender bias in death notices and obituaries, but again failed to explore other aspects of the material (Moreman & Craddock, 1998, p. 241); (Radtke, Hunter, & Stam, 2000). In his book *On our way: The final passage through life and death* (2004) Kastenbaum refers to the above-mentioned study, but draws a longer bow using both historical and contemporary material. The book looks at rituals surrounding death, the concepts of the good death and the way we deal with the corpse.

Prior (1989) did a study on death in 1985 at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. Prior used a random 10% sample of the deaths in Belfast in 1981, resulting in an analysis of 415 deaths. Apparently, concerns regarding the privacy of data were less pronounced at that time in Belfast, enabling him to examine all death certificates, which included medical information as well as the biographical data collected and recorded by the Registrar. This gave him access to information such as age, residence, sex, occupation, and religion as well as coded information as to the cause of death and social class. This information and other research formed the basis of his insightful and carefully researched book, *The social organisation of death: Medical discourse and social practices in Belfast* (Prior, 1989). It examines the public and private discourse of death, and within the latter correlates death notices to the death certificates. While there is textual analysis, the emphasis is on the numerical distribution of the death notices within occupation, gender, age marital status and religious denomination. The study is influenced by the polarised religious and political events which characterised Belfast during that period. "Most residents of Belfast would have a friend, relative or associate who has been killed, injured or otherwise affected by the 'Troubles' " (1989, p. 185).

In the 1976 study Kastenbaum et al (1976) suggested that there was a need for both historical and future research in this area. The researchers suggested that another sex bias might be expressed in the way the family relationship of the deceased was mentioned or not mentioned, and hypothesised that advanced age would increase the visibility of the deceased, making them more likely to receive an obituary.

2.2 Media and death

Media and health by Clive Seale (2002) touches on death, calling death "the ultimate health problem" which only exists in the media when death affects young people (p. 114) – the opposite end of the spectrum to looking at death notices. But the fact that there is a relationship

between age at death and number of death notices, with the number declining the older people get, confirms his comment.

Death is visible in the printed press. Wars, accidents, suicides and euthanasia are all worthy of reporting. There is academic discussion on how these events are represented in the press. But studying the representation of the death of J.F. Kennedy or Princess Diana does not give the general population useful information as to what they would expect as customary when they are making their own end-of-life decisions. An article headed, "Death in the news: the public invigilation of private emotion", sounds promising, but it deals with the reporting of the two boys who killed the infant James Bulger, and the crash of a minibus on the M40 in which a teacher and eleven children were immolated (Walter, Littlewood, & Pickering, 1995b).

"Representations of death" (Bradbury, 1999) makes detailed comments on various sites on the path of death in London, observing and interviewing people professionally involved with death as well as relatives left behind. The media is acknowledged in its role of depicting death caused by AIDS, but representation of natural death in the media is not addressed.

2.3 General literature concerning natural death

Mims' book, *When we die*, deals with death as a natural event, discussing the decomposition of corpses and the use of dead bodies (Mims, 1998). It is practical and scientific rather than spiritual or sociological. Mims explains the difference between life expectancy (the statistical probable life) and life span (the "design" life: how long people would live if all hazards, sicknesses and environmental problems were removed) (pp. 81-82). He suggests that the world is economically, socially and medically unprepared for a time when old people outnumber the young. He puts the normal life span at 115 years, and suggests that if our life span were increased to 125 years (with a corresponding increase in life expectancy) the extra burden on the planet in terms of people would dwarf all other issues (p. 106). The issue of over-population through an ever-aging population deserves to be looked at in connection with the portrayal of natural death in the media. We need to find different ways of presenting death and encourage wide discussion surrounding the issues around keeping people alive come what may. Professor Chris Rapley argues that "the current global population of six billion people is unsustainably high", adding that the "issue of population management must be addressed" (Black, 2006).

More research dealing with death in a practical way is found in *Death to dust* (Iseron, 1994). The book opens with the observation that "being dead is a mutilating experience", and takes us

through the practicality of death, funerals, embalming, decay and autopsy, and advocates organ donation. The book's organisation makes it suitable as a reference guide.

Looking at natural death led to *The natural death handbook* (Albery, Elliot, & Elliot, 1993) which seeks to inform people in the UK about the practicality of dying, has extensive lists of resources (extending to do-it-yourself cardboard coffins), and introduces the National Death Centre. The National Death Centre in the UK seeks to make death and dying an unexceptional topic. Death as a natural process is seen as a modern concept by Tony Walter (1994-1995), who observes that death used to be seen as a spiritual process that could be staved off by prayer, with priests attending the dying. Only in the late 18th century did doctors replace priests at the bedside, declaring death a natural, physical process, which could be influenced by medicine.

Kastenbaum (2004), in his post-9/11 book *On our way: The final passage through life and death*, illuminates death as a consequence of how we live. He shows how beginnings and endings happen all through our life, how we practise for death in many little ways when we need to depart from a train station, or leave a friend. He looks at good and bad death, comments on some of the less obvious cultural environments that abuse or eat their dead and explores the spiritual and practical side of the end-of-life journey (Kastenbaum, 2004).

Elisabeth Kübler Ross, a doctor of medicine and psychiatry, interviewed over two hundred patients with terminal illness and in 1969 published her book *On death and dying* (Kübler-Ross, 1992). She defined five emotional stages that people facing death traverse, sometimes in parallel (denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance) and makes repeated comments regarding the reluctance and inability of her medical colleagues to deal with death.

How we die (Nuland, 1994) shows in graphic detail the most common ways we die. The examples he uses let us appreciate his knowledge in a compassionate manner. He shows that we all eventually die as our bodies become old and unable to resist disease, and suggests that "old age" as cause of death would be more realistic (and give us a healthier approach to death) than the current policies of ascribing death to a specific illness. If a person accepts death through old age, she/he might have a better death than a person who enlists the medical profession to fight individual diseases. The person might have a better chance of dying a natural death.

2.4 What is natural death?

Taking a detached point of view, it can be argued that every death is natural in so far that every living being eventually dies. This view is supported by R.S.Anderson who asserts: “We must deny that death is something unnatural, a break in God's creation” (R. S. Anderson, 2003, p. 166). Similarly the Sharp asserts that “Death ... is heavily mystified, where medical slang objectifies and thus dehumanises patients, denying simultaneously that dying is a natural outcome of life” (Sharp, 2001, p. 112). Others propose that death can be viewed as a failure of medicine to successfully treat a patient – a view that challenges any death as being natural (Bradbury, 1999, p. 153).

Television crime shows present us with the prevalent definitions of death in four categories: homicide, suicide, accident and natural. But the lines between these classifications, between natural and unnatural death, are blurred and ever changing. In 1881, in Belfast, the classification of death as violent used to include starvation and neglect⁶ (Prior, 1989, pp. 177 - 178). While neglect would be less common as a cause of death today, we would hardly call it a violent death. We can expect that the definition of natural death will continue to change, influenced by practical, legal, medical and philosophical arguments.

Bradbury points to the legal concept of natural versus unnatural death, the former assuming that no foul play is involved, the latter raising questions and concerns (Bradbury, 1999, pp. 152-153). Yet this legal concept is open to interpretation by the very people who examine the corpses. Roberts, Gorodkin, and Benbow (2000, p. 340) find that “the distinction between natural and unnatural death is not legally defined, there is a grey area ... and the final verdict varies greatly according to the personal attitudes of both doctor and coroner”. Even a detailed analysis of a death might not result in a clear verdict. Prior (1989) uses examples from Belfast to show how a death can not only be politicised, but also interpreted as murder or accident depending on the viewpoint of the observer (Prior, 1989, p. 175 - 198). *The natural death handbook* seeks to link natural birth to natural death, proposing the concept of “Midwives for the dying” (Albery et al., 1993, pp. 7-8).

The concept of natural birth is not generally disputed, but it is hard to find an explicit answer on what constitutes natural death. Walter (1994-1995, p. 237) compares natural death to natural birth as they both involve de-medicalisation, “not to the extent of excluding medical personnel, but to the extent that death is defined as a natural rather than a medical event. ... If we could remove over-bearing medicine, inappropriate hospitalisation and social taboos, then what would

remain is natural death". As medical technology improves and begs to be used, an increasingly large grey area emerges. When people age and their bodies and immune systems weaken, they are more prone to a number of diseases related to the heart, the lung and the immune system. These diseases can be identified and fought one by one, constantly closing the door to death of a person who might be more than ready to die (Nuland, 1994, pp. 64 - 88) ⁷.

This thesis does not strictly apply any of the above definitions. Death notices, obituaries and articles dealing with natural death do not lend themselves to conclude if the person described in the research material was subject to over-bearing medicine, inappropriate hospitalisation or foul play, or if it was a politicised death or one caused by the failure, or overuse of medicine. The thesis will use the term natural death for a death that is not caused by accident, war, suicide, abortion, criminal activity or euthanasia. That seems to leave death due to illness or old age, which is what is usually represented in the obituaries and death notices.

2.5 The "good death"

Blauner (1966) discusses the problem we have in defining an "appropriate death". He explains that while a hero's death in battle was the ideal death in the middle ages, it had become the patriarch surrounded by family dying in his own home in the nineteenth century. Changed social conditions do not fit the traditional concept of death and no new ideal has arisen, leading to the current crisis of death. The modern death, with people dying alone in a hospital, often with diminished social and mental powers, epitomises to Blauner the inappropriateness of how people die now (Blauner, 1966, p. 392).

⁶ The full list of "violent deaths" includes recognisable forms of accidents, homicides and suicides, starvation, neglect, want of breast milk, intemperance, poisoning, industrial poisoning, injury at birth, opium and morphia habit and lack of care at birth (Prior, 1989, p. 178)

⁷ It is laudable that Dr. Leo Cooney, Professor of Geriatric Medicine at the Yale University School of Medicine, writes "we wish to improve the quality of life for older individuals, not to prolong its duration", but the reality is that in the USA for every one geriatrician there are four heart specialists (Nuland, 1994, p. 71). A patient suffering from depression after the loss of her husband, aged, without a will to live and refusing food, bedridden after yet another fracture caused by osteoporosis might contract pneumonia. Without informing the relatives, the patient will be tube fed and treated with antibiotics. Modern medicine can keep a person alive for a long time. Terri Schiavo, who had irreversible brain damage and was blind, was kept alive on a feeding tube for 15 years before the courts finally agreed to have the tube removed to allow her "natural" death to occur (Brown & Murray, 2005). A patient suffering from advanced stages of Alzheimer, already incontinent, unable to recognise his own family, thinned to a shadow of his former self and strapped to the bed to stop self harm might have a heart attack. The attendant medical staff will try CPR on him (Nuland, 1994, pp. 91 - 102). People would disagree as to whether the above situations describe a natural or an unnatural death. The social and medical costs of not permitting people to die at the end of their natural lifespan are staggering – in the USA costs relating to dementia (mainly Alzheimers) have reached an estimated \$40 billion annually in 1994 (Nuland, 1994, p. 103). Again it is hard to escape the comparison between death and birth. In birthing we also have unrequired intervention, oxytocin, epidurals and caesarean sections negatively affecting mothers, babies and the public purse.

The manner of death and the place of death are important elements of a good death. Contributing factors are preparedness, control over pain and the presence of familiar people. Bradbury (1999) points to the similarity of viewpoints between anti-medical movements advocating natural death and those advocating natural birth, and argues that a medicalised death is not always bad – a predictable death can be manipulated so that a dying patient can be sent home to die (Bradbury, 1999, pp. 147-161). The medical establishment sees a good death as being uneventful, with few people at the scene, minimal fuss, no emotional content and no technical errors (Kastenbaum, 2004, pp. 110 - 111).

When we talk about a “good death”, is this a death that is good for the dying person, or is it a death that is good to observe? Observing pain without being able to help makes us feel inadequate and uncomfortable. Consider participating in a natural birth as an observer. The pain the woman experiences makes the attendant father uncomfortable – but the birthing woman sees it as part of the positive experience of a natural birth. Perhaps when we try to describe a “good death” there is space for a similar leap of imagination.

2.5.1 Place of death

People would like to die at home, but most will die in an institution. Brim (1982, p.32) elaborates: “Elderly patients have less anxiety about death if they live in familiar surroundings or with relatives (or even in homes for the aged) rather than alone”. Nuland (1994) points out that the most frequent location euthanasia patients choose to die in, is their own home (Nuland, 1994, p. 155).

It is difficult to find consistent figures on the place of death. Figures vary depending on their sources but indicate an increase of people dying in institutions from around 12% at the turn of the last century to about 75% at the turn to this century⁸. Nuland writes “those tucked-away sanctums symbolise the purest form of our society’s denial of the naturalness, and even the necessity, of death. For many of the dying, intensive care, with its isolation among strangers, extinguishes their hope of not being abandoned in the last hours” (Nuland, 1994, p. 254). Kearl

⁸ Hunt shows that in 1900, 12% of people dying did so in a public institution, while in the 1990’s it was about 75% (Hunt, Bond, Groth, & King, 1991). In New South Wales the rate of hospital deaths was 27% in 1920 (Jalland, 2002, p.202). In 1966 Blauner observes “Statistics on the settings of death are not readily available” but continues to mention three different studies on the settings of death from 1958, 1963 and 1965 respectively, averaging a rate of death in hospitals of 55% (Blauner, 1966, p. 384). Death Certificates in WA still include the place of death, and the information is passed on to other government organisations, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS used to keep information on the place of death, but stopped doing so in 1998. McNamarra (2001, p.73) uses data supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and comments: “Figures for the place of death in Australia are not routinely collected, but unpublished data accessed through hospital coding systems indicate that in Western Australia in 1995, of the 10355 people who died, approximately 71% did so in hospitals, nursing homes or hospices; 22% died at home; and 7% died elsewhere”. The same percentage is given for the UK in 1992, broken down into 54% dying in hospitals, 13% in nursing homes and 4% in hospices (Mims, 1998, p. 129). Hays (Hays, Galanos, Palmer, McQuoid,

observes that we can maintain cultural denials relating to death “by routinizing the death trajectory within hidden, institutionalised settings” (Kearl, 1989, p. 111). And Kastenbaum alerts us to “institutional creep”, “the tendency for medical, religious, political, and economic establishments to seek hegemony over deaths as well as our lives” (Kastenbaum, 2004, p. 136).

It is unclear if people’s wishes as to their place of death are respected when they die. The studies I have seen offer conflicting information. A 1996 study, which based its findings on physicians responding to hypothetical cases, found that “doctors generally adhered to patient’s wishes” (Waddell, Clarnette, Smith, Oldham, & Kellehear, 1996). Other studies arrive at the conclusion that patients have little say as to where they die (Kuhse, Singer, Baume, Clark, & Rickard, 1997). In the context of the euthanasia debate a study has found that doctors may make end-of-life decisions without the patient’s consent, “even in situations where the patient is competent and could be consulted” (Kuhse et al., 1997). A 1998 study comes to the conclusion that “location of death for terminally ill patients is not determined by patient preference” (Pritchard et al., 1998).

2.5.2 The process of dying

Hospitals are places designed to keep people alive, not to let them die. Sickness is big business, and keeping people alive is a process where the wealth of a family can be drained from the private sphere to the (often state-owned) hospital and hospice system (Kübler-Ross, 1992, p. 249). Doctors make an oath to uphold life (the Hippocratic oath), not to assist death. The church is more flexible. The Anglican Dean of Perth, John Shepard, suggests that in situations where a person is ill and does not want to prolong their life, the medical profession should be listening carefully, particularly if the ill person has left instructions (Emerson, 2005).

Some of the research indicates that doctors don’t listen to their dying patients, preferring to treat them as machines rather than complex human beings⁹. This would reflect Foucault’s

& Flint, 2001) presents statistics for place of death: 57% in acute care hospitals, 17% in nursing homes, 20% at home, 6% elsewhere

⁹ A comprehensive and detailed study extending over four years and involving 9105 patients found that only 47% of physicians knew when their patients preferred to avoid cardiopulmonary resuscitation. (SUPPORT, 1995). A report looking at end-of-life decisions in Australian medical practice describes patients as “mute”, even in “situations where the patient is competent and could be consulted” (Kuhse et al., 1997). Waddell et al (Waddell et al., 1996) indicate that there is little or no evidence of patient participation in end-of-life decisions and implies that many patients are incapable of giving informed consent. The picture of the mute patients is also painted by Pritchard (Pritchard et al., 1998) and Hays (Hays et al., 2001), who find the location of death for terminally ill patients is not determined by patient preferences. A similar comment comes from Elizabeth Kübler-Ross ((1992) who sees the dying person “treated like a thing. He is no longer a person”. Nuland talks about the modern method of dying : “Modern dying takes place in the modern hospital, where it can be hidden, cleansed of its organic blight, and finally packaged for modern burial” (Nuland, 1994, p. xv).

description of a 'machine-society', with 'workers as cogs', 'mechanised individuals', 'machine-men' and 'human machinery' (Foucault, 1977, pp. 242 - 243) ¹⁰.

Many people will die a death that is not good, but they will not know about it. Nuland (1994, pp. 91 - 102) describes how people suffering from Alzheimers will gradually lose touch with reality, and may suffer many physical manifestations, including the indignity of total incontinence without being aware of it, weight changes and compulsive behaviour. He concludes "There is no dignity in this kind of death"¹¹ (Nuland, 1994, p. 117). While the sufferer is unable to grasp and face death, the relatives might be guiltily relieved that his (and their) ordeal is over when he is finally allowed to die.

2.6 Life after death

2.6.1 Religions support the concept of life after death

To believe in life after death we have to believe that we have a spiritual body as well as a physical body, that we have a soul and that there is an afterlife. This belief is embedded in all major religions ¹². In parallel with the religious beliefs in life after death, darker convictions relating to the un-dead still exist¹³.

However, in this modern age the best chance of life after death, or perhaps usefulness after death, is organ donation. Heart, intestine, kidneys, liver, lung, pancreas, pancreas islet cell, heart valves, bone, skin, corneas, veins, cartilage and tendons can all be re-used (TransWeb.org, 2005). However, it is not clear how organ donation affects resurrection, indicating a collision

¹⁰ The invention of the stethoscope by the French physician Rene Laennec in 1816 (Leyden, 2001) is a case in point. This instrument for listening allowed doctors to distance themselves from the patient as a person, and instead monitors the sounds made by the heart just like a mechanic listens to the (mis) firing of a motor. The dualism of man as a machine rather than man as a spiritual human being, the view that mind and body are separate, already existed in ancient Greece. Cranny-Francis (1995, p. 12) explains that the separation of mind and body allows looking at the mind as a "disembodied consciousness", which can then be manipulated at will by either the psychological profession or by society as a whole. Cranny-Francis points to Derrida who illustrates that in dualism one of the terms is usually constructed as negative, the other as positive (1995, p. 3). Dualism allows us to see the mind as a lofty and somewhat intangible mystery, sitting astride a lump of flesh that should be honoured to be compared to something as complex as a machine. However it is not that the body is represented as negative that is important, but that by separating the body from the mind we can manipulate it, dissect it, play around with its functions with impunity. The doctors, and by implication, the whole medical establishment can now treat the body like a machine, rather than worry about the spiritual human being that inhabits the machine. The doctor can listen to the heart as a pump while ignoring the heart as a spiritual concept. That same dualism allows doctors to ignore the wishes of dying patients.

¹¹ 11% of Americans over 65 can be expected to be struck by this disease ((Nuland, 1994, p. 103)

¹² . Buddhists and Hindu undergo rebirth, Muslims experience life after death determined by a final judgement, Jews enjoy an immortal soul (Mudge et al., 1993). The dominant Australian religion, Christianity, promises an immortal soul (but some have to contend with purgatory and the Last Judgement): "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23) (*Christian Workers Holy Bible*, 1895, p. 1139)

¹³ Recently a person has been convicted by a court in Romania for unearthing and ritually re-killing a person in a grave whom he believed to be a threat to his family. The newspaper article quoted him as saying "We took out his

between the concepts of the spiritual body and the physical body. Re-birth and renewal are images used in the description of donor bodies by the so-called procurement professionals (Sharp, 2001). But to link this to the belief in life after death expressed in a Death Notice is tenuous. It is correct to state that parts of the deceased will indeed continue to be useful, continue to “live”. Yet it appears unlikely that a Death Notice containing the expression “God bless till we meet again” refers to meeting the re-used kidney or cornea of the deceased.

2.6.2 Australia is a secular society

The belief in life after death and religion is astonishing in a country that is viewed as having a tentative connection to organised religion. Ken Ham, of the organisation “Answers in Genesis”, “estimates the Australian churchgoing public at 5%, of whom only 2% are dedicated Christians” (Wright, 2005, p. 27). This is supported by a 1997 Time Use Survey¹⁴. There appears to be a difference between adherence to a religion, which is suitable for measuring and statistics, and spirituality, which is harder to harness into statistics. Spiritually is more common¹⁵, and can find expression in death notices. When observing death, it is more comforting to explore spiritual concepts instead of contemplating the biological reality of a decomposing corpse.

2.6.3 The reality of worms and maggots

The perception of life after death seems misplaced in a modern western society shaped by Darwinism, belief in science, rationalism and consumerism. On a rational level it is evident that after death the human body is not different to any other creature that has died. If not burned, a dead body will eventually decompose. The decomposition is a process aided by bacteria, insects and larger animals, hastened or delayed by temperature variance and soil conditions¹⁶. Edgar

heart and he sighed when we stabbed him”. After local police laid charges, they indicated that they were aware of these rituals being performed in the area. (Petrescu, 2005)

¹⁴ . According to a Time Use Survey, on an average day in 1997 only a small proportion of Australians aged 15 years and over (4% of males and 6% of females) spent time on a religious activity or ritual ceremony as a main activity (Australian_Bureau_of_Statistics, 2004)

¹⁵ Scott asserts that less than 12% of Britons attend organised worship yet over three-quarters of them acknowledge a spiritual side (Scott, 1997).

¹⁶ Catts describes a five stage process of decomposition; fresh, bloat, active decay, post or advanced decay, dry or skeletal remains (Catts & Goff, 1992). Others see it as a four stage process; fresh, bloating, decay and dry, with a time frame of as little as four weeks from death to skeleton, depending on weather conditions and ease of access of carrion insects and animals (Iserson, 1994, p. 308).

“Left to itself, a corpse above ground is soon used as food by insects and animal predators” (Mims, 1998, p. 121). A variety of flies lay larvae on the corpse, and depending on temperature the body can be a mass of maggots within 24 hours.

Fleshflies and blowflies swarm to the odour of a corpse from up to two miles away – and in areas where there previously have been cadavers the first flies arrive within seconds, with maggots beginning their work within an hour (Iserson, 1994, pp. 311 - 312)

The sequence of insect invasion can be used to determine how long a body has been dead. When the body is protected from animals, putrefaction occurs over time, again depending on external circumstance; for instance, a coffin might protect the body for some time. Generally within a year all that is left is a skeleton. Bones generally dissolve within a few hundred years, with notable exceptions such as remains from early man and dinosaurs found from time to time (Mims, 1998, pp. 121 - 125)

Allan Poe (Poe, 1959, p. 61) famously and poetically lingered on the image of maggots feasting on a decomposing body¹⁷. There are exceptional circumstances relating to people who have died and whose bodies have not deteriorated¹⁸. Wanting to believe that the dead is not really dead is also expressed in the way we bury people. "Dead people get buried looking as lifelike as possible. ... Just because a person is dead doesn't mean a person has to look dead" (Kastenbaum, 2004, p. 263).

2.7 Summary of research material

Previous studies using death notices and obituaries as a research basis have focused on gender and numerical analysis, while books on death in the media tend to skirt around natural death. There are hundreds of books dealing with death, covering legal, biological, physical, sociological and spiritual aspects of death. These diverse areas of research fail to postulate a common definition of natural death. A similar diversity of views exists on the good death and the concepts surrounding life after death. This encourages the analysis of material from daily life, such as death notices, obituaries and editorial content in *The West Australian*, to add a contemporary interpretation of the way natural death is presented.

The Scottish expression that a "grave was ripe" referred to the time that should be let to pass before a grave was re-used; in a shorter time frame body parts might still be unearthed. Low humidity, low temperatures or specific soil conditions can delay or stop decomposition. In desert areas bodies sometimes mummify. In Danish bogs well recognisable corpses 5000 years old have been found; in a Florida bog 8000 year old bodies have been found (Iserson, 1994, pp. 315 - 316).

17

In the tragic love story *Ligea* Edgar Allan Poe has the dying beloved and exquisitely beautiful Ligea demanding the re-reading of verses that she had composed not long ago, perhaps reflecting some of the anguish Poe felt about the death of his own wife Virginia, who died of tuberculosis. The verses are the eerie poem the *Conqueror Worm*, which includes these lines describing a corpse being consumed by worms:

But see, amid the mimic rout,
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes! --it writhes! --with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And the seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.
(Poe, 1959, p. 61)

Indeed Kübler-Ross describes a terminally ill patient who was so afraid of being "eaten by the worm" that she could not die (Kübler-Ross, 1992, p. 178 - 179). After consultation with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross it was established that this life-long phobia represented her fear of dying, and the patient was able to die peacefully the next day (and was cremated).

¹⁸ Embalming goes some way towards preserving the human shape, but it can involve the removal of the entrails, thus not leaving a viable construct for resurrection. Preserving in very dry air or in ice can leave a body intact, for thousands of years in some cases (Dickson, Oeggel, & Handley, 2003, p. 70), preceding cryogenics by a long time. There are historical records of people in Europe who died and did not deteriorate in conditions that would usually invite the march of the maggots. Examples are the maiden found intact and with her eyes open in a roman sarcophagus in 1485, when Pope Innocent III rebuilt Rome, or Catherine of Bologna who smelled of flowers instead of decay after her interment, and when her grave was subsequently opened, was truly dead but looked well (Kastenbaum, 2004, pp. 139 - 142).

3 Methodology

This analysis of the representation of natural death in *The West Australian* enlarges on the work done by Kastenbaum (1976), who compared the number and length of death notices and obituaries for males and females (Kastenbaum et al., 1976). It also acknowledges the study by Prior (1989), which was based on death certificates and utilised death notices and obituaries as an ancillary source of material (Prior, 1989). This thesis seeks to examine if there is a lack of interest when ordinary people die an ordinary death; hence this research topic and the research question ‘How is natural death presented in *The West Australian*?’

This analysis is based on the content of 24 daily issues of *The West Australian* in the month of February 2005 (*The West Australian* is not produced on Sundays). Obituaries and the editorial content dealing with natural death were examined in all the issues during that month. The death notices were analysed for the first two weeks in February, a total of eleven days (five days in week one, six days in week two). In the second week the analysis was expanded to include gender, and the deaths of two individuals were selected to explore if there was a difference in the content of the death notices based on social status.

In addition to reading the printed version of *The West Australian*, each February issue of the paper was searched electronically with the key words “death” or “die” or “dies” or “died”. This yielded 906 hits. Most of these hits did not deal with natural death – in the majority of cases the word was used in a context unrelated to death. For instance, “to die for” describes desirable real estate or an exciting massage service, “dies” is an abbreviation for diesel, and a “die”-casting machine or the “die” that is cast. 306 articles dealt with death, mostly related to crime, suicide, accidents, catastrophes or war. Fifty-seven articles related to natural death. In addition there were 33 obituaries.

In the first two weeks a total of 345 new names appeared in the death notices column. Based on 11504 deaths in WA in 2005 they represent 91% of deaths in that period. This is nearly the same proportion of deaths to death notices analysed by Prior in 1981 in Belfast (Prior, 1989, p. 134).

The Registrar of Births and Deaths at the West Australian Justice Department was approached for more detailed information on the people who died in February 2005, to enable the correlation of age, gender, religion and profession of the people in the death notices and

obituaries. The request was denied for privacy reasons. However, it was possible to access the Perth cemetery records, which helped to establish the age at death of 153 people whose names appeared in death notices in the second week of February 2005.

This has resulted in the analysis of 33 obituaries, 57 articles dealing with natural death, 4046 death notices and the categorising of 11216 text elements under fourteen headings. During the collection of the data four major themes emerged: the “good death”, the loss suffered by the family, the social context and the hope for a life after death. The material collected within the fourteen headings was assigned to one or more of the major themes. For instance the theme “good death” would explore the data in the categories “how the person died”, “death at home” and “presence at death”. The data also indicated that examining gender bias may be of interest.

The selection criteria for the fourteen categories is shown in this list:

Category	Typical phrases
Descriptive of relationship; family or family position	Adored husband; loved father; grand mother of---; great-grandmother of; daughter of; cousin of; aunt of;
Descriptive of the person’s personality	... who always greeted us with a hug and a smile; the happy man with a big shoulder to cry on; you would always find time for me; I always remember your jovial ways; we remember your warm nature and friendly smile; hardworking; unselfishly shared; devoted; loving and loyal wife; integrity and sense of character; a true gentleman
Specific expression of affection	I love you. I shall treasure the memories of you forever in my heart. Thank you for your friendship
Indicating life after death or religious beliefs	You will always be in our heart till we meet again; reunited with his loved ones; now at peace with God; may God’s angels take care of you in heaven; gone to God’s garden; at rest with her Lord, Rest in Peace
Referring to specific memorable events	Watching the Eagles grand final with you; I will always remember our fishing trips together; happy memories of our bowls days; will miss our Friday nights at Bingo
Descriptive of the person’s social status or profession	A much respected historian; Pioneer of Rockingham; a respected judge; former club president
Indicating presence (of loved ones) at death	I am glad I spoke with you the day God wrapped his arms about you; passed away in the arms of his

loving wife; Passed away peacefully with family at his side; "as I heard you take that final breath"

Formulaic

Fondest memories; treasured memories; happy memories; in loving memory; deepest sympathy; heartfelt sympathy; always remembered; sincere regrets; condolences; sadly missed; sad loss

How the person died

Passed away peacefully; end marked by fortitude; after long illness; suffers no more; you are now safe from pain; after short illness; you left me so suddenly; now without pain; unexpected passing; you put up a great fight; sudden and tragic death

Ad addresses the deceased

Ad addresses the people remaining behind

Hospital death

Home death

Notice shows Age at death

This analysis of how natural death is presented in a daily newspaper is based on *The West Australian*, using editorial content, obituaries and death notices as research material. Perth has been called the most isolated capital city in the world, and while this isolation can be annoying to some, it is an advantage for the purpose of this study. There is only one significant daily paper containing death notices and covering the city and, in fact, most of West Australia, and that paper can supply a representative sample of the information required for this study. *The West Australian*, printed in tabloid format, can reach a population of 2 million people spread over 1 million square miles, but mostly living in the extended Perth Metropolitan area. The publishers claim to serve "as a primary source of news, information and entertainment for most West Australians" (*Annual Report*, 2005). *The West Australian*, founded in 1833, sells about 210000 issues on weekdays, 385000 on Saturdays and claims a readership of more than one million people (*The West Australian*, 2005)¹⁹.

The data collected from information contained in the 33 obituaries, 57 articles dealing with natural death and 4046 death notices is analysed quantitatively in chapter four and qualitatively in chapter five.

¹⁹ According to *The Australian* of Thursday 18th of May, 2006, (citing Ray Morgan and the Audit Bureau of circulations), the figures for the preceding week in May were slightly lower: Monday to Friday circulation 203972, readership 598000; Saturday circulation 372013, readership 983000

4 Press coverage of natural death in *The West Australian*

The content of the research material, the death notices, articles and obituaries are tabulated and examined quantitatively in this chapter, starting with the grouping of editorial content and quantitative gender bias. It then moves to the four focus areas: the good death, family context, social context and life after death. Chapter five observes the material from a qualitative viewpoint. To facilitate convenient comparisons between the quantitative and qualitative components of the analysis, chapters four and five have the same structure.

This analysis looks at 33 obituaries, 57 articles dealing with natural death and 4046 death notices that appeared in February 2005 in *The West Australian*. Due to the relatively small number of obituaries and articles available for analysis, the resulting observations should be regarded as indications. A larger study could shift the emphasis of some of the findings.

To permit looking at each table together with the explanation of the data contained on it on the same page, I have interpreted the guidelines of the *Masters by research handbook* as permitting single spacing when dealing with tables and the corresponding interpretation of data²⁰. To further increase the ease of reading, each table starts on a new page, even where the previous page has not been wholly used.

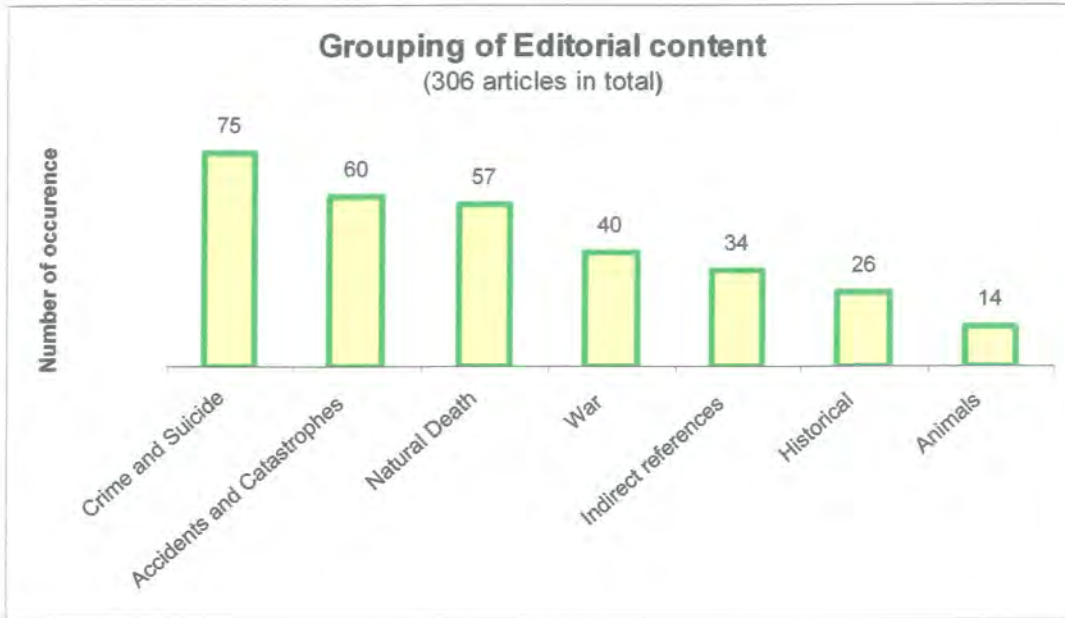
²⁰

“Spacing of 1.5 lines is required throughout most of the thesis. However, single spacing may be used for headings, tables, figures, footnotes, long quotations (indented) and references”.

Accessed 20.05.2006 at

<http://www.ecu.edu.au/GraduateSchool/information/Doctoral&MasterbyResearchHandbook.pdf>

4.1 Death notices, obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death



4.1.1 Grouping of all editorial content dealing with death

Table 1: Grouping of all editorial content dealing with death

44% of the articles (135 articles out of 306) dealt with death caused by external causes (crime, accidents, suicide and catastrophes), events that are responsible for 6% of deaths in Australia (ABS, 2006). Many of the deaths described occurred outside Australia. For instance, people killed in a Tel Aviv nightclub by a suicide bombing, a Brazilian environmentalist shot dead in the rainforest, a Korean actress committing suicide in her dressing room. Australian and local crime and accidents resulting in death are also well represented, for instance, a person shot dead in Melbourne or a man being swept off a cliff near Albany.

In the month of February 2005, 19 % of articles mentioning death or dying dealt with issues relating to natural death.

The category “War” (40 items) describes deaths abroad, and not of Australians. For instance, Iraqis dying in military detention or an Indonesian soldier dying in Aceh.

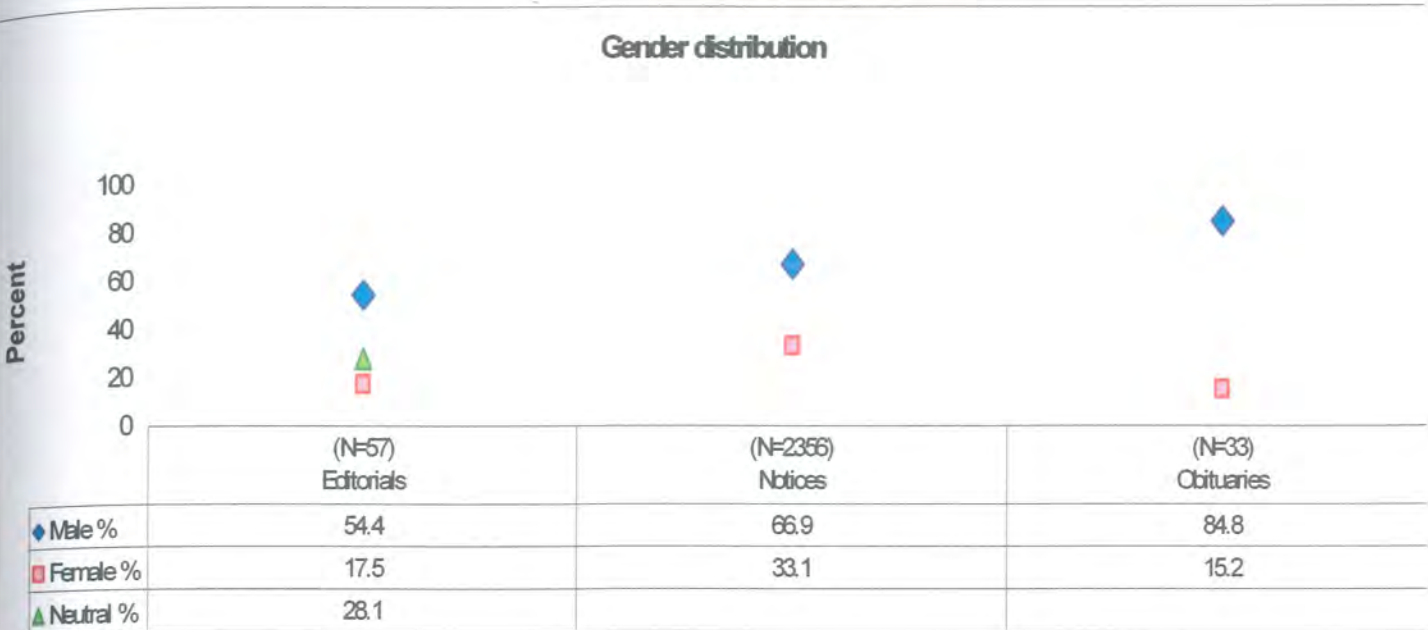
The category “Indirect references” (34 items) includes items where a death is mentioned ancillary to the main story. For example, Rodney Adler in court because of the FAI debacle “was thrust to the head of FAI after his father’s sudden death”.

The category “Historical” (26 items) includes references to people who died in the past. For instance, a Mr. Rector who died when the submarine Tang he was serving on sunk in 1944.

The category “Animals” (14 items) includes articles reporting on the death of animals. For instance, 500 cattle dead on a remote pastoral station described by the RSPCA as the worst case of animal neglect in recent years.

4.1.2 Males receive more quantitative attention

Table 2. Gender bias in the media content



Editorial

Editorial content dealing with natural death has male subjects in 54.4% of cases and female in 17.5% of cases. 28.1% of articles are gender neutral, for instance, articles dealing with death caused by smoking cigarettes, bird flu or alcohol related deaths.

Death notices

There are twice as many death notices placed for males than for females, 66.9% versus 33.1% respectively.

Obituaries

84.8% of obituaries had male subjects, 15.2% (5 out of 33) had female subjects.

4.2 The good death

The literature on death indicated that people desire to die a “good death” (see 2.5). Looking at place of death, how a person died and the presence of those other than hospital staff at the time of death would be some portent of a good death. This table examines the frequency with which indicators of a good death appear in death notices, editorial content and obituaries.

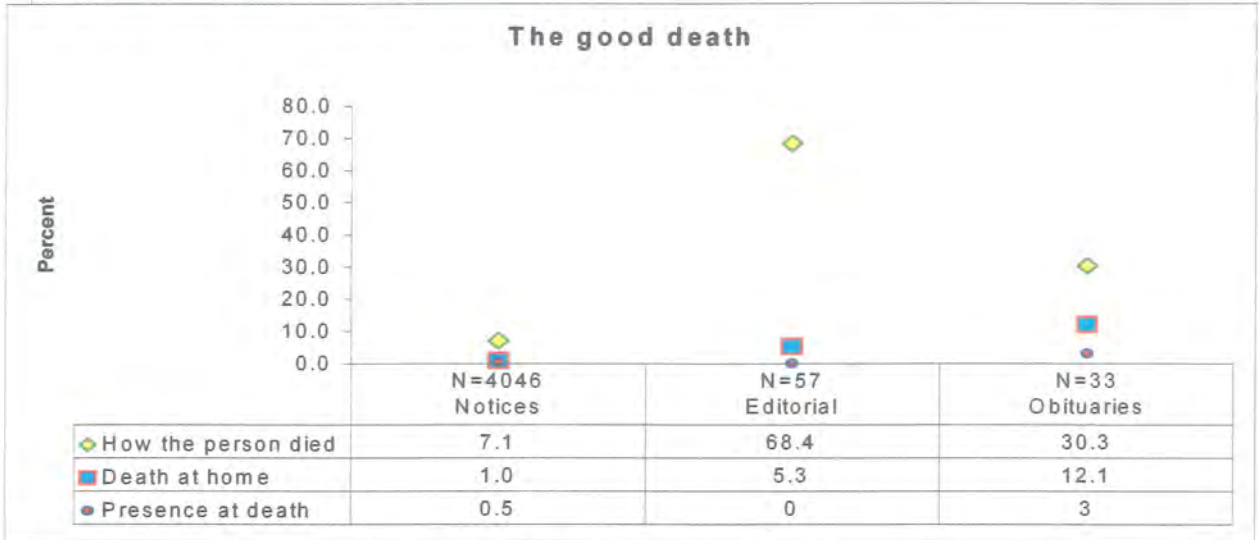


Table 3: Indicators of a good death

How the person died

Where death notices showed how a person died, it was not normally related to the disease, but the manner of death. The common descriptions were “suddenly”, “peacefully” or “unexpectedly”. In that way, 289 (7.1%) of death notices showed the manner of death. 68.4% of editorial articles dealing with natural death and 30.3% of obituaries showed how the person died, but they described a disease, rather than the manner of dying.

Death at home

137 (3.4%) death notices showed where the person had died and 42 (1%) showed the person had died at home. Many of the death notices that showed where the person had died were of an informative character, and were followed by notices for the same person that did not show the place of death. A close relation, a husband or wife, would more likely mention the place of death. Friends and acquaintances placing a notice for the same person would be unlikely to mention the place of death. It might be valid to relate the number of notices showing death at home (42) to the number of people who had died in the survey period (345), indicating a possible higher number of people who had died at home – 12% or higher, similar to the percentage of people dying at home in the obituaries.

Presence at death

Death notices were counted into this category if there was an indication that the writer of the notice had been present when the deceased died, or if an expression such as “surrounded by his family” was used. The percentage is calculated based on all death notices. Because it is possible that only the actual persons present at the death would make such a statement, it might be valid to look at the actual number of notices that relate to presence at death (21) and relate it to the number of people who died in the survey period (345). This could indicate a possible high-end value of 5.1% of people who died with people other than medical staff present and would also relate to the 3% figure in obituaries.

4.3 Family context

Tabulating the use of descriptions of personal traits of the deceased, the mention of memorable events and expressions of affection could position the deceased in the context of the family and the emotions associated with the loss of a member of the family. This section deals with the main indicators that describe the family environment in death notices, editorial content and obituaries.

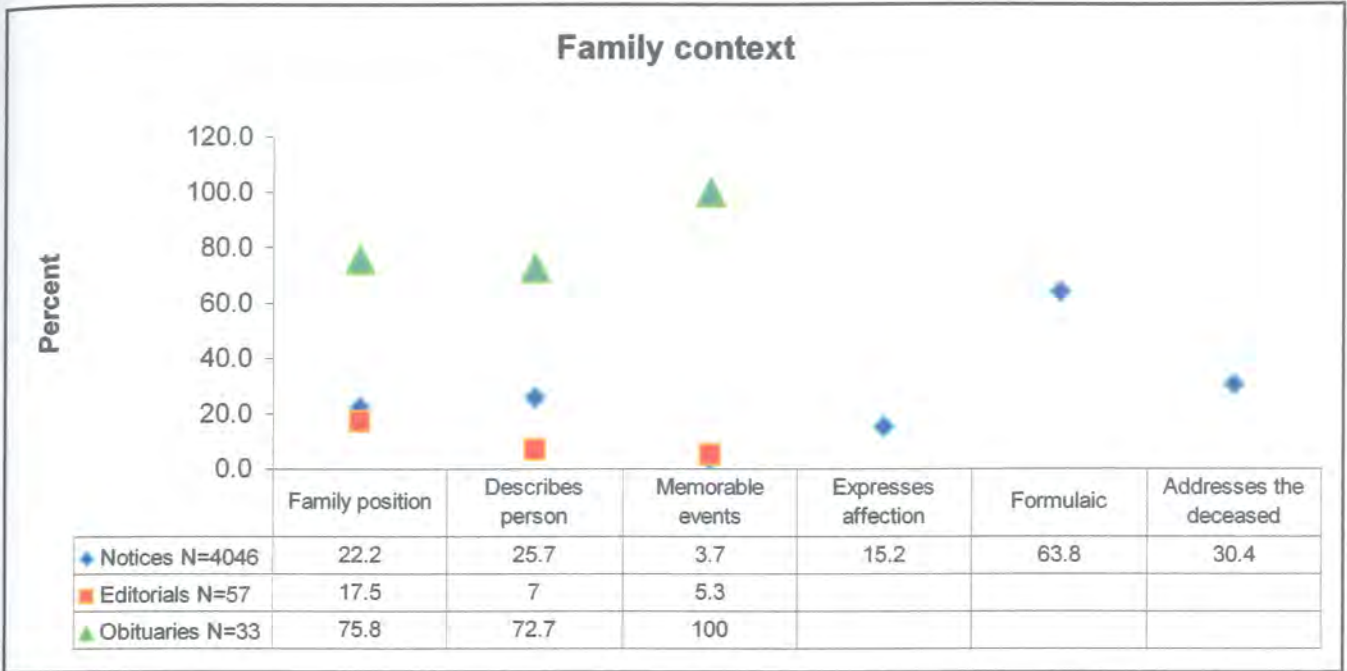


Table 4: Family context

Family position

22.2% death notices and 17.5% articles described notices and articles that place the deceased in the context of their family, while obituaries, with their biographical structure, described some sort of family position in 75.8%. This heading captures, for instance, “adored wife”, “loved father”, “daughter of ...”, “grandmother of ...”.

Describes personality

This heading includes notices and articles that give a glimpse of the deceased’s nature. For instance, “hard working”, “loyal”, “unselfish” or a “true gentleman”. 25.7% of death notices and 72.7% of obituaries describes the disposition of the person, while editorial content dealing with natural death only does so in 7% of articles.

Memorable events

3.7% of death notices and 5.3% of articles talk about specific memorable events, referring to specific events that the writer of the notice or article felt were important to mention. An expression such as “remembering happy days” would not be counted into this category, but “happy memories of our bowls days” would be counted. All obituaries describe memorable events.

Expresses affection

15.2% of death notices contained clear expressions of affection, for instance, an unambiguous “I love you” or “I shall treasure the memories of you forever in my heart”. This category does not apply to editorial content and obituaries.

Addresses the deceased

30.4% of death notices addressed the deceased in the familiar second person, . For instance, “Your kind gentle nature and smiling face will be sadly missed”. 73% of death notices used the fifth person, for instance, “Sympathy to the family”. Some death notices used both forms, thus resulting in a total of 103.4%.

4.4 Social context

Looking at the age of the deceased and the profession can give some indication of the role of social conventions expressed in death notices and relating to the degree of disruption caused by the death of people who were still in the workforce when they died. This section looks at how these items are presented in death notices, editorial content and obituaries. It also looks at the difference in death notices based on social status, and the influence of age at death on the number of notices a person receives.

4.4.1 Content of death notices, obituaries and editorial content

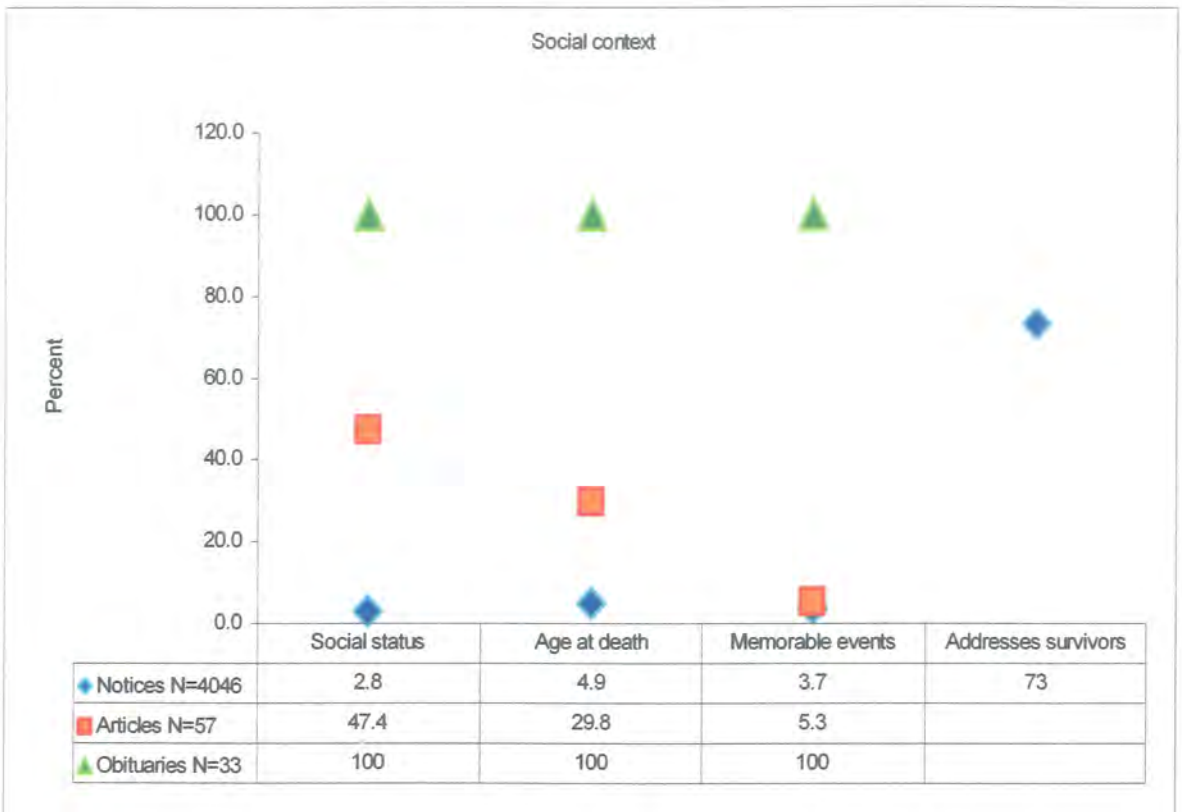


Table 5: Social context

Social status

2.8% of death notices made a reference to the profession of the deceased, or to his social status, for instance, as a former club president or a historian. 47.4% of editorial content dealing with natural death, and all obituaries, showed the social status or profession of the deceased. Editorial content dealing with natural death makes reference to the profession of social status of the deceased in 47.4% of cases. 28.1% of articles were of a general nature; they did not mention a specific person. Removing them from the calculation would result in a much higher 65.8% of articles making reference to social status or profession. The persons described in the articles were either well known or of elevated social status.

Age at death

All obituaries showed the age at death, compared to 29.8% of articles and 4.9% of death notices.

Memorable events

3.7% of death notices and 5.3% of articles talk about specific memorable events, referring to specific events that the writer of the notice or article felt were important to mention. An expression such as “remembering happy days” would not be counted into this category, but “happy memories of our bowls days” would be counted. All obituaries describe memorable events.

Addresses survivor

73% of all death notices were addressing not the dead, but the people remaining behind.

4.4.2 Difference in the content of death notices of a Queens Councillor versus a plumber

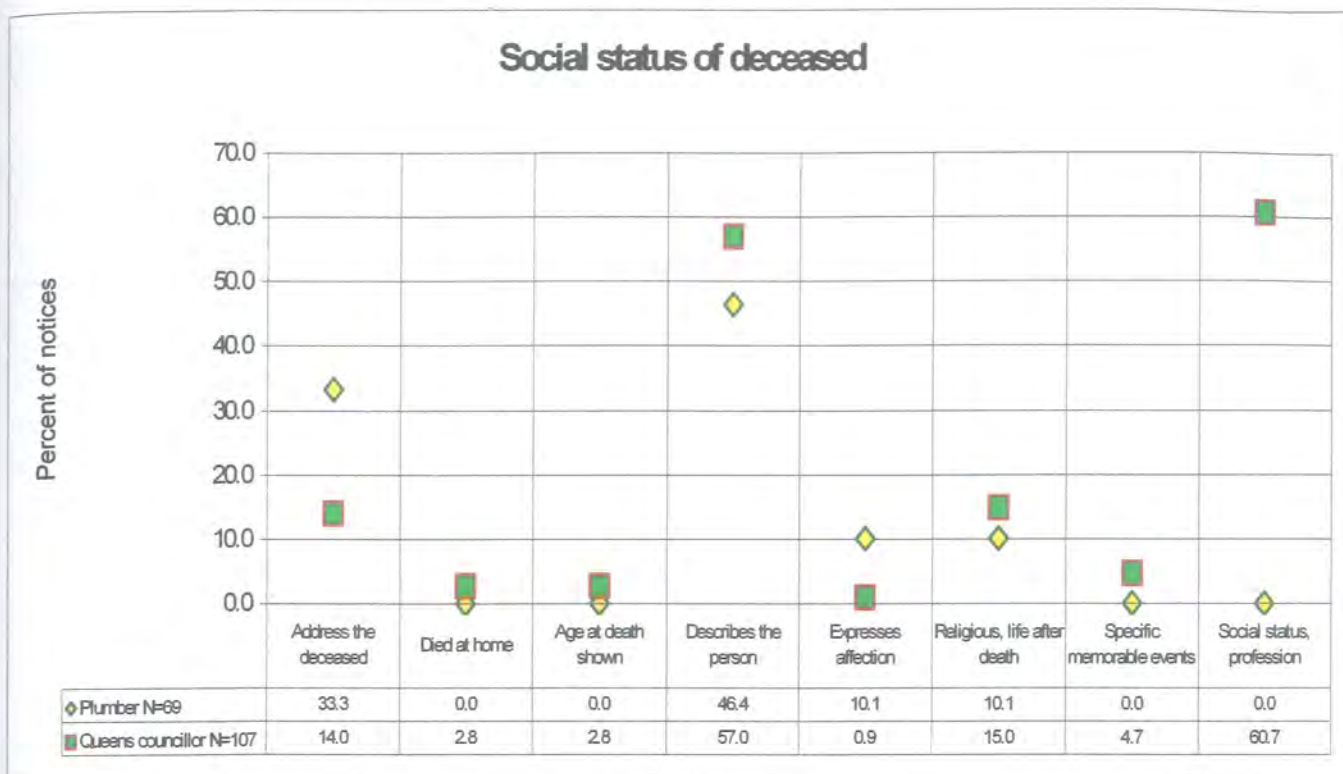


Table 6: Social status of deceased

Addresses the deceased

33.3% of death notices addressed the deceased plumber in the second person, while the figure for the QC was 14%. The average for all death notices is 30.4%.

Death at home

Death at home was mentioned for the QC, not at all for the plumber. The average for all death notices is 1%.

Age at death

The age at death was mentioned in 2.8% cases for the QC (who died aged 71 years old), and not at all for the plumber, who died at age 45. The average for all death notices is 4.9%.

Describes personality

The personality of the deceased was described in 57% of cases for the QC and in 46.4% of cases for the plumber. The average for all death notices is 25.7%.

Expresses affection

0.9% of death notices for the QC contained clear expressions of affection, compared to 10.1% for the plumber. The average for all death notices is 15.2%.

Memorable events

No specific memorable events were recalled in the death notices for the plumber, compared to 4.7% for the QC. The average for all death notices is 3.7%.

Social status

None of the death notices for the plumber made a reference to his profession, compared to 60.7% for the QC. The average for all death notices is 2.8%. That average would have been 1.2% (50 notices) without the 65 notices that mentioned the profession of the QC.

4.4.3 Age at death

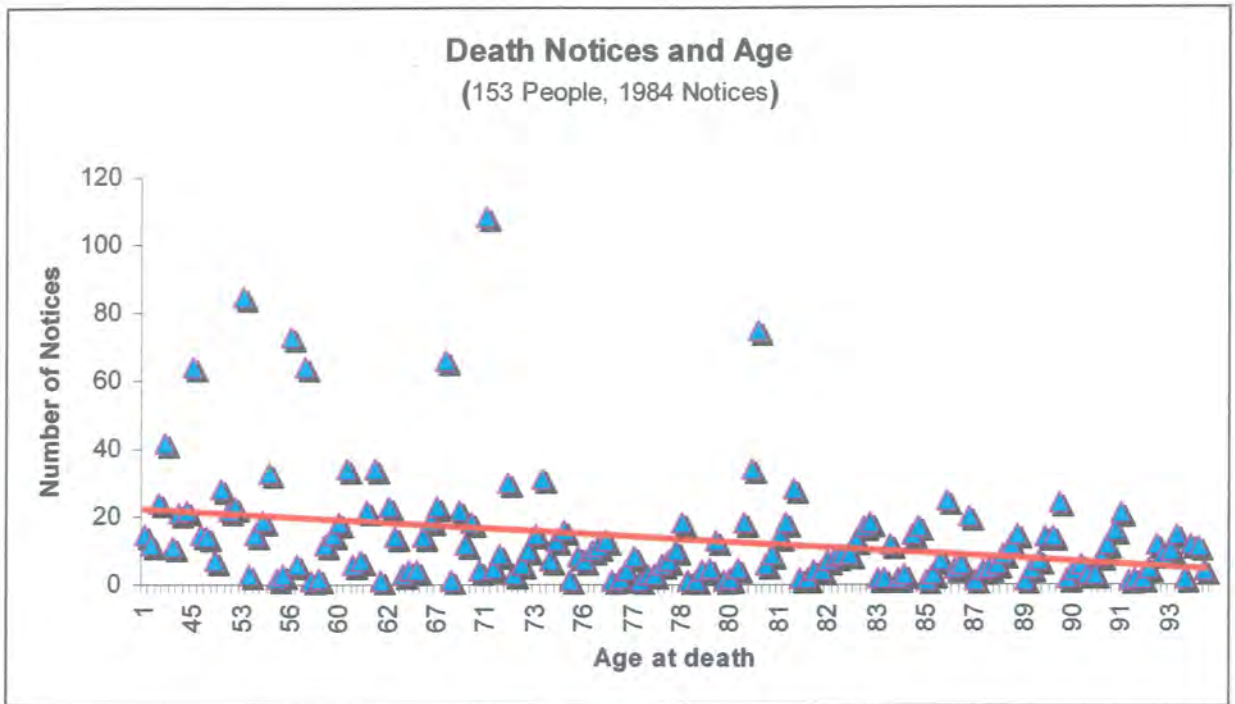


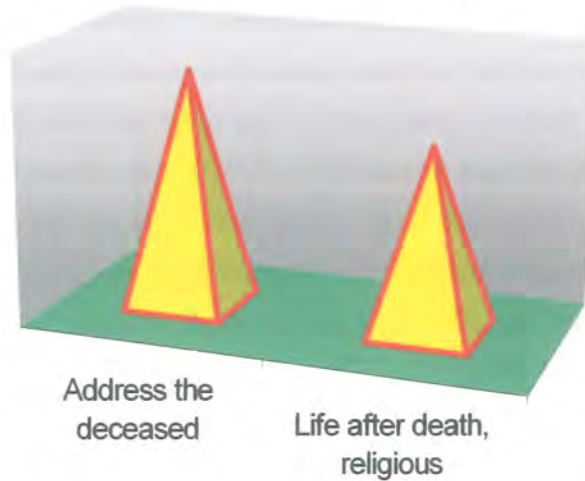
Table 7: Death notices and age

There is a great variance in the number of death notices per person. 13.67 is the average number of notices per person in this sample. The largest number of notices per persons is 108. 36 people received less than 3 notices, 13 received only one notice. On the other end of the scale, seven people received 535 notices amongst them. The youngest forty people received an average of 20.41 notices per deceased, reducing to an average of 8.39 notices per deceased for the oldest forty people. The average age at death of the people in this sample was 73.9 years, but the average of the top 50% of notices was 85.2 years.

Despite the large variance in the number of notices any one individual received, correlating age at death and number of notices shows a clearly declining trend line in the number of notices placed relative to age at death.

4.5 Life after death

Afterlife indicators



	Address the deceased	Life after death, religious
Notices (out of 4046)	1228	950

Table 8: Death notices making reference to life after death or religious beliefs

Life after death – denial of death

Examining notices with a clear religious content, and notices that addressed the deceased in the second person, as if he or she was still alive, would give some indication of the belief in an afterlife for the deceased as expressed by the people remaining behind.

Address the deceased

1228 death notices (30.4%) addressed the deceased in the second person, . For instance, “Your kind gentle nature and smiling face will be sadly missed”. In contrast, 73% of death notices used the fifth person, for instance, “Sympathy to the family”. Some death notices used both forms, thus resulting in a total of 103.4%

Life after death, religious

950 death notices (23.5%) were worded in a way that acknowledged religion or indicated some anticipation of a life after death for the deceased. Notices would be counted into this category if they contained wording such as: “reunited with his loved ones”, “may God’s angels take care of you in heaven”, “gone to God’s garden”, “at rest with her Lord”, “rest in peace” or “You will always be in our heart till we meet again”.

5 Observations

5.1 Death notices, obituaries and editorial content

This research analyses the frequency of appearance and the content of death notices and obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death in *The West Australian*. The numerical analysis in Chapter Four has grouped the data under fourteen headings summarised into four focal themes, while the observations in this chapter deal with the wording and content of the material. Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that “qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s ‘lived experience’, are fundamentally well suited for locating the *meanings* people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

Males receive more obituaries and more death notices than females. More articles dealing with natural death deal with male subjects. The small number of obituaries (33) and articles (57) in this study makes the finding for these two groups indicative rather than conclusive. Examining 2356 death notices revealed a relationship of two notices for males for each notice for a female.

The average age at death in the sample that examined gender bias was nearly 74 years, with the average of the upper 50% a respectable 85 years. The generation of women in the sample might have “missed” the expanded workplace possibilities for females. This would have given the men a more public life, the women a more family-centred life. Whilst both men and women would have a similar circle of family and friends inclined to place a death notice, males would also receive death notices from erstwhile work acquaintances. In the gender differentiated study of 2356 notices, 86 male death notices referred to social status or profession, compared to one notice with a reference to profession for females, and 68 male notices mentioned specific memorable events compared to 17 for females. Further research would be needed to explore assumptions based on the relationship between the generation that died, the differential roles assigned to them in their lives and the echo they generated in the form of death notices, editorial content and obituaries after their death.

5.1.1 Death notices

Death notices are paid advertisements, not written by the dead person, but by the people remaining behind. They reflect the values of the survivors, not of the deceased. They are largely framed by the expectations society places on the people who place the notices.

Prior (1989) suggests that “discourses on death are manifest not only in what people say and do, but also in how they arrange things” (Prior, 1989, p. 111). This study expands the notion of observing what people do in addition to what they say by noting what is omitted in death notices. Where personal characteristics of a person are mentioned, they are invariably positive – clearly we would not write a death notice that makes the deceased look bad. It would not mention greed, grumpiness, deceit, laziness, prejudice, racism or any other of the not-so-nice characteristics that many people possess. Death notices describe the deceased in a positive light - after all, they are paid items in the newspaper, comparable to an advertisement. Blauner (1966) explains that death may remind the survivors of emotional debts towards the deceased, creating a need to make up for some of these debts (Blauner, 1966, p. 383). Part of making up would be laudatory death notices that carefully pay homage to the deceased. Hence, what is omitted is as relevant for the purpose of analysis as what is written.

Another way to avoid placing a controversial or critical death notice is found in the use of formulaic phrases. Thinking about the relationship the person placing the death notice has with the deceased can be avoided by using expressions such as “fondest memories”, “deepest sympathy”, “always remembered” or “sad loss”. Some death notices contain little else. “Deepest sympathy to Kathy and Belinda on your sad loss. Fond memories. From Chris, Janet, Paul and Ben” (Death Notice 05.02.2005, James (Joe)) would be one of many examples. Out of 11216 text elements catalogued in this study, 2583 were formulaic. The incidence of formulaic text elements was high for both males and females, apparently irrespective of social class. Emotional distance from the deceased, for instance, death notices placed by people outside the family, increased the use of formulaic texts. This would support the observation that people have difficulty finding a language appropriate to death (Walter, 1991a, p. 304). Formulaic death notices could be seen as a refusal to take death personally, an attempt to find distance from an event whose certainty we prefer to ignore. The use of a formulaic phrase gives a chance to hide, to find or create distance, similar to the formulaic greeting “how are you?” which often only feigns an interest.

5.1.2 Obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death

Obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death are news items. Obituaries describe, often chronologically, the life and achievement of a prominent person. About half of the obituaries in *The West Australian* relate to people with an Australian connection, followed by people living in the USA or Europe. Asians or Africans are barely represented.

The focus on life means that the way the person dies is only mentioned in 30% of obituaries. It is mentioned if it was unusual, for instance, a surfing accident, suicide or a fractured skull. In the case of Hunter S. Thompson “it was with one of his own guns that he ended his life” (Obituary, *The West Australian*, 23.2.2005). Or Lawrence Noel Ball who did not want to be bedridden, “tried to get up, fell and fractured his skull” (Obituary, *The West Australian*, 28.2.2005).

While they normally focus on the positive sides of the deceased, obituaries can also mention controversial items of their life – and it might actually be the controversial items that make them newsworthy. Rose Mary Wood was the secretary to President Nixon and was embroiled in the controversy of the missing 18 minutes erased from the infamous Nixon tapes. The obituary insinuates that it was she or Nixon himself who caused the erasures. If it were not for that controversy, the obituary of an American typist would not have been published in Australia. And a paid death notice would not focus on those 18 minutes out of her life of 87 years (Obituary, *The West Australian*, 03.02.2005).

5.2 The good death

As seen in the literature review (Chapter 2) components of a good death include an element of predicability, some influence over pain, and the proximity of familiar people at the time of death. Prior knowledge of the approaching death, or the level of pain at time of death or in the period of time leading towards death, were not expressed in the material analysed. But we can observe how the place of death and the manner of death were described in death notices, obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death.

Did the person die a “good” death? If the death experience was bad, we would not detect it by studying death notices. Bradbury (1999) talks about the tendency to call other people’s death “good” unless it is indisputably bad as a way to cope with the extraordinary stress of the situation (Bradbury, 1999, p. 162). If the death was perceived as “good” by the survivors, it would be alluded to in positive terms. If the person died in pain, or alone, or attached to a bevy of machines we would not expect any mentioning of it in a death notice. The exhausted survivors, after having negotiated the maze and confusion of the medical treatment apparently needed to keep the person alive, find it difficult to find a way to put a positive spin on their experience, find it difficult to invent the words that would describe the death as good. Bradbury (1999) reminds us that “Saying a death is a good one is mainly a way of talking about it as

good. It is not the content so much as the intent that is important here” (Bradbury, 1999, p. 142). Place of death would be mentioned if it occurred in a comfortable setting, perhaps even at home, but omitted if death occurred in social or physical isolation. Religion would be mentioned for a nun or priest, and in some way referenced for a deceased who cultivated some religious allegiance, but would be omitted if the deceased was not religious or if the person was an atheist.

5.2.1 Place of death

Of the 4046 notices analysed, 3.4% showed the place of death, 1% indicated that the deceased had died at home, and 0.5% of death notices indicated the presence of family or friends at the death bed. Dying at home presumably indicates

Passed away peacefully at Royal Perth Hospital on 3rd February 2005 in the presence of family. Loved wife of Marty. Loved and loving mother of Jan, Kevin, Jim, Rob, John and Kaye. Special Nanna of 13 grandchildren and Nan of 7 great-grandchildren (Death Notice 4.2.2005 Brennan (Lil))

that family was present even if the death notice does not mention it; thus “Passed away suddenly but very peacefully ... at home” (Death Notice 4.2.2005 Coote) is likely to meet the criteria of a good death. Likewise “Passed away peacefully at home after a short illness, surrounded by her loving family”. (Death Notice 07.02.2005 Chmielewski). Clearly some people die a good death, in a hospital or at home. But according to the material I looked at it happens infrequently, not at the level that would be expected when compared to the wishes expressed by people when they are still alive. A recent study looking at the preferred place of death states “most patients in the United States would prefer to die at home, when in fact most die in acute care hospitals” (Hays et al., 2001, p. 123).

The place of death finds expression in 12% of obituaries. I suspect that in the cases where a person dies at home surrounded by his or her family it is mentioned because it is seen as such a positive and apparently rare event²¹. When Rosemary Kennedy, the eldest sister of the late President John F. Kennedy, died, her obituary ended with “Several of Rosemary’s brothers and sisters, including Senator Edward Kennedy, were at her bedside when she died” (Findlay,

²¹ When Kerry Packer died in 2005, the newspaper obituary had a length of 750 words, and the second sentence was “Mr Packer, who was head of the Nine Network and PBL, died peacefully at home last night with his family by his bedside”(“Kerry Packer dies,” 2005). That press release was carried widely. Out of 27 obituaries of his death published shortly after his death, 26 of them mentioned that he died at home, and 25 of them mentioned that he died surrounded by his family. Media Mogul Kerry Packer had achieved that elusive goal of a good death, and the media release issued by his family immediately after his death emphasised that he died at home surrounded by his family. But when *The Bulletin* printed a 96-page special tribute issue in January 2006 covering every aspect of his life, there was not a single mention as to his place of death, nor to the presence of family at his deathbed. I was curious as to why this exceptional aspect of his death had been ignored and wrote to Garry Linell, the editor of that issue, to find out, but received no response.

2005). (In contrast to the small, hidden away obituary describing her natural death, a Google search for information on the violent death of her brother yields 17 million hits). When the World War II veteran and history writer Norman Healy died, his obituary explained “He died suddenly at home, the morning after sticking to his two-beer limit at an Australia Day barbecue with family and friends” (Manning, 2005). In the above three examples, the death is described in a positive tone, and part of the advantageous image is the place of death, home. The well-known death researcher Elisabeth Kübler-Ross remarked: “The days are gone when a man was allowed to die in peace and dignity in his own home” (Kübler-Ross, 1992, p.21) – but when a person does die at home it is associated with a “good death”. Obituaries, being longer than death notices and more centred on the human who has died, can express this clearly.

Editorial material dealing with natural death mentions death at home in 5.3% of the articles, but if mentioned it is reported so dryly that no conclusion as to the type of death can be drawn. “Alfred Sirven, a leading figure in a corruption case centred on former state-owned oil giant Elf, has died. He was 78. His lawyers said he died at his home in Deauville, Normandy, on Sunday” (“Oil mogul dies,” 2005).

5.2.2 How the person died

The way a person died was mentioned in 289 death notices (7.1%). The manner of death is frequently outlined within a narrow range of expressions, with the most common description being “peacefully” or

Passed away 3.2.05. Deepest sympathy to Marty and family. No more suffering, Lil. Robbie
(Death Notice in *The West Australian* (5.2.2005 Brennan (Lil))

“suddenly”. However there were enough other descriptions such as “end marked by fortitude”; “after long illness”; “suffers no more” or “sudden and tragic death” to stop us from assuming that the mention of the manner of death automatically points to a good death. A comprehensive and detailed study extending over four years and involving 9105 patients found that for 50% of conscious patients who died in the hospital, family members reported observing moderate to severe pain at least half the time. (SUPPORT, 1995).

Only three death notices (out of 4046) directly identified the disease causing death. In two of these cases the person died of mesothelioma, a disease associated with exposure to asbestos particles, and the death notices were placed by the politically active “Asbestos Diseases Society”.

By contrast, the cause of death was mentioned in 68.4% of the editorial material dealing with natural death. Frequently it was the disease responsible for the death that prompted the article. "Excepting the deaths of celebrities, just about every death reported in the media is 'bad'; we play out the opposition between good and bad by focusing on the latter and in the process we articulate the good ideal death" (Bradbury, 1999, p. 162). Confirming the opinion of Bradbury (1999), the cause of death in the editorial material dealing with natural death in that month included: AIDS, prostate cancer, heart attack, infection, bird flu, breast cancer, perforated bowel, pneumonia, SARS, toxic chemical, smoking, alcohol and deep-vein thrombosis. The focus on disease in articles dealing with natural death corroborates the opinion of Kellehear (2001, p. 508) that Australians see death as a failure of health.

Obituaries, focusing mostly on the achievements of a person, mention the manner of death in 30% of cases. Every obituary shows geographical locality and date of birth and of death. Omitting both the place of death and the manner of death in 70% of obituaries could indicate how unimportant the way we die is to the people who survive us. "When modern people do acknowledge the dead, it is often with an avowed inattention and unconcern" (Iserson, 1994, p. 3). Where the manner of death is mentioned in an obituary, it is generally an unexceptional cause of death, such as heart attack or cancer. Accidental death is mentioned in 10% of cases. Thus, while the editorial content frequently has the cause of death as the main focus of an article, in the obituary it can have the function of additional colour, confirming prevalent beliefs about a person. "Hunter S. Thompson, whose life and writing, vivid and quirky reflections of each other, made him one of the principal symbols of the American counterculture, shot and killed himself on Sunday at his home near Aspen, Colorado" (*Washington Post*, 2005). This syndicated obituary was carried in the news section of the paper and also mentioned his "affinity for the drug life style", his wild youth and his "outlaw-seeming independence". Thus the explicit mention of death by suicide served to confirm his perceived alienation from society. Another syndicated obituary that appeared the next day again mentioned his suicide, this time in the context of both his gun collection and his extensive use of drugs (*Daily Telegraph*, 2005).

5.3 Family context

The death of a person can be described in the context of loss for the family structure that surrounds him, or in the context of the social structure. Where the loss to the family is the prime motivator, death notices in particular can provide a public vehicle to honour the family, express affection, describe the deceased, and recall memorable moments from his life.

The family context is emphasised in notices that enumerate the position the deceased had relative to other members of the family. Examples are “adored wife”, “loved father”, “daughter of ...”, “grandmother of ...”. The list of family relationships can include people already

Passed away peacefully at Craigmont Nursing Home on 3rd February, 2005, aged 90 years. Beloved wife of George (dec) and Bob (dec). Loved mother of Ellen, Lucy, Georgie and Ruth. Loved mother-in-law of Ron, George, Ben and John (dec). Loved grandmother of 11 and great-grandmother of 15. ...
(Death Notice 5.2.2005 Byers Becky (Dempsey))

dead. Often the notice that extensively describes the family position is an informative notice that also contains details as to the manner or place of death. It is then followed by other death notices for the same person that mention only of a portion of the family structure, such as “father of ...” or “uncle of ...”, which may be less informative but more emotional. 22.2% death notices and 17.5% editorials described the deceased in such manner, while obituaries, with their biographical structure, described some sort of family position in 75.8%. In obituaries the family position describes mostly descendants. In editorial content dealing with natural death, family context, if mentioned at all, is usually confined to the most immediate family, the spouse or the children.

Affection can be expressed with an unambiguous “I love you” or with a longer declaration of fondness, for instance, “thanks for a shared life and friendship”. Death notices that express affection normally address the deceased in the second person, emphasising closeness with him or her and a reluctance to see the deceased leave the environment of the survivor. 614 death notices in the sample (15.2%) contained clear expressions of affection.

Where death notices mention the personality of the deceased, they are described in positive terms, remembered for their jovial ways; warm nature or friendly smile; described as hardworking; unselfish or devoted. Frequently a number of notices for the one person would

Your unselfish joy and happiness in life will always be with us. We know that you have left us and Mum with enough happy memories to last forever. A gentleman and a bloody good bloke at rest. Don, Pat, David, Deane, Sharon, Chris, Katrina, Bernie and families
(Death Notice 4.2.2005 Andrew (Arthur))

describe him or her in a similar way, be it a “true gentlemen”, or a person with a sense of humour. 25.7% of death notices refer to personal traits of the deceased, compared to 72.7% in obituaries. Obituaries also emphasise the positive side of the deceased, describing the deceased as: passionate, remarkable, compassionate, thoughtful, wise, erudite, elegant, multi-talented, generous, kind and a good leader. But they are less beholden to the deceased and will also use negative portrayals, including aggressive, tough, impatient, restless, addicted and shocking.

Obituaries may use adjectives to describe the deceased that we would not expect to find in death notices: tough, gifted, vague, influential, astute, imposing, provocative and bold. 7% of articles made mention of personal traits of the deceased, but here it was used to show contrast in a story, for instance, a person being described as active before falling suddenly ill and dying within two days. The description was not used to illuminate us on the personality of the deceased, but to illustrate how unexpected his death was.

Death notices can honour the writer's connection to the deceased by recalling specific memorable events from the deceased life. When this happens, they tend to be the "small" events that bind

Our heartfelt sympathy to Jean and families in your sad loss. Fond memories of a true gentleman in good times at Northam Railway Tennis Club. Kevin and Julie.
(Death Notice 5.2.2005 Clark (Rex))

people together rather than monumental achievements. Fishing trips, bowling activity or bingo might be recalled, or perhaps watching the football grand final together. In the death notices, 149 notices (3.7%) made reference to specific memorable events.

All obituaries wrote about memorable events, but here the events were not private experiences, but events that were public and of interest to the public. People were remembered for having a hospital built, or for playing bowls against South Africa, or for acting in important film roles.

5.4 Social context

When hearing of a person's death, the first reaction tends to be a personal one, relating to the loss to people close to the deceased. But Hertz (1960) reminds us that "Death does not confine itself to ending the visible bodily life of an individual; it also destroys the social being grafted upon the physical individual" (Hertz, 1960, p. 77). Social status, profession and the age at death can be factors that influence the content of death notices, obituaries and articles, reflecting the reaction of the outside world to a death.

5.4.1 Social status or profession

Social status or profession is referred to in only 115 out of 4046 death notices. This figure includes 65 notices for the one person. When we meet somebody, we very quickly try to establish what they are doing, what their job is. Then we can position them in our social value system. As Blauner explains: "Industrial societies value people in terms of their present functions and their future prospects" (Blauner, 1966, p. 391). But in a low-mortality industrial

society we die old, mostly without a social function. Social status is more likely mentioned for a musician or politician than for a clerk or truck driver. Social status as expressed by a person's profession can become irrelevant if the work has not produced a lasting social legacy, or if the time elapsed between the person carrying out that job and death is large. The relevance of a person's profession can cease to be part of the consciousness of the people left behind. A person dying ninety years old might be remembered for growing orchids for 25 years, not for the work he did as an accountant for 40 years. A judge or QC or politician or cleric, however, might have had an impact in their life that extends beyond their death, through laws, politics or opinions. Thus it could be relevant to mention their profession in the death notice. When the well-known Queens Councillor Brian Singleton died, 65 out of 107 death notices mentioned his profession.

Our sincere sympathy to Mrs Singleton and family on the sad loss of your husband and father. Brian's long standing contribution to the legal profession of WA and to the Legal Practice Board will be greatly missed. From the chairman, members and staff of the LPB
(Death Notice 09.02.2005 Singleton (Brian) QC)

In the same week the plumber Frank Bastow died. None of the 69 death notices he received mentioned his job. The people who placed death notices for the plumber addressed him in the familiar second person twice as often than those for the QC. Affection for the plumber was expressed in death notices at ten times the rate compared to those for the QC, despite the fact that the QC died at home.

Where the profession is mentioned it is probable that the deceased is still active in the work force. The death notice placed by the employer or from within the work

A dedicated and highly respected **teacher** and **administrator** who enriched the lives of her students at Gidgegannup Primary School. She will be greatly missed by the school community. Deepest sympathy to Trevor. From the Director General and Corporate Executive of the Department of Education and Training
(Death Notice in *The West Australian* (4.2.2005 Balmorth (Ann))

environment is likely to mention the profession. "A valued and respected Wildlife Officer for 27 years, your great sense of humour and quiet unassuming nature will be remembered. Our sympathy to Steve and family. From your friends and colleagues at CALM" (Death Notice 08-02-2005 Roberts (Phil)). Shortly before his death, Phil Roberts was still actively involved in recovery plans for threatened flora in the wheat belt and the South West of West Australia.

65.8% of editorial content pertaining to natural death and referring to individuals made reference to social status or profession. These people were socially influential, famous or both. Some of the individuals in the articles were described as: president, political leader, member of parliament, oil mogul, politician, writer, musician, televangelist, film animator and scientist.

Being influential seemed to be a recurrent theme for the selection of individuals for these articles.

All the obituaries described the profession or role in society of the deceased. Again, the individuals honoured with an obituary were well known or of special appeal. Amongst them were a naturalist, conductor, biographer, aviation pioneer, linguist, jazz musician, queens councillor, actor, member of the Order of Australia, conservationist, journalist and an historian. While a good number of the people described in the obituaries were influential, there seemed to be an emphasis on people who were of a more general interest. The appendix has a list of the professions of some of the people in obituaries and editorial content dealing with natural death.

5.4.2 Age at death

The question of old age, and death at an old age, is commented on by Blauner (cited in Walter (1991a, p. 300). Blauner points out that before public health and modern medicine drastically reduced death rates, most people died in the prime of their life, while today they die at an old age, with their children grown up and independent. To paraphrase this crudely: people used to die when they were useful, and thus were missed. Now they are dying when they have long been useless, and are therefore not missed much. This is to be contrasted with tribal societies where the dead, in the form of benevolent or malevolent spirits, exercise considerable influence over the living, and therefore people need to be respected in their old age and appeased at death (Blauner, 1966, pp. 389 - 391).

The death of people at what used to be considered a very old age seems to have implications for their place of death and lack of public interest in their death. In his study Kastenbaum hypothesised that advanced age would increase the visibility of the deceased, making them more likely to receive an obituary (Kastenbaum et al., 1976). The findings of this study indicate that the opposite happens – the visibility of older deceased is reduced. While we would expect an older person to have more living descendants than a younger one, this study indicates that they leave behind a smaller circle of grieving people. The analysis of 1984 death notices from 153 deaths shows an average of 20.41 notices per deceased for the youngest forty people in the sample, aged 1 to 65. The average for the oldest forty people was 8.39 notices per deceased, and their ages ranged from 85 to 97. The trend line underlying the data confirms that older people get less death notices. As Bradbury observes: “The physical deaths of those who have already suffered a social death are unremarked events” (Bradbury, 1999, p. 162). In contrast, the death of a people in their prime leaves emotional and financial gaps felt by the family, workplace and the community.

When Seale talks about the sequestration of death, he points out that “this involves the imposition of ‘social death’ on elderly people, so that their loss through biological death is minimally disruptive” (Seale, 2002, p. 114). We see this reflected in the frequency of death notices – the older the deceased, the less notices are placed. If people die younger, the grief seems to be less restrained. This is best illustrated by three death notices, each placed by a sibling of the deceased.

Neil Francis died at age 27	Frank Bastow died at age 45	Joe Kirby died at age 91
Treasured brother to Karen. We had so much fun together and I am proud to be your sister. I would have done anything for you and I am so grateful we had 26 years together, you looked after me so well. I’d give anything to see your beautiful smile one more time, my heart is aching for you. You will always be missed but never forgotten. I love you with everything I am. My children shall know and love their Uncle Neil. Sweet dreams my kind and gentle brother. There is beauty and magic all around you. Love Karen and Stefan (Death Notice 07.02.2005, Francis (Neil))	My Brother Frank, I’ll never know why, only you will, but I know I love you and will miss you always. Your little brother Rob. My heart goes out to Joanne and Kate, Jessica and Louise. (Death Notice 08.02.2005, Bastow (Frank))	Loved brother and brother-in-law of Roy and Fay, uncle to Sandra, Keith and Gary and families. Rest peacefully dear brother (Death Notice 07.02.2005 Kirby (Joe))

5.5 Life after death

Biologically speaking there is no life after death. Spiritually speaking there is. All major religions contain concepts that imply there is a soul, there is life after death, and there is some sort of rebirth and resurrection.

Australia does not present as a religious country; indeed Australians are documented as describing themselves as “the most secular society on earth”²². However there seems to be a broad religious base in Australia²³, which is activated by the proximity to death. 23.5% of death notices made direct reference to religious beliefs or life after death. 30.4% of death notices addressed the deceased in the second person, as if the person was still alive. When death notices

²² “Australians ordinarily find it important to start conversation on religion by saying something like, ‘You know, we are the most secular society on earth’. Former colleague and later Yale Divinity School Dean Colin Williams, an Australian, helped coin that phrase. One of our hosts, Vice-Principal Ian Breward at Ormond College, published his Australian bicentennial religion lectures under the title *The most Godless Place Under Heaven?*” (Marty, 1989, p. 708)

²³ In 2001, 74% of Australians aged 18 years and over reported affiliating with a religion, and 82% of persons aged 65 years and over identified themselves as Christian. (Australian_Bureau_of_Statistics, 2001)

that address the deceased in this personal, immediate way are looked at in conjunction with death notices with religious content, it points to a large portion of the population that still seeks the comfort of religion and belief in life after death. This seems to contradict the assertion that “ideas of regeneration and rebirth are more weakly stressed in an industrialised, individualistic society” (Bradbury, 1999, p. 192).

Phrases to indicate life after death could be in an indirect form such as “You will always be in our heart till we meet again” or “reunited with his loved ones”. Choosing this form of homage can be useful for people who are not steeped in religion, but understandably find it difficult to cope with a loss in the family, or the loss of a friend. By giving the deceased a new life, a life after death, they don’t have to process their own feelings about death. Others death notices were clear and unambiguous: “May peace be with you now in your new life” (Death Notice 8.2.2005 Dowling (Yvonne Joyce)). There is no doubt here that the person addressed was not dead, but simply embarking on to a new life. In another context this phrase might be used to describe an important transition in life, perhaps a person changing their civil status or leaving permanently to a far away place, perhaps joining a religious order.

Many people need the reassurance that a belief in life after death brings, and to them it makes sense to address the deceased directly in death notices. To start the communication with the deceased on this new level now that the previous method of talking to him directly has been interrupted by his death brings consolation. It can be a way to use the French “au revoir” (loosely translatable into “see you again”) instead of the English goodbye. Bradbury elaborates:

The contemporary sacred good death is viewed as a time to say goodbye to our loved ones. This social aspect extends beyond the immediate moment of death into the rituals that follow it. The shift in focus from the dying period to the grieving period makes sense if we consider that in a religious death the dead person’s soul is still present and is open to communication during this period of ritual transition. The liminal soul can actually observe and perhaps even enjoy the mourning rituals of the bereaved. (Bradbury, 1999, p. 148).

The references to religion often included the concept of the deceased still living. Some were unemotionally descriptive, for instance: “now at peace with God” or “at rest with her Lord”. Others were more elaborate visions of the prospects of the deceased, such as “may God’s angels take care of you in heaven”, “Follow the light and go to Him and rest with Him in eternal peace” or “gone to God’s garden”. These death notices implied a more personal relationship of the deceased with God, and conjured visions of paradise. They also imply a wish to escape to a life better than the one already lived – a wish not only for the deceased, but probably also for themselves. They seem to imply a regret for things not done, not accomplished, and not achieved. It is rare to have a dying man say, “This is my time” (“Packer knew “time was up”,” 2005).

A close association with religion does not necessarily mean that the people left behind will describe us sitting at the side of God or suggest that we have a life after death. When the Trinity Theological College placed a death notice for trustee and council member John Ellis, who died of cancer, neither religion nor life after death were overtly described (Death Notice in *The West Australian* (11.02.2005 Ellis (John))).

The perception of life after death is odd in a Judeo-Christian western society shaped by science, rationalism and consumerism. Science proves that after death, a body decomposes or is burned and turned to ashes. The print media has examples of prominent people supporting this rational view, of seeing death as a final closure with nothing beyond it²⁴.

Beyond a life after death, albeit in pieces, through organ donation, the closest way to live on is through our genetic material, through our children, or in the memory of the survivors. This interpretation of life after death is described in death notices as well. A wife assures her deceased husband that he will live in his children, daughters who declare that they will see their father every night in their dreams, and a woman who assures her sister that "To live in the hearts of those we love is not to die" (Death Notice 11.02.2005 Griffin (Coleen Margaret)).

²⁴ The recently deceased media mogul Kerry Packer had a brush with death in 1990. Revived after having no heartbeat for seven minutes, he apparently said "I've been to the other side, and let me tell you, son, there's f...king nothing there." ("This is my time: Packer," 2005). And Robert Hughes, the art critic, supposedly said there is "nothing even remotely divine on the Other Side" after a five week coma as a result of a car crash (*Hughes on the mend*, 1999).

6 Findings and reflections

This study has examined 4046 death notices, 33 obituaries and 57 articles dealing with natural death, all taken from *The West Australian* during February 2005. This included categorising 11216 text elements under fourteen headings and then grouping into four major themes: the “good death”, the loss suffered by the family, the social context and the hope for a life after death. The data also indicated that examining gender bias may be of interest. The quantitative analysis in chapter four was followed by a qualitative analysis in chapter five.

6.1 Findings

Based on the above research, natural death is disregarded as a certain part of an ordinary life. Obituaries and editorial material prefer to ignore natural death, or show death as a result of disease. If death notices talk about the act of dying it is obliquely, in terms such as “suddenly” or “now safe from pain”. This seems to validate the psychological and Christian associations of disease and death with sin and punishment (Kübler-Ross, 1992, p. 16); James 5:14 – 15 (*Christian Workers Holy Bible*, 1895).

Confirming previous studies (Kastenbaum et al., 1976, ; Moreman & Craddock, 1998, ; Radtke et al., 2000), males receive more attention after death. In a sample of 2356 death notices there were two male notices for each female notice. For males, death notices would mention social status more often, recall memorable events more often and describe the personality of the deceased more often.

Death notices exhibited a frequent use of formulaic phrases. This could be seen as a way for survivors to distance themselves from the deceased and from death in general, confirming the observation by Walter (1991b, p. 304) that people have difficulty finding appropriate words around death.

Death notices, which are placed by friends and relatives of the deceased, focus on the person. Obituaries focus on the life and achievements of the deceased, whilst editorial content dealing with natural death focuses on the manner of dying, the disease that has caused death.

Death notices allow observations regarding the way the deceased were seen within their close environment. They frequently emphasise the position the deceased had in the family structure,

remembering them with affection, describing them in a positive manner and recalling memorable events from their life. When the circle of people placing a notice expands, different observations arise. Profession is largely ignored in death notices, except where the deceased were influential because of their work, or died while still in the workforce. This contrasts with obituaries, and to a lesser extent, editorial material, where social position and achievements are a focal point.

The preoccupation with achieving a long life is not honoured in death notices – the older a person dies, the less they are missed, and the less death notices they receive. This contradicts the hypothesis by Kastenbaum and his researchers (1976), who suggested that the older a person died, the more acclaim they would secure. “Social death” (Seale, 2002) seems to happen some time before the biological death, perhaps at the time of entering a nursing home, or when the descendants of an aging person reach retirement age themselves.

The difficulty of accepting death is manifested in the high proportion of death notices that address the deceased as if he or she were still alive, or notices containing reference to religion. Addressing the deceased in the second person can help to cushion the pain of the loss, and could indicate that the survivors seek to avoid the implication that they too will die eventually. Instead the people left behind seek solace in an irrational belief in life after death for the currently deceased friend or relative and by extension, for themselves at some later stage.

6.2 Reflections

*Death belongs to life as birth does.
The walk is in the raising of the foot as in the laying of it down.*

*I have learnt the simple meaning of thy whispers in flowers and sunshine--teach me
to know thy words in pain and death.*
(Tagore, 1916, verses 268, 269)

In the last one hundred years we have relinquished control over the most important events in our life. The majority of births and deaths have been taken away from their natural context, the home, and moved to institutions. “ ‘Deathing’ and birthing rituals in the institutional setting have more than a little in common” (Kastenbaum, 2004, p. 99). The quest for a good birth or a good death is a common one.

Neither death notices nor obituaries or articles dealing with natural death clearly indicate if the people died a good death. It is the survivors who decide if the death was good or bad, if it validates their own fears and expectations of death. A small portion of death notices indicated a home death (1% of the sample) or the presence of familiar people at the deathbed (0.5% of the sample). Where obituaries mention death at home, it is invariably in a positive tone. The manner of death is largely ignored in death notices. Bradbury (1999) suggests the possibility that the “good medical death” could have its basis in a nineteenth century power struggle between doctors and clergy seeking dominance (Bradbury, 1999, p. 191) – who should be at the deathbed, who would be more useful, more helpful, more important and ultimately more powerful. Death notices indicate that this struggle has been won by the medical establishment, with people predominantly dying in institutions. A good death at home is not written up in *The West Australian*, and consequently will not be considered as a viable option when death comes closer. The desirability of a death at home exists in people’s minds, but not in the printed press.

Persons in West Australia relying on the dominant daily newspaper in this state, *The West Australian*, would find it hard to construct an informed view on how to achieve a good death. If they were regular readers of death notices, they would find little reference to people who had died at home, and where the manner of their death was described, it was in terms of “suddenly” or “no more pain”. Pursuing the editorial content of the paper including the obituaries, they might find an occasional article dealing with natural death, but probably none dealing with a good death. They would read of people dying from all kinds of disease, but none of them of old age. On the available information, they were likely to form the notion that dying was a medical event rather than a natural one, something that one had to submit to meekly and helplessly. They would not get information that could guide them to a good death, an event that, while being unknown, could be approached openly and proudly.

The material reveals death notices as describing *who* a person is; they describe, in varying degrees, position in the family, friends, personality and mention how a person is missed. Obituaries and editorial material dealing with natural death describe people in terms of their achievements, their jobs, and their position in society. They describe *what* a person is, what they have attained.

The way natural death is presented in *The West Australian* would seem to indicate that we affect the people close to us as persons, not as achievers. As we go through life, each moment bringing us a little bit closer to the inevitable death, we would do well to reflect on what is important to us: is it who we are, or is it what we have accomplished?

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1. TABULATED RESEARCH RESULTS

All death notices

from the

1st February 2005

to the

12th February 2005

Death Notices 1st February 2005 to 12th February 2005

	1.2.05	2.2.05	3.2.05	4.2.05	5.2.05	7.2.05	8.2.05	9.2.05	10.2.05	11.2.05	12.2.05	Bastow	Singltn	Totals	Percent of Total Notices
Total Notices	410	456	289	283	252	283	409	390	383	408	307	69	107	4046	
Address deceased	150	107	88	82	85	99	143	114	102	114	106	23	15	1228	30.4
Address survivors	285	285	255	204	178	192	283	298	302	309	217	55	89	2952	73.0
Shows place at death	22	18	7	9	18	11	11	12	11	12	6	0	0	137	3.4
Shows home death	2	1	2	2	1	3	6	6	5	5	6	0	3	42	1.0
Shows age at death	22	20	18	15	18	17	27	19	16	12	11	0	3	198	4.9
Formulaic	217	229	268	140	151	158	208	155	313	329	239	77	99	2583	63.8
How person died	29	27	22	21	30	24	32	32	31	23	16	1	1	289	7.1
Shows family position	93	135	95	75	62	71	97	85	63	67	45	5	6	899	22.2
Describes personality	65	67	69	61	61	72	129	112	121	108	81	32	61	1039	25.7
Expresses affection	40	54	34	47	57	54	78	74	42	63	63	7	1	614	15.2
Life after death or religious	53	53	52	69	63	93	127	123	96	110	88	7	16	950	23.5
Memorable events	11	14	25	8	6	13	21	27	9	7	3	0	5	149	3.7
Social status	7	10	4	7	0	3	6	1	7	3	2	0	65	115	2.8
Presence at death	2	2	0	1	1	4	9	1	1	0	0	0	0	21	0.5

Death Notices differentiated by gender
7th February 2005

to

12th February 2005

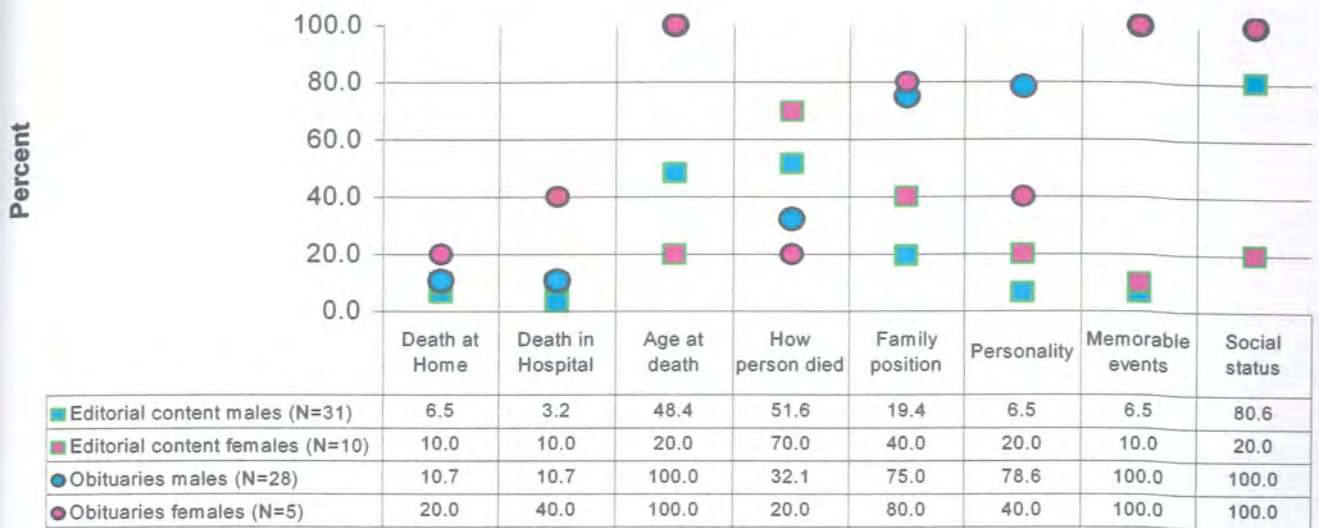
Gender differentiated Analyses (Data from 2nd week February)

	7.02	7.02	8.02	8.02	9.02	9.02	10.02	10.02	11.02	11.02	12.02	12.02	12.02	Bastow	Singlet	Male	Totals	Female	Totals	Number	of all
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	(Male)	Number	Male	Female	Number	% Notices	% Notices
Notices	153	130	249	160	262	128	278	105	273	135	185	122	69	107	1576	780	66.9	780	33.1	2356	
Address the deceased	53	46	88	55	70	44	69	33	71	43	60	46	23	15	449	267	28.5	267	11.3	716	30.4
Address the survivors	103	89	172	111	209	89	221	81	212	97	138	79	55	89	1199	546	76.1	546	70.0	1745	74.1
Place at death	6	5	6	5	9	3	6	5	8	4	2	4	0	0	0	37	2.3	26	3.3	63	2.7
Died at home	1	2	4	2	4	2	3	2	4	1	6	0	0	0	3	25	1.6	9	1.2	34	1.4
Age at death shown	10	7	17	10	12	7	10	6	5	7	6	5	0	0	3	63	4.0	42	5.4	105	4.5
Formulaic	79	79	131	77	87	68	243	70	240	89	166	73	77	99	1122	71.2	456	58.5	1578	67.0	
How person died	10	14	21	11	18	14	19	12	17	6	11	5	1	1	98	6.2	62	7.9	160	6.8	
Family position	30	41	57	40	54	31	35	28	39	28	29	16	5	6	255	16.2	184	23.6	439	18.6	
Describes the person	51	21	79	50	79	33	91	30	83	25	47	34	32	61	523	33.2	193	24.7	716	30.4	
Expresses affection	31	23	43	35	41	33	27	15	41	22	34	29	7	1	225	14.3	157	20.1	382	16.2	
Religious, life after death	49	44	71	56	73	50	64	32	66	44	51	37	7	16	397	25.2	263	33.7	660	28.0	
Specific memorable events	10	3	17	4	22	5	9	0	4	3	1	2	0	5	68	4.3	17	2.2	85	3.6	
Social status, profession	3	0	5	1	1	0	7	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	65	5.5	1	0.1	87	3.7	
Presence at death	2	2	7	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0.6	5	0.6	15	0.6	

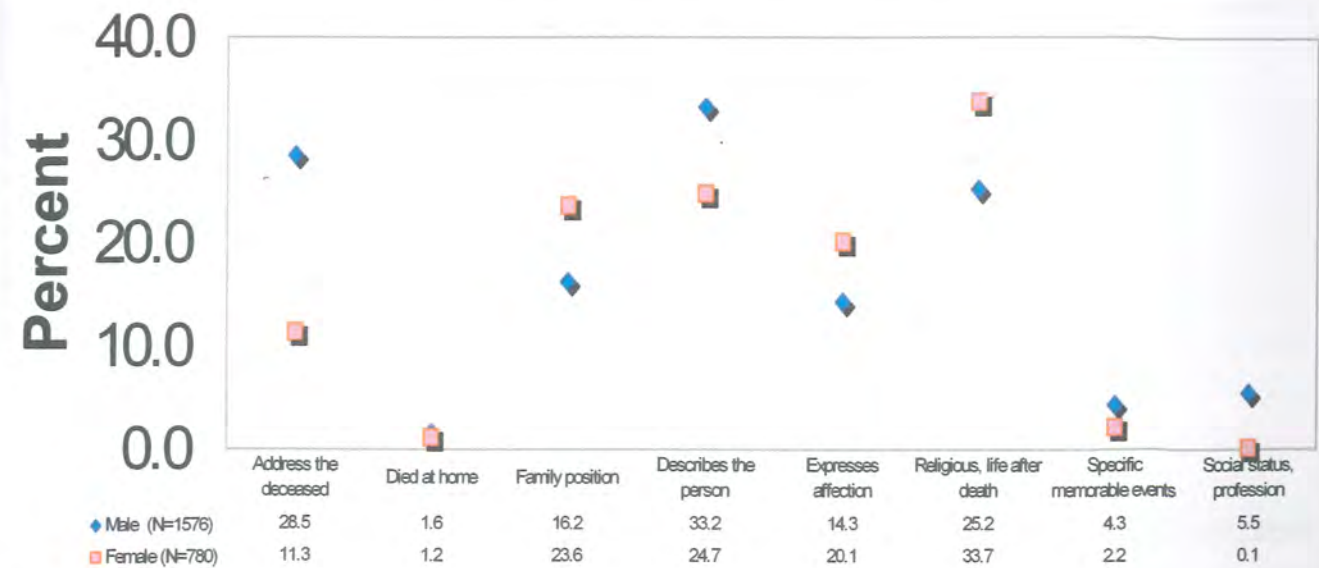
2. Tables on Gender differences

Grouping of editorial content and obituaries by Gender

(57 instance of editorial content, 33 obituaries)



Death Notices content by gender



3. PROFESSION OR SOCIAL STATUS IN OBITUARIES AND EDITORIAL CONTENT

(Incomplete list)

Job grouping	Obituaries	Editorial content
Political, Influential, Moneyed	Queens councillor Queens councillor, Supreme Court Judge Order of Australia Order of Australia Councillor, Accountant, Order of Australia Women Historian, Activist, Order of Australia Total entries: 6	Member of Parliament Political leader Pope Pope President Oil Mogul President Politician Televangelist (American) US Ambassador Total entries: 10
Artistic, interesting, scientific	Jazz Musician Linguist, scholar Journalist Aviation Pioneer Biographer Naturalist Chief conductor Paediatrician, lecturer Actor Historian, author, ordained Musician, singer Academic, professor Author, playwright Writer, director, activist WWII gunner, feature writer Historian, photographer, businessperson Conservationist Journalist, Author Boxer Bowler Murderer, friend of famous writers -- Women Nun (beatified) Sister of JF Kennedy Opera singer Secretary to President Nixon Total entries: 26	Film Animator Musician Scientist Comedian Boxer Bowling champion Author Conductor Writer in exile Boxer Cricketeer Racehorse owner and breeder Women Flight attendant Nun Total entries: 14
		Sales Detective Bikie (Member of motor cycle gang)

4. RESEARCH CATEGORIES

Category	Comments, typical phrases used
Ad addresses the deceased	
Ad addresses the people remaining behind	
Place at death shown	
Place at death shown as home	
Notice shows Age at death	
Formulaic	Fondest memories; treasured memories; happy memories; in loving memory; deepest sympathy; heartfelt sympathy; always remembered; sincere regrets; condolences; sadly missed; sad loss
How the person died	Passed away peacefully; end marked by fortitude; after long illness; suffers no more; you are now safe from pain; after short illness; you left me so suddenly; now without pain; unexpected passing; you put up a great fight; sudden and tragic death
Descriptive of relationship; family or family position	Adored husband; loved father; grand mother of---; great-grandmother of; daughter , cousin of, aunt of,
Descriptive of the person's personality	... who always greeted us with a hug and a smile; the happy man with a big shoulder to cry on; you would always find time for me; I always remember your jovial ways; we remember your warm nature and friendly smile; hardworking; unselfishly shared; devoted; loving and loyal wife; integrity and sense of character; a true gentleman
Specific expression of affection	I love you. I shall treasure the memories of you forever in my heart. Thank you for your friendship
Indicating life after death or religious beliefs	You will always be in our heart till we meet again; reunited with his loved ones; now at peace with God; may God's angels take care of you in heaven; gone to God's garden; at rest with her Lord; Rest in Peace
Referring to specific memorable events	Watching the Eagles grand final with you; I will always remember our fishing trips together; happy memories of our bowls days; will miss our Friday nights at Bingo
Descriptive of the persons social status or profession	A much respected historian; Pioneer of Rockingham; a respected judge; former club president
Indicating presence at death	I am glad I spoke with you the day God wrapped his arms about you; passed away in the arms of his loving wife, Passed away peacefully with family at his side; "as I heard you take that final breath"

5. DEATH NOTICES

5.1 Examples how the Categories are applied

(02.02.2006 O'Connor Gerald (Cliff))

Loved brother of Tom and brother in law of Carole. Fond uncle of Michael, Jane, Alison and families. Passed peacefully into God's care on 31.1.05 to walk beside Dad, Mum and Chris. Love and everlasting tanks from all of us to Dorothy for her untiring love, devotion and care. A man of great courage. Per Ardua ad Astra.

Comment: This ad would be counted into

- Ad addresses the people remaining behind
 - Shows how person died (peacefully)
 - Descriptive of family position (Brother, Uncle etc)
 - Indicating life after death or religious beliefs (walk beside Dad etc)
 - Descriptive of the person's personality (great courage)-
-

(02.02.2006 Scherini (Irene))

Grandma, happy memories of my childhood in Kalgoorlie. Love you always and miss you heaps. Love from your grand daughter Kym Scherini and family

Comment: This ad would be counted into

- Ad addresses the deceased
 - Specific expression of affection (Love you)
 - Descriptive of relationship, family or family position (Grandma)
-

(02.02.2006 Selby (Phoebe Elizabeth))

Passed away peacefully at home surrounded by family.....much loved wife of Bill (dec) Dad has reached out his hand to take you on your final journey....

Comment: This ad would be counted into

- Ad addresses people remaining behind
 - Shows place of death (at home)
 - How the person died (peacefully)
 - Descriptive of relationship, family or family position (wife of)
 - Indicating life after death or religious beliefs (Dad has reached out....)
-

(02.02.2006 Woodall (John))

My condolence to Pauline and family at the loss of a good friend, Freemason and JP. Linda and Trevor

Comment: This ad would be counted into

- Ad addresses people remaining behind
 - Formulaic (condolences)
 - Descriptive of the person's social status (Freemason, JP)
-

(03.02.2006 O'Brien (John))

To a big hearted man whose passion for furthering Australian-Japanese relations was extraordinary. We will greatly miss your smile, sense of humour and that mischievous sparkle in your eye.

Deepest sympathy to Natalie and families....

Comment: This ad would be counted into

- Ad addresses people remaining behind
- Ad addresses the deceased
- Formulaic (Deepest sympathy)
- Descriptive of person's personality (sense of humour, big hearted)

(03.02.2006 Coote (John Gordon))

Passed away peacefully on 2.2.05. Dad, it's hard to say goodbye as you left so suddenly, but thankfully, very peacefully. You always gave your unconditional love, advice and guidance to us all. Your strength gave us a standard to follow. You were generous, without showing favour, our love for you is immeasurable. You have finished with this life and now gone to a better place, waiting for mum to be by your side again.

As my promise to you dad, I will love and care for mum with all my heart and soul. 'Til we meet again, my darling dad, rest peacefully, you deserve it. Faye and Adrian, Aaron and Tracy, Matthew and Sherree

Comment: Ads do not have to be formulaic.

This ad would be counted into

- Ad addresses the deceased (hard to say goodbye to you..)
 - How the person died (left so suddenly, but thankfully, very peacefully)
 - Descriptive of relationship, family or family position (dad)
 - Indicating life after death or religious beliefs (gone to a better place, waiting for mum to be at your side again)
 - Specific expression of affection (our love for you is immeasurable)
 - Descriptive of the person (generous, giving, guiding)
-

5.2 Specific examples by category
of the
Death Notices in *The West Australian*
1st Feb to 12th Feb 2005

Category	Text
Ad addresses the deceased	<p>Your unselfish joy and happiness in life will always be with us. We know that you have left us and Mum with enough happy memories to last forever. A gentleman and a bloody good bloke at rest. Don, Pat, David, Deane, Sharon, Chris, Katrina, Bernie and families (4.2.2005 Andrew (Arthur))</p> <p>Your kind gentle nature and smiling face will be sadly missed. You were a mum to me and treated me like a daughter. There will always be a place in my heart for you. Condolences to Sam, Nerina, Alfio and family. Anna and Kevin Giuffre and family. (07.02.2005 Mariotti (Eileen))</p>
Ad addresses the people remaining behind	<p>Sympathy to the family. Keith Bliss (4.2.2005 Sheridan (June))</p> <p>Deepest sympathy and thoughts to Hilda and her brother Charlie on the sad loss of their dad. Jim Carmichael (4.2.2005 Taylor (David))</p> <p>Dear Chelle, Phil, Ryan and Claire our thoughts and love are with you at this time David, Helen and Tammy (07.02.2005 Mariotti (Eileen))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at Craigmont Nursing Home on 3rd February, 2005, aged 90 years. Beloved wife of George (dec) and Bob (dec). Loved mother of Ellen, Lucy, Georgie and Ruth. Loved mother-in-law of Ron, George, Ben and John (dec). Loved grandmother of 11 and great-grandmother of 15. ... (5.2.2005 Byers Becky (Dempsey))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at Alfred Carson Lodge on 3.2.2005, aged 96. Beloved wife of Mervyn (dec). Loved and loving mother of Anthony and Elizabeth. Fond mother-in-law of Colin. Dear Granma of Tim and Dani and Pru and Mark (UK) Great-granma of 6. Reunited with her soulmate (5.2.2005 Cooke (Betty))</p> <p>Born Derby 4.2.1978 Died in Perth 3.2.2005. Dearly loved son of Sue and Geoff, brother of Karen, Grandson of Mavis and Ivan (dec) and Doris (dec) and John (dec) Williams, loved nephew of Stephen (dec), nephew and cousin to the Williams and Francis family. Passed away suddenly. A quiet and gentle nature, many treasured memories, so sadly missed – we will love you always. Rest peacefully, love Mum, Dad, Karen and Nanna Francis. (5.2.2005 Francis (Neil))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at Armadale Hospital on 4.02.2005 aged 91 years. Devoted wife of Ivan (dec). Loved mother of Penelope, Richard (dec, Lucille, Ian (dec) and David. (5.2.2005 Webster (Margret))</p>
Place of death	<p>Passed away peacefully at Royal Perth Hospital on 3rd February 2005 in the presence of family. Loved wife of Marty. Loved and loving mother of Jan, Kevin, Jim, Rob, John and Kaye. Special Nanna of 13 grandchildren and Nan of 7 great-grandchildren (4.2.2005 Brennan (Lil))</p> <p>Passed away suddenly but very peacefully on Wed, 2nd Feb., at home, in his 89th year. Loved husband of Hilda and the perfect father to Graeme, Kevin, Faye, Terry and Patricia. Your love and kindness will live on through your immediate and extended families. (4.2.2005 Coote (John Gordon))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at home 2.2.2005 aged 72 years. Dearly beloved wife of Vuksan. Loving and caring mother of David, Yelena, John, Petar and families. Peacefully at rest in God's care</p>

	<p>(4.2.2005 Dragovic (Stana))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at home after a short illness, surrounded by her loving family. Beloved wife of Kevin (dec), ... etc. Beloved nanna of 10 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. We love you deeply and you will remain forever in our heart. (07.02.2005 Chmielewski (Christa Anna Luise))</p> <p>Passed away on the 5.2.05 at home in South Perth. Loved father of Jenny, ... (07.02.2005, Francis (A.C.))</p> <p>Loving wife of Douglas, mother of Patricia, Matthew and Robyn, grandmother of Brittany and Jack, mothr-in-law of Sherrie and Glen. Passed away at home with incredible courage in the embrace of her loving family. ... (07.02.2005 Jones (Carolyn))</p> <p>Dearly beloved son of Ida, brother to Lee and uncle to Nina. Passed away peacefully at home February 7th (8.2.2005 Hartz (Neil))</p>
<p>Notice shows Age at death</p>	<p>13.11..28 – 2.2.05 Passed away Northam Hospital. Much loved husband of Jean, loving father and father-in-law to Pam and Ian, Daryl, Cheryl and Robert, Wendy and Russell, adored Pop of seven. Always loved, always remembered (4.2.2005 Clark (Rex))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at Armadale Hospital on 4.02.2005 aged 91 years. Devoted wife of Ivan (dec). Loved mother of Penelope, Richard (dec, Lucille, Ian (dec) and David. (5.2.2005 Webster (Margret))</p>
<p>Formulaic</p>	<p>Fond memories of a beautiful lady. Deepest sympathy to Diane, Clive and families. Now in God's care. Kerry and Ron (4.2.2005 Abell (Kathleen))</p> <p>Our deepest sympathy to Kim, Rochelle and family on the passing of Rick. Fond memories of a workmate and friend. He will be sadly missed. Management and Staff at Westcott Towbars. 4.2.2005 Barnard (Rick)</p> <p>Fond memories of a wonderful aunt. Deepest sympathy to Uncle Jack and family. You will be sadly missed. Tania, Phil, Ryan and Nathan. (5.2.2005 Cochrane (Melva))</p> <p>Deepest sympathy to Kathy and Belinda on your sad loss. Fond memories. From Chris, Janet, Paul and Ben (5.2.2005, James (Joe))</p> <p><u>Note – Death notices do not have to be formulaic – here a few examples</u></p> <p>We still can't believe you're not with us anymore, mate. We miss your laugh, your humour and your mateship. Our workmate, our mate. Ride free, Barney Jim Burton, Blue and Linda Pheiffer (07.02.2006 Barnes (Neil))</p> <p>Carr (Beryl): Mum, with admiration I watched you fight so hard to stay. With my heart I felt your pain. With tears in my eyes I watched you slowly face away. But then as I lay there and heard you take that final breath, I smiled, as I knew that finally both mind and body were at rest. A part of me went with you that day to care for you along your way. Your loving daughter Bromwyn. You shall live on forever in our hearts. <u>02.02.2005 Andrew (Arthur E)</u></p> <p>(03.02.2006 Dragovic (Stana)) To John, Liz and family, our thoughts are with you. Your workmates at FER</p>

	<i>(Comment: This is were we would expect a formulaic notice being placed – but this notice shows that feelings of sympathy can be expressed in clear language without resorting to formulaic expressions)</i>
How the person died	<p>Passed away peacefully at Royal Perth Hospital on 3rd February 2005 in the presence of family. Loved wife of Marty. Loved and loving mother of Jan, Kevin, Jim, Rob, John and Kaye. Special Nanna of 13 grandchildren and Nan of 7 great-grandchildren 4.2.2005 Brennan (Lil)</p> <p>Passed away suddenly but very peacefully on Wed, 2nd Feb., at home, in his 89th year. Loved husband of Hilda and the perfect father to Graeme, Kevin, Faye, Terry and Patricia. Your love and kindness will live on through your immediate and extended families. 4.2.2005 Coote (John Gordon)</p> <p>Passed away 3.2.05. Deepest sympathy to Marty and family. No more suffering, Lil, Robbie (5.2.2005 Brennan (Lil))</p> <p>Tragically taken on February 2, 2005 whilst holidaying in New Zealand. Dearly loved and loving parents and parents in law of Mark and Andrea, Vanessa and Roger. Adored Nan and Pa of Nick and Angus (5.2.2005 Lewis (Bernie and Chris))</p> <p>A funeral service is being held in Scotland today for Lynette who passed away at home in Livingston on Saturday the 29th of January after a five month battle with cancer. Cherished wife of Tom, devoted mother to David and Gabriella. Much loved Grandmother to Emily and Tom. Remembered with affection by Alan, Pati and Lynette's extended family in Australia. (9.2.2005 Inglis (Urani) Lynette)</p>
Descriptive of relationship; family or family position	<p>Passed away peacefully at Royal Perth Hospital on 3rd February 2005 in the presence of family. Loved wife of Marty. Loved and loving mother of Jan, Kevin, Jim, Rob, John and Kaye. Special Nanna of 13 grandchildren and Nan of 7 great-grandchildren 4.2.2005 Brennan (Lil)+</p>
Descriptive of the person's personality	<p>Your unselfish joy and happiness in life will always be with us. We know that you have left us and Mum with enough happy memories to last forever. A gentleman and a bloody good bloke at rest. Don, Pat, David, Deane, Sharon, Chris, Katrina, Bernie and families 4.2.2005 Andrew (Arthur)</p> <p>A dedicated and highly respected teacher and administrator who enriched the lives of her students at Gidgegannup Primary School. She will be greatly missed by he school community. Deepest sympathy to Trevor. From the Director General and Corporate Executive of the Department of Education and Training 4.2.2005 Balmorth (Ann)</p> <p>Passed away peacefully on 2.2.05. Dad, it's hard to say goodbye as you left so suddenly, but thankfully, very peacefully. You always gave your unconditional love, advice and guidance to us all. Your strength gave us a standard to follow. You were generous, without showing favour, our love for you is immeasurable. You have finished with this life and now gone to a better place, waiting for mum to be by your side again. As my promise to you dad, I will love and care for mum with all my heart and soul. 'Til we meet again, my darling dad, rest peacefully, you deserve it. Faye and Adrian, Aaron and Tracy, Matthew and Sherree (3.2.2005 Coote (John Gordon))</p>
Specific expression of affection	<p>My darling lovely, I will love you forever, God bless until we meet again. Your loving husband, Hess. (4.2.2005 Bedford (Phylis))</p> <p>Mum, with admiration I watched you fight so hard to stay. With my heart I felt your pain. With tears in my eyes I watched you slowly face away. But then as I lay there and heard you take that</p>

	<p>final breath, I smiled, as I knew that finally both mind and body were at rest. A part of me went with you that day to care for you along your way. Your loving daughter Bromwyn. You shall live on forever in our hearts. (02.02.2005 Carr (Beryl));</p>
<p>Indicating life after death or religious beliefs</p>	<p>Fond memories of a beautiful lady. Deepest sympathy to Diane, Clive and families. Now in God's care. Kerry and Ron 4.2.2005 Abell (Kathleen)</p> <p>My darling lovely, I will love you forever, God bless until we meet again. Your loving husband, Hess. 4.2.2005 Bedford (Phyllis)</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at home 2.2.2005 aged 72 years. Dearly beloved wife of Vuksan. Loving and caring mother of David, Yelena, John, Petar and families. Peacefully at rest in God's care 4.2.2005 Dragovic (Stana)</p> <p>Sincere condolences to Uncle Marty, family members, brothers and extended family. Now with God, Lil will continuing caring for you all. We will miss her. Peter, Robyn and kids (5.2.2005 Brennan (Lil))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at home surrounded by family.....much loved wife of Bill (dec) Dad has reached out his hand to take you on your final journey.... (5.2.2005 Selby (Phoebe Elizabeth))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at Alfred Carson Lodge on 3.2.2005, aged 96. Beloved wife of Mervyn (dec). Loved and loving mother of Anthony and Elizabeth. Fond mother-in-law of Colin. Dear Granma of Tim and Dani and Pru and Mark (UK) Great-granma of 6. Reunited with her soulmate (5.2.2005 Cooke (Betty))</p> <p>Hey Baba. I will miss going for walks with you and your hugs and kisses, and I will miss pulling each others ears. You always used to say only God was looking after me, but now I have Baba and God. Love Steven, xxx (5.2.2005 Dragovic (Stana))</p> <p>Dearly loved brother of Lil, uncle of David, Coralie, Neville (dec), Julie, Nancy and their families. Tending God's roses in heaven (5.2.2005 Harmer (Frederick))</p> <p>In memory of Yendys King (Greenwood). Went to the loving arms of Jesus 3.2.05. An angel from Heaven sent to live among us for 72 years. Much loved Mother of Allison, Mother-in-law of Sahmus, Grandmother to Stephanie, Rachel, Tracy and Christopher. You will be in our hearts forever until we see you again in paradise.+ (5.2.2005 King (Yendis))</p> <p>Rest in Peace. My beautiful Nonna, I will never forget your softest voice which will stay in my heart. Me memories of you will be cherished always. Follow the light and go to Him and rest with Him in eternal peace. Love always, Michael (5.2.2005 Maccarone (Lucia))</p> <p>Farewell to Gerry. Sympathy to Dorothy and family. Fond memories of days on the river. Mike and Pauline Smith. "And I will rest in the port of my God forever." (5.2.2005 O'Connor (Gerry))</p> <p>Loving father of June, father-in-law of Ross, grandfather of Lisa and Ruth, great grandad of Alex and Dana. Our great loss is Heaven's gain. Eternal life is yours to enjoy, dad. You are free at last. (07.02.2005 Kirby (Joe))</p> <p>Dearly beloved wife of Richard, loving mother of Shayne and Karen, respected mother-in-law of Sue and Glenn, adored grandmother of Paul, Samantha and Rachael. Passed away peacefully after a short illness at age 60. May peace be with you in your new life</p>

	<p>(07.02.2005 Van Leeuwen (Lorna Jacqueline))</p> <p>We will miss you, Mum. You will be forever in our hearts. We will treasure the times we spent together. May peace be with you now in your new life. Your loving son Mark and Elaine (8.2.2005 Dowling (Yvonne Joyce))</p> <p>Passed over peacefully on 8.2.05. Beloved daughter of Eddie and Rena (both dec) beloved sister of Moya. To live in the hearts of those we love is not to die. (11.02.2005 Griffin (Coleen Margaret))</p> <p><i><u>When the Trinity Theological college places a death notice for trustee and council member John Ellis, who died of cancer, neither religion nor life after death are overtly described</u></i></p> <p>Beloved brother in Christ, friend and counsellor who brought the vision of Trinity House into being. His kindly disposition, humility, bright intelligence and warm smile we will greatly missed (sic). Our love and prayers to Margaret, Anne, Jill, Iain and family. From the faculty, staff students and trustees of Trinity Theological College (11.02.2005 Ellis (John))</p>
<p>Referring to specific memorable events</p>	<p>Fond memories of Formula 500's in years gone by. Catch you later, Pete. Ed and Betty Walker 4.2.2005 Stubbings (Peter)</p> <p>Our heartfelt sympathy to Jean and families in your sad loss. Fond memories of a true gentleman in good times at Northam Railway Tennis Club. Kevin and Julie. (5.2.2005 Clark (Rex))</p> <p>Farewell to Gerry. Sympathy to Dorothy and family. Fond memories of days on the river. Mike and Pauline Smith. "And I will rest in the port of my God forever." (5.2.2005 O'Connor (Gerry))</p> <p>Gentleman at rest. Now I know there will be music in heaven. Wonderful memories of your hospitality in Oxford, UK. Heartfelt sympathy to Audrey, Clare, Mike and families. Kathy Salter. (5.2.2005 Willett (George))</p> <p>Many happy memories of our time in Kalgoorlie, especially when you, Jonathon and I shared accommodation at the Gold Miner Caravan Park. Your meat loaf on the 4th July was a highlight. Goodbye old friend. Thinking of you Nancy Nick Robotham (07.02.2005 Moran (Dennis))</p> <p>Deepest sympathy to Jonathon, Andrew and family. I will miss the times we shared together watching the kids play cricket, eating our Maccas and having a quiet drink. Your honesty and love of life has changed us forever. As one Liverpool supporter to another, I weep not that you have gone, but smile that you have been. In life as in death, You will never walk alone. Condolences from Alan, Kath, Steve, Marc and Luke (8.2.2005 Cornelius (Mark))</p> <p>A special friend. Our never to be forgotten school, A.T.C., teenage years and duck hunting great times together. You were always a thoughtful and caring friend. Sympathy to Jill and family. Colin, Kathleen, Peter, Mark and Karleen Bowra (8.2.2005 Lilleyman (Jim))</p>
<p>Descriptive of the person's social status or profession</p>	<p>A dedicated and highly respected teacher and administrator who enriched the lives of her students at Gidgegannup Primary School. She will be greatly missed by the school community. Deepest sympathy to Trevor. From the Director General and Corporate Executive of the Department of Education and Training (4.2.2005 Balmorth (Ann))</p> <p>The WM and Brethren of Victoria Plains Lodge No 287 WAC extend condolences to the family of our late esteemed Worshipful Brother Len Daley. His contribution to Freemasonry at Spring</p>

	<p>Park Lodge and Victoria Plans Lodge will long be remembered. Rest in peace, Len (8.2.2005 Daley (L.R.))</p> <p>Journalist, Author, Landscape Architect, Historian, Order of Australia Medal. Moman, beloved mother of Tish and Jan Oldham, died peacefully on Friday February 4. We will all miss her strength, her humour, her indomitable spirit and her love ... (8.2.2005 Oldharm Ray (BA, AAILA, FRWAHS, OAM))</p> <p>A valued and respected Wildlife Officer for 27 years, your great sense of humour and quiet unassuming nature will be remembered. Our sympathy to Steve and family. From your friends and colleagues at CALM (8-2-2005 Roberts (Phil))</p>
<p>Indicating presence at death</p>	<p>Passed away peacefully at Royal Perth Hospital on 3rd February 2005 in the presence of family. Loved wife of Marty. Loved and loving mother of Jan, Kevin, Jim, Rob, John and Kaye. Special Nanna of 13 grandchildren and Nan of 7 great-grandchildren (4.2.2005 Brennan (Lil))</p> <p>You courageously opened your eyes after a long fight to say goodbye to me and your loving kids. You are amazing to give us that last beautiful memory. ... (5.2.2005 Lilleyman (James))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at home after a short illness, surrounded by her loving family. Beloved wife of Kevin (dec), ... etc. Beloved nanna of 10 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. We love you deeply and you will remain forever in our heart. (07.02.2005 Chmielewski (Christa Anna Luise))</p> <p>Loving wife of Douglas, mother of Patricia, Matthew and Robyn, grandmother of Brittany and Jack, mothr-in-law of Sherrie and Glen. Passed away at home with incredible courage in the embrace of her loving family. .. (07.02.2005 Jones (Carolyn))</p> <p>I felt so honoured to be there as you opened your eyes one last time. It wasn't until then I realised how much more I loved you and were about to miss you. Love you always, Matt and Sherrie (07.02.2005 Jones (Carolyn))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at Bunbury amongst family. At rest now, Neil. (08.02.2005 Bilich (Nick))</p> <p>Passed away peacefully, in the company of this family, after short illness. Deeply loved by his wife Jean ... Words were everything, words can't say enough. (8.2.2005 Ferguson (James Keith (Jimmy)))</p>

6. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

6.1 Short Biography Brian Singleton

Brian Singleton was a larger than life character, a dedicated lawyer and a fearless advocate

Legal lion dies, aged 71

ROY GIBSON

One of WA's most respected criminal lawyers, Brian Singleton QC, died of a heart attack at his home on Sunday. He was 71 and had been fighting throat cancer in recent months.

Mr Singleton was flamboyant and witty, with a gift of speaking to jurors in terms they understood. He gave his time generously to aid younger members of the legal profession.

If there was a big criminal trial or royal commission in WA over the past 30 years, Mr Singleton was involved in it. His clients included former premier Brian Burke and businessman Laurie Connell.

A strongly religious man, Mr Singleton just failed to complete a degree in theology at Notre Dame University. Away from the law, he was proud to be president of Subiaco in 1973 when the club won the WAFL premiership to break a 49-year drought.

Born in 1933, Mr Singleton was educated at CBC and Aquinas College before getting his law degree at the University of WA. He spent the early part of his career with local firms and was a partner with Corser & Corser for five years until he went into private practice in 1971. He was appointed a QC in 1985.

Several years ago, Mr Singleton was ill with polyps in his throat. When he returned to work, his booming voice was never quite the same — but his enthusiasm for work remained undiminished.

Corruption and Crime Commissioner Kevin Hammond, who is godfather to one member of the Singleton family, was a friend from university days.

“He was a larger than life character, a dedicated lawyer and a fearless advocate,” Mr Hammond said. “Many of today's experienced lawyers will remember him as a man who gave generously of his time to assist them.”

Supreme Court Justice Geoffrey Miller said yesterday: “We did many criminal trials together over the years. He was a tough fighter who refused to prosecute anyone because he considered himself to be a defence lawyer through and through.

“If you were in trouble, he was the person for you. He had a great talent when it came to addressing juries and sometimes he could sum up a difficult trial with only brief notes.

“After Subiaco won the 1973 premiership, he had a trial in Bunbury but he travelled to Perth each night as the celebrations continued through the week.”

If there was a black mark on Mr Singleton's career, it came in 1998 when he was charged with conspiring with the late Laurie Connell and others to pervert the course of justice. Mr Singleton was found not guilty — a decision which brought applause from the many legal figures in court to support him.

He is survived by his wife Beverley, two sons and two daughters.

Tough fighter: Brian Singleton QC, flanked by Supreme Court Justice Geoffrey Miller, left, and Laurie Connell.

(The West Australian, February 8, 2006, page 14)

Even cartoons show death occurring in a sterile environment, alone

(except for the company of the grim reaper, who, fittingly, alludes to his use of drugs, thus supporting a medicalised view of death)

(*The Weekend Australian Review*, June 3 – 4, 2006, page 40)

