

STORIES OF LIFE AND DEATH: UNDERTAKERS' PERSPECTIVES

by

ELSIE PETRONELLA NEL

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SUMMARY

Like death, the defining human reality underlying our relationships and views of life's meaning, the experiences and activities of undertakers, remains an uncommon subject for psychological research. Existential anxiety roots a society-wide denial of the fundamental nature of death, which necessitates the development of institutions to take responsibility for the dying and dead. As the image and service of the stigmatised funeral industry improves, society's experience of death should become more meaningful. The overview of the research into these topics noted the need for further studies.

Within a holistic, ecosystemic epistemology, this study adopted a qualitative approach and case study method, which provided descriptions of the ecology, contexts, and relationships characteristic of the undertaker's vocation by focussing on patterned expressions of views and attitudes. The aim was to gain insight into the undertaker's experience of the many faces of death, with a genuine interest and deep respect for their world.

Key words: Death, bereavement, undertaker, funeral director, existentialism, death ritual, anxiety, denial, meaning, ecosystemic epistemology, context, constructivism, second-order cybernetics, qualitative research, co-created realities.

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APPENDIX A

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

Death is one of the few truly universal experiences that define the human condition, and mankind's reactions to it give us some idea of human nature. It can be considered as the most intimately personal and, at the same time, most disturbing fact of life. Man's historical attempts to understand the purpose of his existence has brought deepened awareness of his finiteness and constantly reminded him of the preciousness of life (Carse, 1980). The realisation of his mortality has however also turned death into a subject of morbid attention (Corr, 1979b).

The momentous part that death plays in human existence has made it the frequent subject of legends, poetry, drama (Waugh, 1948) and literature (Tolstoy, 1960). Death has been extensively debated and explored in academic fields such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and physiology. It seems to be a subject, however, that still eludes closure or resolution as it remains a mystery that lies beyond the scope of complete comprehension (Toynbee, Mant, Smart, Hinton, Yudkin, Rhode, Heywood & Price, 1968). Despite our attempts to come to some kind of understanding about death, it is still a word that fills people with great anxiety and discomfort (Freud, 1950). The finality and absoluteness of death creates feelings of helplessness and uncertainty, resulting in attempts to avoid any discussion around this topic (Corr, 1979a).

Background to Death and the Undertaker

Contemporary Western society's involvement with death has changed as our everyday lifestyles and customs have changed (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Until the turn of the century people died at home and friends and family members prepared their bodies for burial. As a result of modernisation and industrialisation we seem to have arranged our lives in such a way as to decrease the opportunities for the

individual to confront death (Thompson, 1991). Most people in our society will, for instance, go through life without ever witnessing the natural death of a close relative or friend (Kübler-Ross, 1969; Thompson, 1991). Advances in modern technology and medicine has led to a steep decline in the number of deaths due to disease or degeneration, but has increased deaths due to accidents and violence (Toynbee et al., 1968; Fulton & Owen, 1994). As natural death becomes less and less part of our common experience, death becomes more and more unusual. Death in our society is therefore characteristically more unnatural, more brutal or violent and something which can be expected only to occur in the later stages of life (Fulton & Owen, 1994; Molyneux, 2002). Even though death has become more predictable and understandable on an objective, abstract, and intellectual level it has become less natural or familiar, and almost less 'appropriate', as part of life (Corr, 1979a).

One of the ways in which we attempt to remove death from the midst of our lives is by handing over the responsibility of the dying to institutions and professional functionaries (Fulton & Owen, 1994; McKay, 1990). We seem to segregate ourselves from the elderly, those with a high risk of mortality, those who are actually dying, and bodies of the dead (Kübler-Ross, 1969; Pine, 1975). Death became something to be handled by a select group of highly trained professionals such as doctors, nurses and hospital staff (Thompson, 1991). People are therefore more likely to die alone and in unfamiliar surroundings among strangers, not in an attempt to make it easier for the dying person, but rather to spare the survivors an unpleasant experience (Fulton & Owen, 1994; Corr, 1979b).

As a result of our changing attitudes towards dying, one of the most common features of death has become the employment of an undertaker (Pine, 1975). The responsibility for the disposal of the body is completely transferred to him or her and they literally have to do the death work and become the 'caretakers of the dead'. The undertaker's occupation places him in a paradoxical position of performing duties deemed by larger society as necessary but unclean, unacceptable and even dangerous (Thompson, 1991). This does not only place an unexpected degree of responsibility on the undertaker, but also makes him or her vulnerable to undue criticism (Pine, 1975).

Even though death is an everyday occurrence, most people appear to be unconcerned, or have little experience, with its impact. The undertaker, however, is deeply concerned about death and mortality, deals with it daily and regards it as his or her main source of income (Keith, 1998; Pine, 1975). Death is not merely a routine part of the funeral director's work, but is his or her reason for existing. Working with the dead, and with the constant reminders of death, seems to be the crux of their job rather than merely a distasteful aspect (Cahill, 1999; Keith, 1998). Unlike physicians and nurses, undertakers cannot leave the handling of corpses to underlings (Sudnow, 1967).

As most people regard the undertaker's occupation as something that they could never do, the undertaker is often viewed as different or abnormal for having chosen such an occupation (Thompson, 1991). Society's own discomfort with death makes the undertaker a popular subject of humour and as Warner (1959) states:

The deep hostilities and fears men have for death, unless very carefully controlled and phrased, can turn the undertaker into a scapegoat, the ritual uncleanliness of his task being identified with his role and person (p. 317).

The very existence of a functional subgroup such as the undertaker in our society confirms the recognition of the demands that death makes on us (Corr, 1979b). But what about the demands placed on the undertaker as a person? What provides him or her with comfort in a society that is too uncomfortable with death even to acknowledge its existence? Why would anybody consider a profession with such negative connotations, and what would give them the satisfaction to continue? If people who have little or no contact with death find it difficult to face up to death, what must it be like to be confronted with death every day? What is the effect of seeing the full extent of death, of dealing with that part of death that very few people have the courage to look at?

Problem Premise

It has been stated above that death as a phenomenon has been a popular subject of art in general. It has been the subject of intellectual curiosity in the field of Philosophy concentrating on concepts like the meaning of death and existence (Carse, 1980; Heidegger, 1970; Simpson, 1979), human mortality (Keith, 1998; Lifton & Olsen, 1974) or the immortality of the soul (Ariès, 1974; Flew, 1976). The meanings and implications of death from various religious standpoints such as Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism have also been contemplated and studied in detail (Pine, 1975; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1994; Toynbee et. al., 1968).

The physiology or the technical processes of death as well as the ethical and legal questions around alternative forms of death, like euthanasia, has been considered in the light of the changing dilemmas faced within our society (Blank, 1994; Carson, 1979; Hammes & Bendiksen, 1994). Sociological studies has been done to determine the when, why, and how of death and has supplied us with practical information regarding the occurrence of death according to a number of variables, for example, gender or age (Keith, 1998; Lerner, 1970; Tomer, 2000). A number of studies have also been done regarding the various attitudes towards death, as well as factors that can influence or change these attitudes (Ariès, 1974; Popa & Hanganu, 1979).

In the field of Psychology authors have done exhaustive studies on subjects like grief and bereavement. In-depth investigations have been done regarding aspects such as the psychological problems experienced by the dying person, the bereaved family as well as the doctors and nurses caring for the dying patient (Kübler-Ross, 1969; Thorson & Powell, 1988). The impact that bereavement and grief has on crisis workers such as the police, fire fighters and trauma personnel has also received some attention (Isaak & Paterson, 1996; Talseth, Lindseth, Jacobsson & Norberg, 1997). The emotional difficulties experienced by the survivors of death, as well as advice on ways to deal with the pain of death, have been widely written about (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 1972).

The history and development of funeral ceremonies, as well as the role or the functionality of such rituals, have been discussed from a number of perspectives (Fulton, 1979). The practical duties and the different situations in which undertakers have to conduct themselves have been explained (Pine, 1975), but the area that has received the most recent attention is the important role that undertakers fulfil in the grieving process (Gamino, Easterling, Stirman & Sewell, 2000). The funeral, the way in which the funeral is conducted, and the amount of support provided by the undertaker are considered as important elements of death aftercare (Lund, 2001). Information regarding the bereaved's needs and experiences during this process have been explored with suggestions on how the grieving process could be further facilitated, or hampered, by the undertaker (Fulton, 1979; Weeks, & Johnson, 2001). The ethical issues surrounding the undertaker and the criticism of the industry as a whole has certainly not been left untouched (Kübler-Ross, 1974; Pine, 1975; Taylor, 1979).

The undertaker's experience of his or her world, and the emotional impact that the profession has on him or her, seems to be a subject that has been widely neglected. The limited number of studies available regarding the undertaker has traditionally involved research from a quantitative perspective supplying no richer descriptions of the undertaker as a human being (Cahill, 1999; Thorson & Powell, 1996). No studies exploring the undertaker's view or attitudes of concepts such as life or death could be found.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is the unstructured exploration of a psychological interest in the world of the undertaker. A qualitative, or naturalistic, research approach, which will best suit the researcher's ecosystemic epistemology, will be applied to allow for a holistic understanding of this human phenomenon (Sells, Smith & Sprenkle, 1995). The foundations of the research will be grounded in ecosystemic assumptions focusing on ecology, patterns, relationships, interconnectedness, and context (Keeney, 1983). The belief in multiple realities defines research as an attempt to make sense of the world of the people being studied (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). In order to achieve this, research cannot be entered into as an attempt to verify a preconceived hypothesis, but rather to create a conception or understanding of an interesting phenomenon after the experience of it (Babbie, 1992; Orford, 1993).

The research inquiry will therefore be entered into with tentative theories to guide the identification of areas of interest (Dane, 1990). It will be entered into with a 'not-knowing' stance to promote curiosity, collaboration, an openness to being informed by the research participant or 'co-researcher', a willingness to expand prior knowledge and an emerging understanding, and the desire to understand the co-researcher's experience (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). This will hopefully allow for the observation of subtle communications and other unexpected events, attitudes and behaviours that might not have been anticipated or recorded otherwise (Babbie, 1992).

As the inquiry proceeds, the research problem will become more focused and more questions will be posed. The areas of interest will be refined as continuous data analysis is carried out and it is possible for a theory to emerge from the relevant contextual values of each case (Moustakas, 1981). The focus of the research is likely to change during the process, and as a result the expected products of the research is difficult to specify. The only result that can be expected is an increased understanding, or a rich description, of the lived experiences of the undertaker in his or her context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study has the intention of discovering and developing new ideas and information about undertakers, as well as forming new hypotheses about their world.

Chapter Review

This study will comprise of a literature survey, a theoretical, as well as a practical component.

Chapter 2 provides the intellectual background that serves as the starting point for this study. It surveys the existing body of academic views and research on

society's orientation and attitudes towards the reality of death, as well as the lack of an existential framework that could make a more meaningful experience of death possible. The historical development and contemporary role of the funeral industry, with specific focus on the activities of the funeral director and his or her deeper significance is described. Particular difficulties that undertakers face in their professional capacity is considered and as well as their role as the institutionalised buffer that protects society against the negative impact of death.

Chapter 3 will discuss the ecosystemic epistemology that served as the theoretical foundation for the study. A brief description of the development of this approach will be given after which the basic concepts inherent to this ecosystemic approach will be discussed. The main focus will, however, be on the second-order cybernetic and constructivist principles as they form an integral part in the use of this particular epistemology.

Chapter 4 will include an exploration of naturalistic research as the chosen paradigm to be used in the study. The basic conditions for this mode of inquiry will be set out, as well as the influence of this style on the research process. The aim and the purpose of the study will be clearly stated, illustrating the emergent design. A qualitative methodology has been chosen which will be illuminated in terms of the gathering of data and the interpretation of results.

Chapter 5 will contain case studies of three funeral directors actively involved in the most important aspects of the death process. Descriptions will be given of how each of them experiences their world as it evolved from the conversations.

Chapter 6 will provide an overview of the common themes that emerged from the case descriptions. The research findings will be linked to existing literature that either supports or contradicts it.

Chapter 7 will be the concluding chapter. The study will be evaluated regarding the aim and the purpose of the study while the strengths and the

weaknesses of this ecosystemic approach will be contemplated. Recommendations for future research will also be made.

Conclusion

This study, adopting a holistic, ecosystemic conceptual framework and a qualitative method, will descriptively explore the unique contexts and realities of the funeral director. In so doing, it will lay some groundwork for the further investigation of the problematic position of the undertaker and his or her role in helping society to absorb the pain of bereavement, as well as to improve its general insights into the reality of death.

CHAPTER 2

DEATH AND THE UNDERTAKER: A RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

Throughout human history man has considered the reality and meaning of death in his quest for understanding the purpose of life and in order to answer the “why?” and “how?” of his existence. During the late 19th century the existentialists started the serious and extensive philosophical contemplation of the question of death (McKay, 1990). Their insights have been limited, though, by the fact that this complex and many-sided dimension of human experience seems always to be eluding mankind’s direct intellectual and emotional grasp (Caglioti, 1974). Carse (1980) dares to state that the true meaning of death will always lie beyond the scope of our comprehension and that it is, in a sense, a subject about which nothing can be learned, as it can never be ‘lived through’ in the same way as other human experiences. This view is enhanced by Smith’s (1998) observation that any investigation taking death as its subject will, ironically, rather point to our ignorance and confusion about life. This chapter will, therefore, not attempt to explain or understand death, but approach it with the necessary respect, for as Hertz (in Owen, Markusen & Fulton, 1994) states:

We all believe we know what death is because it is a familiar event and one that arouses intense emotion. It seems both ridiculous and sacrilegious to question the value of this intimate knowledge and to wish to apply reason to a subject where only the heart is competent (p. 80).

The first section of the chapter will provide background information concerning the way Western society has traditionally explored the phenomenon of death and describe some of the most prevalent attitudes and viewpoints it has developed in so doing. A brief summary of the development of the profession of the undertaker will follow, after which his or her role and duties will be discussed in more detail. As the issue of death has only recently become a significant subject for

scientific inquiry in the Western world, the investigation of past research will point to the need for more specific research regarding the emotional impact daily contact with the many realities of death has on the funeral director.

The Nature of Death

Veatch (1979) offers the following definition of death:

...a complete change in the status of living entity characterized by the irreversible loss of those characteristics that are essentially significant to it (p. 324).

In the simplest terms this definition recognises that the only thing we can safely say about death, is that it means passing into a state of being which is fundamentally different from the one experienced as 'life' (McKay, 1990). In characteristic existentialist style the event is described as the ending of Dasein ('being-there'), which literally refers to the end of 'being-in-the-world', when life itself ends (Elliston, 1978; Heidegger, 1970). This alarming biological fact brings the material body to its end in the most solitary human experience imaginable (Lifton & Olson, 1974; McKay, 1990). Death seems to be our constant companion from the moment of birth (Rando, 1984), an ever-lurking reality that the human animal seems to be constantly aware of in many different ways and on many different levels (Lifton & Olson, 1974). Any definition of death should, however, present an element of the decisive certainty, finality and implied impartiality of death (Parsons, 1994).

The thought of death is invariably accompanied by "a shudder which comes from the sudden awareness that our non-existence is entirely possible" (Leveton, 1965; Simpson, 1979, p.127) and that it could, in an instant, make life seem completely meaningless. For the influential existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre (in Cebik, 1980), death is something outside of the living person that can never give meaning to his or her existence but rather offers the permanent risk of removing all meaning from life. Rather than being only a physiological termination, death holds the threat of non-being, which for future orientated mankind, seems to be far more disturbing

than the reality of past non-existence (Cebik, 1980; Taylor, 1979). Death threatens the human being with the negation of all that he or she values in life, and finally, of his or her very self (Rando, 1984). It makes a mockery of the achievements that amount to nothing after a life of exertion and strife (Taylor, 1979). The stark reality of death points for some to the absurdity of the whole human enterprise that seems doomed to come to an end - to move into nothingness (McKay, 1990).

Society's attitudes towards death seem to be dominated by the negative elements associated with words like threat, pain, mutilation, helplessness, meaninglessness, degradation, annihilation and loneliness (McKay, 1990). The unconditional finality of death, our powerlessness against the fact, and our inability to do anything for the dead, leaves us with a feeling of complete helplessness (Parsons, 1994). We find the subject morbid and merely talking about death fills us with personal anxiety and social discomfort (Corr, 1979a).

The one positive realisation that emerges from our awareness of the reality of death, however, lies in the recognition that it is only in actually facing the threat of nothingness that man can live his or her remaining days with the authenticity of true self-understanding. Without it man could never rise above the debilitating fear of living an incomplete and unfulfilled life (McKay, 1990).

Death and Anxiety

Anxiety is probably the most common emotion associated with death (Green, 1982). According to Kastenbaum (1992) all anxiety is rooted in the awareness of our mortality, while Baird (1976) describes death as the ontological source of all anxiety. Freud (in Parsons, 1994) ascribes the existence of anxiety to the expectation of the loss of an 'object', for example of someone with whom one has an emotionally significant relationship. As death is considered the ultimate loss, the passing away of those we care about is feared and a certain amount of conscious and subconscious anxiety is likely to accompany all our meaningful relationships. The death of others will inevitably also mark the anticipation of our own death.

For the influential American theorist, William James (in Becker, 1973), psychosis seems the most realistic response to the 'horrors' of life, of which death must surely be the most disturbing that the human organism has to face during its lifetime. Yalom (1980), a contemporary writer and psychotherapist, agrees when he asserts:

The attempt to escape from death anxiety is at the core of the neurotic conflict...The neurotic life-style is generated by a fear of death; but insofar as it limits one's ability to live spontaneously and creatively, the defence against death is itself a partial death (p. 146).

It seems meaningful to recognise and distinguish the fear of death in itself, from the fear of the results and consequences of dying, though the latter certainly forms a vital element of the former. Because of our emotional character and social nature, the fear of death is also associated with the fear of the death of others. All meaningful relationships thus include some level of awareness of the fear of separation from and the loss of loved ones, and the emotional hazard of their potential demise (Kastenbaum & Costa, 1977). On a personal level practical questions like what will become of one's property and of those left behind seem obvious. More thoughtful concerns, driven by our fear of the unknown, include trepidation about what might happen in the afterlife, the possibility of a last judgement and punishment for everyday sins, deepen our fear of death itself (Kastenbaum, 1992).

Death and Denial

Reflection on the enigma of death, especially in reaction to the experience of mortality, seems to carry one "into the heart of a bitter paradox reflected in art, poetry, philosophy, song and literature" (Vaux, 1978, p. 56) where cultures as a whole try to make sense of this painful reality of existence. According to Freud (in Corr, 1979a) our unconscious mind is unable to conceive of our own death and we

are thus deeply troubled by any thoughts about death that convey intimations of our own mortality. He states (in Kastenbaum, 1992):

Our own death is indeed quite unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators. Hence the psychoanalytic school could venture on the assertion that at bottom nobody believes in his own death, or to put the same thing in a different way, in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality...It follows that no instinct we possess is ready for a belief in death (p. 136).

The Psychoanalytic view further attributes vacillations in a person's attitude towards death to the conflicting attitudes experienced in the unconscious. While the unconscious is convinced of its own immortality one of its motive forces is, paradoxically, the pursuit of death itself (Kastenbaum, 1992). According to Freud (in Carse, 1980) death represents pleasure and the desire of the organism as a whole. A person's 'thanatos' or death wish serves as a balance to the desire for 'eros' or life. We therefore die, in a sense, because we choose to die - an inherent contradiction in human existence (Carse, 1980).

In an attempt to resolve this conflict a person has the option of either accepting the belief in immortality or the promise of life beyond the grave, but the ego will struggle against this resolution because embracing one motive inevitably causes its primal opposite to reassert itself in an even stronger form. Within the cultural praxis different death denying or death defying practices, like the Christian religion, offer some variation of immortality through elaborate systems that promise life beyond the grave (Fulton & Owen, 1994).

Confronting death consciously and verbally thus violates our implicit sense and unspoken conviction that we shall exist forever (Corr, 1979a). Our idealised view of human life is shattered by the reality of inescapable death that compels us to

acknowledge the radical finiteness of human existence (Lifton & Olsen, 1974). Likewise, man's infinite aspirations to contemplate and control the universe are hampered by the finite limitations of the natural world, the body and death (McKay, 1990).

Even though death is of primary concern to every living being, we seem ultimately to be unable to find a meaningful framework for understanding death. As McKay (1990) explains:

Since every person is continuously under the threat of death, each one must find a way, from the many possibilities which exist, of coping with that threat (p. 33, italics added)

We typically attempt to deal with the negative impact of death by simply denying the fact that it will happen to us and by a variation of strategies softening the extent of death (McKay, 1990; Sudnow, 1967). To the degree that death cannot be completely denied, it is loathed in the individual's constant awareness of 'time running out' and of the fact that one will never have the opportunity to 'do all and be all' that one aspires to. Doss (1974) describes our unfortunate position:

Man is the only animal which contemplates death, and also the only animal that shows any signs of doubt of its finality (p. 3).

The modern, Western way of dealing with death has included handing over the largest part of the process of dying to specialised institutions that can protect the public against the trauma and suffering it naturally entails (Becker, 1973; Fulton & Owen, 1994). It is taken for granted that a funeral director is employed to do the dirty 'death work' as 'caretaker of the dead' (Corr, 1979b; Pine, 1975). In sharp contrast to the rest of society, the funeral director is deeply concerned with death, deals with its myriad of presentations daily, and derives his or her main income from this source (Pine, 1975). Society's attempts to remove death from its daily existence forces the funeral director into an extremely complicated position as he or she not only has to attend to funerary concerns, but also has to deal with the fact that his or

her very existence reminds society that death lies in wait, eventually to strike down all who are now young, fit and full of life (Pine, 1975).

A Balanced Perspective on Death

Every person's perception of life and death, and their approach to these realities, is finally based on, and influenced, by the values and milieu of their particular culture (Corr, 1979a). In order to deal with death each culture constructs a distinctive network of suppositions, norms and symbols that regulate the communal management of death and dying in that specific society (Bugen, 1979; McKay, 1990). Most members of Western society appear, at least superficially, to be mostly unconcerned about death and have little experience of the broad range of its impacts (Corr, 1979b).

Even though it might be impossible to think about death without trepidation, it remains a reality that touches every living being and should ideally be considered as a natural and essential part of the transition through which all living organisms grow and decay (Owen et al., 1994). Because death is a natural extension of life, it is not realistic to accept life without also accepting the necessity of death so tightly intertwined with it (Corr, 1979b). Parsons (1994) regards death as one of the facts of life that is as inexorable as our need to eat and breathe in order to live. He therefore holds death to be normal to the point that 'denial' must be regarded as pathological.

Despite the fact that death is a definite and natural future event, it is nonetheless an unpleasant reality to face constructively (Heidegger, 1970). Many reasonable explanations can be offered for the anger, confusion, disorientation and discomfort we experience when death and its unpredictable consequences are thrust into our lives (Corr, 1979a). The imminence of death has led many authors to describe it as the most intimate, and at the same time, the most disturbing fact of life (Carse, 1980). Kastenbaum (1992) believes that it is essential that we acknowledge our anxieties in relation to death if we intend to live as free, enlightened and self-actualised individuals, beyond the fear and inertia it can so easily force into our

contented, everyday existence. To refuse death is to refuse life, and these two aspects of existence have to be integrated if we are to make sense of it all (McKay, 1990). It somehow does not seem realistic to accept life without also accepting the necessity of death that comes along with it (Corr, 1979b).

Society's Attitudes Towards Death

Attitudes towards death have been grouped into two broad conceptualisations, with any particular individual lying somewhere between the two extremes, holding a view containing elements of both of the opposites. In the first instance death is regarded as little more than a transitional phase leading into another mode of being or a new existential level. The second approach is less positive and considers death as the tragic, abrupt and absolute conclusion of an individual's existence. This more materialist, scientifically minded approach itself varies between considering death a dry, given fact of life, and finding it especially repulsive as it involves the complete dissolution into nothingness (Popa & Hanganu, 1979; McKay, 1990).

Philippe Ariès (1974) presents a historical development that distinguishes four characteristic attitudes towards death. He firstly identifies a well-balanced and death-accepting attitude, referred to as 'tamed death'. It involves, with reference to its Greek origins, a stoical acceptance of the inevitability of death as a common and ordinary fact of life that is integral to existence. Impending death is considered to be near and familiar without evoking great apprehension or dread. It is simply a fact of human destiny that we shall all die - and we all know it. Death remains sad and painful but should not greatly threaten the regular order of life's events. This attitude seems to represent some kind of ideal state that existed before the changes that came about during the Middle Ages and from which modern man could take a rewarding lesson about living (Corr, 1979a).

During the late Middle Ages death became an occasion for man to be deeply aware of himself. Here an attitude of the 'acceptance of one's own death' became possible. As a "decent interval" (Ariès, 1974, p.48) usually preceded death, the

individual had the opportunity to assemble his or her family, to dispose of property, set affairs in order, and to prepare for death. The dying person and those in attendance sought to do whatever they could to get ready for the final event and a certain 'art of dying' was displayed that encouraged calmness, solemnity and a sense of awe as death was literally regarded as the high point of the individual's life (Corr, 1979a).

Ariès (1974) identifies an important shift that occurred in Western attitudes during the 18th century. Death came to be considered as a break with life and was suddenly turned into something frightening, though morbidly interesting. It became the object of gruesome attention and society developed a fascination with the death of others. It was a time when public executions were regarded as social events and mourning had the tendency to become increasingly hysterical. Cemeteries were moved into urban areas and it became common to erect monuments and memorials for the dead (Corr, 1979a).

Ariès (1974) identifies the last attitude of 'forbidden death'. During the middle of the 19th century Western society developed a growing feeling of distaste for death. It came to be considered as a shameful, forbidden topic leading to a society-wide dishonesty about the facts and nature of dying. While this was originally considered a positive way of assuming the burden for the dying person's sake, it soon turned into a way of sparing society the strong and unbearable emotion caused by the 'ugliness' of death and its presence in the midst of happy life. Death was not judged in terms of the appropriateness for the dying person, but rather in terms of its consequences for the survivors and broader society. Thus society's approach to death became dominated by the unhealthy attitudes of negativity and denial, which seem to inform our opinions on the subject today (Corr, 1979b).

Robert Fulton (in Corr, 1979a, p. 8), a student of the sociology of death, has described the 'death-free generation' of contemporary society as having little experience or direct contact with death as it is not uncommon to grow into adulthood without ever witnessing the natural death of a loved one (Thompson, 1991). Although society strives to deny death and focus on living, the very idea of death still

produces a variety of emotional responses. The prevalent dread of death appears to be informed by a shame-driven, biological perspective that focuses on justifying itself through the fear of physical pain, the loss of natural function, and the altered body image this dictates (Kastenbaum & Costa, 1977). The most extreme form of the fear of death that grabs contemporary society, while being rather abstract, seems to be the thoughts about death being a state of not existing at all, of non-being, and the accompanying complete loss of self or identity.

Today death seems to have become an inappropriate aspect of life. On an abstract, intellectual level death is taken for granted as a universal fact of life. As a subjective event, however, it has become so uncommon that it has been subconsciously eased out of lived experience, to be regarded as not quite real. It becomes a loosely defined eventuality in some remote future. Comforted by the fading presence of natural deaths society has taken to encouraging those processes that put it out of sight. As death is considered unfortunate, undesirable and improper we want to believe that it is, in fact, not a legitimate part of life and that when it does occur, it will only happen to the elderly (Corr, 1979a).

Toynbee (in Lifton & Olson, 1974) relates how 'un-American', and this applies to the whole of the developed world, dying has become. Contemporary Western culture places an unwholesome emphasis on progress, strength, beauty and success. It affronts the individual's excessive rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Youth orientated society values health, vigour and vitality beyond more socially meaningful virtues that might include respect for the elderly and an appreciation for their wisdom, experience and sacrifice (Corr, 1979a; Lifton & Olson, 1974). Mental and physical disabilities are easily grouped with death to be considered signs of weakness or even as 'moral faults' (Corr, 1979b). The ever-increasing rise of respect for individual freedom has developed to such absurd proportions that suicide has almost become a life option in a society that seems to encourage self-destructive tendencies to its own detriment. The pursuit of youth, excitement and pleasure has almost been turned into an obligation. While the death of an infant or child is regarded as a 'high grief loss' and taken to be movingly premature and unjust, the death of the elderly seems to be a slight loss and an

acceptable outcome, bordering on the removal of those no longer considered to be in any position to enjoy life the way it is supposed to be. Little recognition is offered to the fact that both the young and old are living human beings in a society where quality is so effortlessly ignored for the sake of quantity (Fulton, 1979).

Our unsuccessful attempts to avoid any confrontation with death, reveals the margins of our fear and loathing of its presence. In society at large we live with attitudes of denial or negativity about death, with the tension of unavoidable recognition expressed mainly in terms of discomfort and ambivalence. Evans (1971) states:

We have created systems which protect us in the very aggregate from facing up to the very things that as individuals we most need to know (p.83).

Over the past 30 years death has become a popular subject for workshops, self-awareness courses, discussion groups and public talks (Corr, 1979b; Lewis, 1976). Despite the renewed interest and increased popularity of 'death literature', this so-called 'death awareness movement' has taken a hard look at society's obvious 'denial of death' and provides evidence of a new realisation of the extent to which we have lost touch with the reality of death (Cahill, 1995; Parsons, 1994). This revival in the investigation of death could be an attempt to end the tabooing of the subject in order to reach a more mature position but society's posture towards death still remains predominantly negative (Corr, 1979b). It remains to be seen whether this increased interest and serious reflection is more than a superficial curiosity or passing fad.

The Role of Industrialisation and Modernisation

Industrialisation and modernisation appear to be two of the main factors explaining the state of our contemporary Western society's views of death. While it would be a mistake to think that society has found death fully manageable during any historical phase, Lifton and Olson (1974) argue that death and life seems

painfully out of joint in our time. Goldscheider (1971) offers some explanation for this untenable current position based on, firstly, the relationship between modernisation and mortality figures, and secondly, the consequences of the evolution of mortality patterns for the nature of human society.

The process of systematic denial and convenient avoidance of the experience of death seems especially prevalent in highly industrialised societies. The developed world finds it imperative to control, manipulate, manage and dominate all aspects of living, and by implication, possibly even more so, all aspects of dying (Lifton & Olson, 1974). Technological advances create the illusion that death has become objectively more predictable and understandable, but in fact causes it to transform into something more unnatural and unfamiliar (Corr, 1979a). There are obvious risks to creating the illusion that society can rise above the reality of death that cannot be methodically controlled through science.

Industrialisation and modernisation bring with it the 'pros' and 'cons' of an overall gain in standards of living. While areas such as agriculture, housing, work conditions, communication, transportation, public health and sanitation improve, certain negative effects also follow. The increase in life expectancy serves as an excellent example of how these improvements impact the circumstances of dying (Corr, 1979a; Lifton & Olson, 1974). Death is more likely to occur in a hospital or old age home, removed from family and friends, within a system geared to squeezing the last ounce out of a life that might have come to its end naturally, sensibly and meaningfully under simpler conditions (Corr, 1979a; Fulton & Owen, 1987). Further examples include the fact that natural deaths are replaced by far more brutal and degrading deaths due to motor accidents, murder, suicide and drug abuse. Society seems to have developed a self-destructive taste for dangerous, risk taking, and high-speed lifestyles. The end result of these factors and changes is a reduction in regular confrontation with 'real' death. It is considered the distasteful business of the unlucky, sick and elderly that we are somehow hoping never to become ourselves (Corr, 1979a).

Advances in Medical Technology

The realities of the pre-industrial period, involving high mortality and low life expectancy, meant that people often died at a relatively young age or in the prime of life, with children and infants being the most vulnerable group (Corr, 1979a; Fulton & Owen, 1994). Epidemics, war and famine accounted for the largest part of deaths in traditional civilisation and death by disease reached its unparalleled peak with the scourge of 'The Black Death' in Europe and Asia of the 14th century. Society seemed beset by uncontrolled mortality because of the impotence of medicine and the backwardness of public health measures (Goldscheider, 1971).

While the unparalleled advances in medical technology of the past century have certainly facilitated a much greater sense of control over sickness and disease, and hence over life, it has also brought its share of complications. The reality of death has been removed from the world of everyday experience to become a technical problem challenging science as part of a new field of study that is to be conquered (Lifton & Olson, 1974). In a review (Lerner, 1970) of the causes of death in the US during the 20th century it was found that advances in medical technology have caused a dramatic shift from communicable disease, like influenza and pneumonia found mostly among young people, to degenerative illnesses, like cancer and heart disease during old age (Corr, 1979a).

Increasingly, the primary concern of the medical profession appears to be the prevention of 'unacceptable' deaths at any cost (Wass, 1979). The inevitable death is interpreted as a sign that a given professional or institution has somehow been unsuccessful or that a particular medical intervention was a failure (Lifton & Olson, 1974). A dead body in the hospital is an embarrassment that serves as a dreadful reminder that the stated goal of the hospital is to make sick people healthy, no matter what the details of the case might be (Redding, 1979). With a blatant disregard and disrespect for the organ that has traditionally been considered fundamental to the individual's humanity, the medical profession would not refrain from solving a difficult case by transplanting a heart from a cadaver. With machines keeping people alive in hospitals it seems that it has become more important and

attractive to sustain the appearance of life than to allow its natural termination (Parsons, 1994).

Doctors often consider the end of life as the end of everything, in line with their positivist, materialist training and clinical exposure (Lifton & Olson, 1974). Dying patients are conveniently avoided and their deaths easily blamed on the failure of technology (Kastenbaum, 1986; Kübler-Ross, 1969). This attitude seems to gather momentum from the doctor's medical experiences that point firmly to the fact that they do not have the expected control over existence or over their own anxieties about death (Benoliel, 1987).

It appears then as if mankind has, over the last century and a half, steadily become more removed from witnessing and comprehending the dual processes of both life and death. The removal of births to hospitals, the significant decrease in premature deaths and a general rise in life expectancy are all factors that have contributed to most people never witnessing either a natural birth or death. At the same time, the population over 65 years of age and the proportion of modern humans living out the full course of life has increased greatly, making premature death a more disturbing and unsettling event than in times gone by (Parsons, 1994).

Scientism and Agnosticism

The well-known Biblical statements, 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' from 1 Corinthians 15 verse 55, reflects the broader underlying support that the Christian religion traditionally offered Western man against the frightening reality of death (McKay, 1990). Eastern mysticism likewise provided some framework in which to make sense of life that seems so defencelessly delivered to the power of death.

Franz Borkenau (in Fulton & Owen, 1994), an influential German historian, has described the modern era as an empty, post-Christian period. With the disintegration of traditional beliefs in immortality society has come to embrace a nihilistic outlook of denial and despair (McKay, 1990). Traditional Christian dogma

promised salvation and eternal life through the tormented death of Jesus that could fill the believer with wonder and gratitude about life and its conclusion in death. The fact that imperfect life could be exchanged for everlasting bliss served as a powerful buffer against anxieties about loss and death (Corr, 1979a). As death also represented punishment, judgement and possible damnation, both anxiety and serenity were, however, intensified (Cahill, 1995; Kastenbaum, 1992).

As contemporary Western society cut itself loose from traditional religious meanings, its traditional answers to death were also no longer effective in giving deeper meaning to the disappointments, inequalities, injustices and perplexities of this life (Ariès, 1974). Death suddenly became the final event, not an opening to a more glorious, and fulfilling future. In more poetic terms, it became the thief who cheats and steals life, and the enemy who ultimately defeats everyone (Corr, 1979a). While life and death were still equally unpredictable, religion could no longer offer ready-made answers to absorb our fear and anxiety about this primal reality.

Death in the Media

Throughout cultural history death has been a frequent subject of diverse legend, poetry, drama and literature, which reflects the momentous role it plays in human existence. Today death has become the fantastic subject of, amongst others, movies and the bizarre ritual of cartoons (Fulton, & Owen, 1994). In the news death is usually presented in such a casual and remote way that it becomes indistinguishable from other newsworthy events, or is exaggerated and sensationalised beyond a point of any reference to real life. The meaning of death has become submerged and depersonalised by the way in which news items are presented between commercials or other mundane subject matters (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Throughout the editorials of newspapers, magazines, television programs and commercial films, death is portrayed with a particular focus on the thrilling and horrific qualities of death (Lifton & Olson, 1974).

As a consequence, the public seems to have become both over-stimulated by, and desensitised to, the fictionalised accounts and documentary depictions of death. Western culture demonstrates a certain careless tolerance of violence and war, considering them little more than exciting flirtations with death (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Dramatic episodes on stage and in film establish the illusion, often unconscious, that it is possible for the same person to die again and again (Lifton & Olson, 1974). Under these conditions audiences become removed from the emotions that surround death. It becomes a shared experience with the safeguards of being distant, depersonalised and ultimately dehumanised. It also feeds into the habitual conviction that the worst will only happen to other people.

The television seems to define contemporary mass public education. Research (Fulton & Owen, 1994) shows that the first television-generation viewed 10 000 acts of aggression, violence, rape and homicide in an easily accessible and effortlessly digestible package, within the comfort of their own homes. Cartoon characters, like the long-running Tom and Jerry, seem to be doing nothing other than annihilating one another in an infinite variety of excessively violent ways, only to reappear alive and unscratched in the next frame. This bizarre depiction of death is, however, the chosen entertainment for the youngest, most impressionable, and least discriminating members of our consumerist society.

The inherently contradictory way in which the media treats death is especially evident in its portrayal of the male as a brutal, lethal young 'killing-machine' that strives heroically to kill or be killed. At the same time the coverage of wars, like in Vietnam or the Gulf, portrays death as something that happens elsewhere, in a far off country or to foreigners and enemies (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Likewise, accidents and disaster victims are either discretely covered to keep the gaze of the public away from disturbing images or offered with prior warning as graphic depictions only for those not easily offended (Lifton & Olson, 1974). Despite the fact that these dramatic and fanciful portrayals often relentlessly feature violence and death, the resultant grief and ruptured lives are only treated superficially (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Death in the media therefore seems to be at the same time illusively fantastical and frighteningly real.

In popular music and books we find the most commercially viable forms of morbid fascination with death. Rock legend, Alice Cooper, has made a fortune out of 'death rock lyrics', a style of music that romanticises death as an ecstatic interference in the pleasures of life, while downplaying its role as an inevitable, natural part of existence. Successful fiction thrives on violent themes of murder and intrigue. Established genres of crime fiction, 'whodunits' and espionage thrillers seem to be flourishing in an industry where decent literature has been relegated to an idealised past (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Popular literature, which is supposed to map the deepest aspects of human nature, seems to ignore the human response to death, often portraying it as a casual and impersonal event significantly different from the reality of the everyday world. It is the young and beautiful hero, or the deserving 'baddie', that comes to an exciting and violent end. This portrayal of the occurrence of death completely ignores the statistical fact that death usually comes to the elderly person, often in a hospital or nursing home, from such 'unfashionable' ailments as heart disease, cancer or stroke.

Media culture has created the idea that contentment comes only with a life that is always happy, or at least one that should always seem to be happy. The very idea of death is to be avoided, because it would prevent us from living out this ideal of happiness. The emotional experience of the modern individual seems to vacillate between the nation-wide American admiration for the stoical reaction displayed by Kennedy's wife after his assassination (Corr, 1979a), and the excessive public displays of grief, experienced vicariously through the guiding media coverage of, for example, the death of Princess Diana and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre.

There have recently been positive developments in books, television programs and even dramatic films that offer a more honest portrayal of death (Cahill, 1999; Corr, 1979b). Death, as original theme, which has long been part of fairy tales and folklore, has also recently reappeared in more authentic ways in children's literature but these cases are still the uncommon exception to the general, harmful rule. On the whole, the way in which the media portrays its fantasies about death seem to be eating at the heart of the value and meaningfulness of human life, as

well as distancing us from death so that we lose respect for its significance (Corr, 1979a). We have become spectators who react less emotionally because of the psychic numbing or averted eyes that follow both overexposure and unrealistic depiction.

Specialisation and the Transfer of Responsibility

Research in the mid-nineties (Fulton & Owen, 1994) has found that two out of three deaths either occur in hospitals, nursing homes or settings other than at home. This has increased the distance between everyday life and death as it becomes progressively more institutionalised. A combination of escalating factors, like the wide-ranging absence of relatives, unfamiliarity of neighbours, break-up of rural communities, pressures of the modern urban life-style, and time-bound constraints of post-industrial employment have meant that more and more people die alone and 'abandoned' (Corr, 1979a).

We seem, intentionally or unintentionally, to be taking excessive care to arrange our lives in such a way as to decrease the opportunities for confronting the inevitable reality of universal death. Death, in all its myriad manifestations, has itself steadily become more and more undesirable (Corr, 1979a). In fact, direct contact with natural human death is already becoming an invisible, abstract and unusual event (Corr, 1979a), and although no less menacing, it no longer seems immediate or real. Even the death of animals has been removed, as livestock is not slaughtered at the house anymore (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Death has been systematically removed from the midst of our hurried, vacant lives, to occur in unfamiliar and cold surroundings amongst somewhat uncaring strangers. These circumstances have certain marked negative implications for the way in which the individual will experience death, the impressions of death for survivors, and for the institutions and its employees onto which the dying and their demise are thrust.

Modern man has increasingly segregated his or her daily life from any sign of death including the elderly, those with a high risk of mortality, those who are actually dying, and from the bodies of the dead (Kübler-Ross, 1969). It is therefore no longer

the right, responsibility or privilege of family or friends to take care of the old and the dying, or to dress the dead. We seem to have developed a full-scale, shared illusion of pretence that death is not inevitable by removing its occurrence from our immediate awareness, so that when it does become unavoidable, to allow it only to occur in hospitals and nursing homes (McKay, 1990).

A number of recent cultural developments have had a direct impact on society's view of death, especially through the prevalent wearing away of a sense of community. Smaller family units, that exclude caring for the frail and elderly, have replaced the extended family where it was considered commonplace (McKay, 1990). Death has come to be regarded as revolting and distasteful, imposing a certain stigma on those associated with it (Thompson, 1991). The dying is set apart physically and mentally, while the bereaved, at their most vulnerable, is often avoided because of the social discomfort and common disapproval contact with their sorrow would hold. Regrettably, rather than protecting society against the pains of death, these expulsions of the dying from the community only strengthen the inherent private and social threats of death (McKay, 1990). As isolation limits the opportunities for meaningful contact with death, negative attitudes become entrenched and self-perpetuating.

The employment of a funeral director to deal with our dead has now become a taken-for-granted common practice (Pine, 1975). It was as recently as half a century ago that the role of caring for the dead or disposing of the body was taken over by this indispensable, paid functionary. Any consideration of the very existence of this functional subgroup manifests some recognition of the arduous demands death places on the affected living and on society in general (Corr, 1979b). The reality of the need for, and attractiveness of, this more impersonal approach point to some recognition of the ultimate pain death holds for the individual and the group.

Caretaker of the Dead: A Historical Development

Human beings have, since ancient times, responded to the death of a fellow human with solemnity and ceremony (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Archaeological

evidence from a gravesite at Shanidar, Iraq, suggests that primordial ancestors buried their dead with ceremony as long as 60 000 years ago (Fulton & Bendiksen, 1994). Through burial a ritual was created to dispose of the body, while the funeral became the vehicle through which emotional reactions to bereavement could be channelled and articulated in an orderly fashion (Owen et al., 1994). The burial and its related religious rites served to assist those left behind in acknowledging the loss of loved ones (Fulton, 1979).

The ceremony, which included customs like burying items such as weapons or combs with the dead, has commonly placed emphasis on the preparation for the life after death (Fulton & Bendiksen, 1994). Above all it signalled the commemoration of a life and provided the occasion to reassure and re-establish the cohesion of the social group in order to avoid the fear that the threat of communal life engenders (Fulton, 1979).

In most early cultures, including the ancient Greek and Hebrew societies, experienced members of the family carried out the different tasks and functions associated with burial (Cahill, 1995). The status of these members was determined by the number of times such care had been provided and sometimes, as was the case in Jewish and Christian families, the funeral was conducted under the supervision of the clergy (Pine, 1975).

Anthropological evidence suggests that death appears to have been one of the primary concerns of Ancient Egyptian civilisation. It is argued that the elaborate preservation of the corpse was considered of vital importance because of their belief that the soul would re-inhabit the same body in the afterlife. The Egyptians therefore developed an intricate system of practices, performed by the surviving family members, to take care of the body while the embalming was left to a trained specialist (Pine, 1975).

In Ancient Rome it was common practice for the wealthy to employ a professional undertaker or libitinarius whose functions included the embalming, the provision of professional mourners and mourning clothes, and all other practical

arrangements for the funeral. These specialists with their expert services can be considered as the direct forerunners of the modern funeral director and also had a direct impact on the funeral practices of the contemporary world (Pine, 1975).

By the end of the 17th century the undertaker was recognised as a tradesman in England (Cahill, 1995). It appears that death was considered an acceptable, natural and inevitable aspect of life, and "the grave was as familiar as the cradle" (Pine, 1975, p. 15). Mourning had an extensive social character in which the family members would actively participate. By the end of the 18th century experts in laying out and arranging funerals started taking over all the functions traditionally performed by the family. Undertakers were, however, considered as little more than suppliers of funeral products and equipment (Cahill, 1995; Pine, 1975).

During the 19th century the various tasks were progressively brought together in one function, as the family became increasingly unlikely to perform the preparation of the body or the funeral. Funerals started to become increasingly gloomy and distressing for the bereaved and the need arose for a more 'pleasant' setting in which the family could experience the process of loss and grief (Cahill, 1995). As embalming equipment became more sophisticated and difficult to move around, it was considered increasingly impractical to perform embalming at the family's home, as was traditionally done. With the decline of the extended family, houses tended to be smaller and larger rooms became necessary to accommodate mourners. All these factors lead to the development of the specialised profession of the undertaker who could perform specific tasks that society found useful beyond the traditional supply of merchandise (Pine, 1975).

Today the employment of a funeral director has become common practice. The natural processes of physical decomposition require particular procedures to treat and dispose of the remains (Corr, 1979a; 1979b). The very existence and special functions performed by this group of professionals with a measured impersonal approach, manifests some recognition of the many demands death places on the members of society (Corr, 1979b).

Defining the Undertaker

The Oxford dictionary defines an undertaker very simply, with a focus on the practical tasks, as:

(O)ne whose business it is to prepare the dead for burial or cremation and make arrangements for funerals.

Family members and friends have relinquished all their traditional roles in the 'death ritual' to the "...special person who would 'undertake' responsibility for the care and burial of the dead" (Amos, 1983, p.2). For the purpose of this study the more traditional term of 'undertaker' has been chosen for inclusion in the title as a deliberate recognition of the fact that the researcher believes it to capture best the essence of the vocation, as well as the negativity and stigma publicly associated with the profession. As part of our society's attempt to distance itself from the reality of death, the term 'undertaker' has largely become disused, only to be replaced by more politically correct technical sounding words like 'mortician' and 'funeral director' (Thompson, 1991). Throughout the following sections these terms will, for convenience sake, be used interchangeably as the development of the profession, the undertaker's role and specific duties are considered.

The American National Funeral Directors Association's definition (in Pine, 1975) of a funeral director reads as follows:

A funeral director is a person engaged in the care and/or disposition of the human dead and/or in the practice of disinfecting and preparing by embalming or otherwise the human dead for the funeral service, transportation, burial or cremation, and/or in the practice of funeral directing or embalming as presently known, whether under these titles or designations or otherwise. It shall also mean a person who makes arrangements for funeral services and/or who sells funeral supplies to the public or who makes financial arrangements for the rendering of such services and/or

the sale of such supplies whether for present or future need (p.144).

From these two definitions it is clear that the undertaker's identity is built up by diverse occupational tasks and activities. Their profession requires the roles of medical technician who disinfects and preserves the cadaver (Pine, 1975), and restorative artist who removes the traces of suffering and death from the deceased (Strub & Frederick, 1989). Moreover, the undertaker's functions as producer and director of funeral rites include the arranging and staging of the ritual drama that marks the passage from life to death (Turner & Edgley, 1990), but also as a merchant businessman who profits from the retail sale of funeral supplies (Connelly, 1989). On a more emotional level the modern-day funeral director is not only prepared to assume all the activities associated with death, but is also expected to be a member of the helping profession who counsels the bereaved through the phases of their loss and provides grief therapy as part of his or her advice concerning the funeral (Osmont, 1988; Pine, 1975).

Despite the fact that the undertaker seems to be easily and widely criticised, he or she plays an extremely important part in the execution of a meaningful death ritual. The general public seems largely unfamiliar with the funeral procedure and has limited knowledge about the role and the duties of the undertaker. Their work includes public presentations as well as non-public activities that are purposely hidden from the view of the community (Pine, 1975). The public aspects of the undertaker's work will be discussed first as it is largely through the carrying out of these funeral activities that the context for a funeral is established, which serves as guidance for a notion of 'appropriate' funeral behaviour that the bereaved develop.

The bereaved often question the nature and value of the undertaker's 'invisible' activities and the undertaker is therefore involved in a constant and sensitive conflict between blunting and sharpening the realities of death. While they regard it their duty to mask the reality of death for the survivors through these non-public activities, they also have to draw some attention to the special, unobserved services they render (Pine, 1975).

Public Duties

First Call

The first call is the very important and literal 'call' that informs the funeral director of a death. This initial summons to collect the body of the deceased requires great care and skill on the part of the undertaker who has to treat the family's initial distressed reactions with particular patience and composure. The family must be assured that the undertaker will take immediate and realistic control while taking care of all the necessary practical arrangements. It is vitally important that the undertaker comes across as both knowledgeable and concerned about their needs in order to give them the assurance that everything will be done to make the next few days as undemanding as possible. After agreeing to remove the body from the place of death the funeral director usually suggests that the family come into the funeral home to make further detailed, face-to-face arrangements (Pine, 1975). The first call thus sets in motion an extended and diverse series of activities for the particular undertaker and staff. Most of these will be described as part of the non-public activities, including the removal, embalming, and the laying out of the deceased.

Funeral Arrangements

This involves clarifying the specific wishes of the bereaved, finalising practical details for the funeral, the gathering of vital statistics for filing out a death certificate, and the arranging of a burial permit. As families are often unfamiliar with the funeral procedure it is the funeral director's responsibility to familiarise them with its requirements but also to be aware of the dangers of defining too narrowly the behaviour that is appropriate for the bereaved (Pine, 1975). It is usually also during this time that the undertaker will have to answer the family's questions regarding legal matters, insurance policies, joint bank accounts and so forth as they relate to the funeral.

It is important that the funeral director should come across as professional, knowledgeable and concerned in creating an appropriate setting in which to conduct this sensitive business with the client (Cahill, 1995). They have to be careful not to come across as too 'sales orientated' and should, despite the popular belief to the contrary, discourage family members from spending beyond their financial means. The undertaker has to be an excellent listener, mindful of and sensitive to those social and emotional needs of the families that form part of the service he or she renders. They often have to act as a soundboard to the family's voluntary discussions of the death and its consequences. The undertaker is placed in a delicate and challenging position when the bereaved feel the need to offer unnecessary additional information regarding the deceased, seek excessive personal attention, and expect unrealistic amounts of sympathy and understanding (Pine, 1975).

Selecting the Casket

The funeral director usually supplies the family with information about an appropriate casket on request, but has to be very careful not to force the sale. It makes business sense for undertakers to prevent the sale of a casket priced beyond the assumed financial abilities of the family, as they believe the sale to be of no use if they are not going to be paid for it. The other side of the coin, however, requires that the undertaker encourage the clients to spend up to the limit of their considered buying power as the purchase of a 'cheap' or well-below-average casket is considered by them as 'strange' or 'disrespectful' of the deceased (Pine, 1975).

Viewing of the Body

It has been argued that the viewing of the body developed out of Ancient society's fear of the possibility that someone might be buried alive. The Greeks, for example, laid the body in state for viewing to confirm that death actually occurred but also to verify that the body had not been mistreated (Pine, 1975). Today the period of visitation allows family and friends to 'pay respects' and others to offer their condolences.

This is usually an emotionally upsetting time for the family as it is commonly the first time they see the body after death. While the family has the opportunity to display their loss and grief openly, the funeral director stays in the background, ready to offer any kind of assistance they might require. In his or her communication the funeral director will play the role of host and confidante, paying particular attention to the explicit wishes and likely emotional needs of the bereaved concerning the make-up, clothing, casket, lighting and atmosphere in the visitation room (Pine, 1975).

Most funeral directors are expressly concerned about the appearance of the body as they consider it an essential part of their role in helping the family finally to realise and accept the fact of death (Cahill, 1995; Corr, 1979b). The restorative activities of the funeral director are aimed at creating a lasting positive memory and the body is therefore treated to reveal as little visible evidence of death as possible. A number of critics question the value of open-coffin viewing, regarding these attempts to hide the visible signs of death and to make the body appear as life-like as possible, as denials of the reality of death (Pine, 1975).

Others, however, believe the absolute contrary and recognise the psychotherapeutic effect that viewing could have as a final confirmation of the reality of death. Kübler-Ross (1969), famous for her work on the grieving process, seems convinced that the viewing should, in most cases, be a positive experience that helps the bereaved to experience the reality of death and to confront it in a mature fashion. Fulton (1979) admits an element of disguise involved in the preparation of the body for viewing, but compares its justification to the use of cosmetics or a veil in another of life's common social rituals, the wedding. He believes that these slight improvements are functional in helping grieving survivors to move from their initial shocked denial to the healthy acceptance of death.

The Funeral or Cremation

The funeral process, with its variety of practices, commonly involves a religious service and/or a cultural ritual at home, in church, at the cemetery or at

some other specified public gathering place. The sense of ceremony that is conveyed to the bereaved serves as guidance to assist them in behaving in a socially acceptable or 'death-appropriate' way. The undertaker's duties in this regard commonly include transporting the body in the hearse, directing the movement and interaction of other guests, seating the family in their appropriate place in the church, distributing funeral handbills, and the lowering of the coffin (Pine, 1975).

With years of service funeral directors find themselves in the difficult position of performing death rituals that are ceremonially repetitive, yet individually singular. They have to be able to provide the appropriate setting and proper ceremony suited to the different conceptions each family may have of what is important and acceptable (Pine, 1975). The undertaker is required to recognise the significance of each death and is therefore constantly concerned with displaying an appropriate image to the general public (Thompson, 1991). To complicate matters, undertakers are dependent on these dealings with the public at the time of the funeral as their primary source of promotion (Bowman, 1959).

It is the funeral director's duty to maintain order at the funeral and to have safeguards in place to avoid unexpected disturbances and deviations. For this very reason a strict, formal agenda with certain practical variations has been established to reduce the risk of disruptions (Hockey, 1996). The funeral director, however, also has to be able to adjust to unpredictable situations that might arise and for this reason, and in an attempt to be receptive to the family's needs, he or she constantly has to rely on subtle cues, hints, expressions, gestures and signs that accompany the funeral process. Here the undertaker faces the difficult challenge of striking a balance between logistical considerations and aiming to please the bereaved (Pine, 1975).

The undertaker will encourage and facilitate a certain amount of openly displayed emotion as part of the exceptional ritual and setting. It also creates the opportunity for others to offer condolences and emotional support not readily provided in other situations. The ritual behaviour during the funeral can be

considered an important social process that deals with death in a caring way that is especially valuable in assisting the bereaved in accepting their loss (Pine, 1975).

In modern times cremation, believed by the Ancient Greeks to be a way to set the soul free, is becoming steadily more popular as a way of disposing of the body. Practical considerations, like the shortage of space and slightly lower costs involved, offer some explanation for the popularisation of this trend (Molyneux, 2002). Cremation as the undermining of tradition, and the religious opposition this practice has received, should also be noted. As a consequence services without the presence of the body or no burial ceremony to follow the service have increased. Some regard this trend as indicative of the need to avoid the unpleasant reality of death by opting for the 'less emotional', and 'more convenient' form of disposal of the dead (Cahill, 1995).

Non-public Behaviour

Removal of the Body

The funeral director has to remove the body from the place where death has occurred within a reasonable time. The transfer of the remains to the funeral home can take place from an institution, a home, or the scene of an accident or crime where the death occurred. Undertakers regard it as part of their occupation to be called out over weekends or during the early hours of the morning in order to attend to the incidence of a death (Pine, 1975).

Bystanders and family members have to be directed, for practical and emotional reasons, from the scene of death before the body can be prepared for removal. Although not usually the case, the removal of bodies where decomposition has already set in, can involve considerable 'dirty' work. Throughout these procedures the undertaker has to take care not to upset the family by appearing intruding, hurried or insensitive. He/she needs to keep the removal respectful and accomplish this by referring to the deceased person by name and through handling the body with care. This time often represents the first opportunity for the

undertaker to make contact with the bereaved and to supply the necessary advice. Families are specifically encouraged to ask questions, no matter how trivial it may seem, as the limited amount of certainty that these answers can provide could make the rest of the process easier (Pine, 1975).

Embalming

Embalming is a procedure that was initially developed by the Ancient Egyptians in an attempt to preserve the body for the life after death. It involves a time-consuming and messy procedure that many find repulsive and upsetting (Pine, 1975). Funeral directors therefore feel very strongly about keeping this procedure away from public scrutiny and actively discourage family to attend or participate in the embalming of the deceased. Funeral directors also have to be carefully aware of practical considerations, like the possibility of blood on their clothes after an embalming, as any trace of this disturbing procedure is considered "less than proper" (Pine, 1975, p. 114).

Embalming is a procedure that is not often performed in South Africa, as there is no legislation enforcing it. This procedure is only required when a body has to be transferred across national borders. Modern refrigeration equipment, the expedience of burial, and the fact that viewing the body is on the decline makes embalming seem like an excessive and senseless expense.

Cosmetic Restoration of the Body

A number of surgical and cosmetic techniques are used in an attempt to create a 'natural likeness' to the person, as he or she looked when alive, before family, friends and the public view the body. The funeral director takes pride in his or her workmanship and the role it plays in relieving the bereaved of the shock and suffering that the viewing of the body entails (Cahill, 1995). The most visible parts, the face and hands, are of obvious and primary cosmetic concern. As it is quite a time-consuming exercise, and because most families today choose not to view the

deceased, it is common practice merely to ensure that the body appears reasonably presentable (Pine, 1975).

Difficulties Facing the Undertaker

The undertaker's profession has a unique combination of diverse stresses and strains, which make any treatment of it analytically complex and practically confusing (Cahill, 1995). The death issue often renders situations overly upsetting and it is more difficult to keep a balanced, detached perspective. Feelings of anxiety and doubt seem to be ever present due to the "sensitive nature of death" (Pine, 1975, p. 30) and as Stephenson (1985) explains: "In a society which seeks to deny the reality of death, the funeral director is a living symbol of this dreaded subject" (p. 223). Bowman (1959) confirms that society has ambivalent feelings towards the undertaker, which makes him or her an easy target as scapegoat for the emotional upheavals of the bereaved. Kearl (1989) goes even further in suggesting that the whole profession comes under fire because of "the American death orientation whereby the industry is the cultural scapegoat for failed immortality" (p. 278).

The fact that the funeral director's tasks, rights and duties are not well defined adds to society's ambivalent attitude towards the profession (Cahill, 1995; Hockey, 1996). Despite their obvious ignorance regarding this occupation laypeople have certain expectations about the profession that may differ greatly from the undertaker's own ideals and needs. Negative perceptions and conflict is usually the result of the difference between the expectations of the public and the services the undertaker actually delivers (Pine, 1975).

The undertakers of today thus seem to have failed in persuading the public that theirs is an honourable profession deserving of social respect, authority and handsome remuneration (Cahill, 1995). It has been suggested that the most important factors contributing to the negative perceptions and critical attitudes the public holds towards this profession, can be associated with the idea that they physically handle the dead (Thompson, 2001), as well as the high cost of funeral practices (Wass, 1979). Undertakers repeatedly argue that these prejudices are

borne solely out of fear and ignorance, but it appears the only way of convincing the public of the value of their services would be by scaling the wall of silence that Western societies have built around death over the past century and a half (Cahill, 1995).

The Stigma of Handling the Dead

According to Taylor (1979, p. 381), in an insightful play on words, the general public finds the day-to-day work of an undertaker an “unpalatable undertaking.” It is at best considered an inappropriate, disgusting, frightening and “physically distasteful” subject (Cahill, 1995; Warner, 1959, p. 315). Warner (1959) cautions:

The deep hostilities and fears men have for death, unless very carefully controlled and phrased, can turn the undertaker into a scapegoat, the ritual uncleanliness of his task being identified with his role and person (p. 317).

The majority of funeral directors tend to be defensive about the subject of the aversion the public feels towards their person as a consequence of the nature of their profession, and some even deny that such an aversion exists at all. They do tend, however, to comment freely on the injustice of such negative reactions (Pine, 1975).

As the work of the undertaker is surrounded by mystery, taboo and stigma they are often viewed as cold, detached and downright morbid for taking up such a profession (Thompson, 1991). They are generally considered ‘different’ from other people and somehow abnormal for being able to do the ‘dirty’ work the occupation requires of them. The very fact that so many people state that they would never be able to do the work of an undertaker strengthens the fact that they find it ‘strange’ for someone to choose it voluntarily (Cahill, 1999; Pine, 1975).

A further challenge for the undertaker is the ability to balance his or her public expression of the emotional reaction to death. If the death ritual is performed too

clinically, his or her conduct might be considered as overly comfortable with death, proving something to be 'wrong' and strengthening the 'weird' image. If the death ritual is, however, not performed professionally they might in turn be evaluated as being insensitive, which also strengthens the negative image (Pine, 1975). The undertaker is thus forced to be an expert at impression management, always being aware of what the client expects.

In a complex, industrialised society like ours a person's occupation or profession is central to his or her personal and social identity (Thompson, 1991). In America the funeral director seems to have high social status and is located in the upper social ranks with doctors, lawyers and other professional people (Bowman, 1959). Respondents in South Africa disagree, still feeling looked down upon in professional terms because the public appears to regard their job as typically assigned to the lower socio-economic classes (Thompson, 1991). Satirical portrayals of the profession (Waugh, 1948) and recent movie and television characters, have dogged their public image and contributed to the fact that they are still a source of humour and the butt of morbid jokes (Cahill, 1995).

Undertakers find socialisation difficult as others' main motivation for interaction too often involves curiosity, leaving them to feel constantly interrogated about 'what is it like?' Undertakers often prefer to inform only relatives and close friends about their profession as they find it 'easier not to say' to neighbours and acquaintances exactly what they do for a living (Bowman, 1959; Cahill, 1999; Thompson, 1991). To the extent that the funeral director does not merely exemplify the organisation, but in a sense is the organisation, it imposes certain restrictions on the way in which they act in all aspects of their lives (Pine, 1975). It is not easy for the undertaker to step out of 'character' and they have to be constantly aware of respecting the privacy and integrity of their clientele. As undertakers are on duty twenty-four hours of the day, and most live on the funeral home premises, they have little freedom from the actual operations of the funeral home (Pine, 1975).

Criticism From Clergy

Many of the clergy prefer to describe death as a joyful spiritual victory and therefore do not believe the funeral to be of much comfort to survivors (McKay, 1990). They generally consider the funeral only as a rite of passage and believe that the funeral industry is sensationalising this ritual, turning the ceremony into an unnecessarily sad and gloomy occasion. They also believe that funeral directors are dramatising the presence of the body and focusing too much attention on the physical appearance of the corpse while ignoring the more serious spiritual matters (Fulton, 1979). Clergy often accuse undertakers of paganism or 'religious uncleanliness' (Thompson, 1991) because of the relativist attitude the latter hold toward funerals and the fact that they make their services available to the members of different faiths (Fulton, 1979; Pine, 1975). Undertakers on the other hand feel that clergy tend to ignore the fact that death is the ultimate separation and that, as with any irrevocable loss, the survivors may experience a profound sense of defeat, not addressed honestly by religion.

Criticism of Financial Gains

The rising costs of funerals raise the client's concern about the competence of the particular undertaker and his or her true motivations, often leading to detailed inquiries into the specific charges of a funeral (Pine, 1975). Undertakers are commonly criticised for making a profit out of what, in the past, used to be a neighbourly act (Cahill, 1995; Taylor, 1979; Thompson, 1991).

As has been mentioned before, the whole death ritual is likely to evoke an emotional state of upheaval that undermines the client's ability to make a realistic judgement of the reasonable costs involved in a funeral (Taylor, 1979). The substantial financial decisions involved in acquiring a funeral have to be made in a period of great emotional distress and uncertainty (Corr, 1979b). This state renders the customer uniquely vulnerable and the bereaved often tend to spend more than they can actually afford. Customers are largely inexperienced at purchasing a funeral or simply not in any state to shop around and compare prices (Taylor, 1979).

Recent research by Sakalauskas (2001) reports that men are generally more concerned with the costs associated with the funeral, while women seem to be more concerned about the appearance of the body and with social relationships with family and friends involved.

The funeral industry is generally accused of abusing their clients' emotional encumbrance and severely criticised for 'forcing' them to purchase beyond their means. Funeral directors are fully aware of the stigma associated with their profession and acknowledge the possibility of increasing profits by underhand tactics such as mobilising guilt, appealing to pride and playing on emotions (Thompson, 1991). Most of them are, however, strongly opposed to using such manoeuvres because of ethical and practical considerations as to the negative effect it has on their public image, their social credibility, and the sustainability of the industry as a whole (Pine, 1975; Taylor, 1979).

The high cost of funerals have, however, also been considered to have some therapeutic value as a number of people find it comforting to spend great amounts of money on a deceased relative. As a mortician (in Taylor, 1979) explained during an interview:

The living are guilt ridden about their dead and one of our functions is to ease this guilt by providing opportunities to spend money for the departed (p. 377).

It needs to be mentioned that the payment of an undertaker could be justified by the mere fact that he or she is a licensed professional, trained in the art and science of preparing dead bodies for burial and cremation, and responsible for all the many tasks and activities of the death ritual discussed so far (Pine, 1975; Taylor, 1979). It can also be argued that they deserve a high profit as they have taken up a thankless profession that most people would regard as the last way they would choose to make their living (Taylor, 1979).

It is important to recognise that funeral directors are business professionals who either manage or own a funeral home that has to make a living from selling funeral merchandise and catering for funerals. As with any enterprise the objective of the funeral industry is to survive and make a profit against economic odds (Taylor, 1979). Their ambitions of running a profitable business or the desire for a high turnover of funerals is, however, often misconstrued as a wish for the death of others (Pine, 1975) and numerous jokes suggest their supposed longing for the death of friends and acquaintances. It is in the undertaker's interest to present him- or herself as a qualified, professional person who provides, for a reasonable fee, an expert personal service to someone in dire need. The client must believe that the fee is reasonable for competent, dedicated and responsible service (Pine, 1975).

The troubling position and questioning of the value and expertise of the undertaker is obvious when it is compared with the authority of the medical doctor. While it is expected of funeral directors to try and save money for the bereaved, the high costs of medical procedures, often keeping patients alive 'unnecessarily' when there is no hope of recovery, is almost taken for granted (Taylor, 1979).

Changing Funeral Practices

In today's modern Western society many consider the religious, emotional and economic obligations of funerals inappropriate and burdensome (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Traditional style funerals are more often seen in a negative light as they are taken to aggravate the sorrow of the mourners. Leading British psychiatrists, John Bowlby and Murray Parkes (in Fulton, 1979), explain:

Drawing the blinds, viewing the body, attending the funeral service, lowering the coffin into the grave, all serve to emphasise the finality and the absoluteness of death, and make denial more difficult (p.238).

Recent theoretical approaches that developed anthropological monographs suggest that certain aspects of the death ritual, for example viewing of the body and

the modern funeral, are cultural artefacts that have become 'personalised' by funeral directors to reflect their own agendas, aspiration, values and worldviews. As the latter are often in direct contrast to those of the bereaved (Hockey, 1996) these ritualistic behaviours are seen as having little positive value in dealing with 'the reality of death'.

Far-reaching changes in funeral customs have been recommended in an attempt to contain or limit the social impact of death upon the family and community. The main thrust of this movement is to transform society's idea of death into that of a gentle and welcome release from life's trials and tribulations (Fulton & Bendiksen, 1994; Parsons, 1994). Ariès (1981) asserts that the privatisation of family life that accompanied the development of industrial capitalism sparked a "revolution of feeling" (p. 472) that helped to create an audience receptive to this more comforting image of 'the beautiful death' (Cahill, 1995). Death is no longer an event to mourn, but an occasion to celebrate. For the funeral industry to survive, it has to learn to emphasise life rather than death, as society prefers to avoid the latter (Lifton & Olsen, 1974). The commercialisation of the funeral serves to 'disguise' death (Pine, 1975) and the undertaker thus works at "sparing friends (the) pain and anxiety" (Cahill, 1995, p. 29) of the reality of death.

Undertakers are managing to turn the funeral into a less sombre affair through measures like the replacement of the formal black limousine with cars of different colours, especially white, and by encouraging clients to choose colourful flower arrangements that turn the funeral into a brighter occasion (Pine, 1975). Although most undertakers still prefer to wear dark suits, they are no longer wearing black exclusively and have given up the traditional tailcoat suit with its accompanying white gloves. Their behaviour has become less formal and their title has changed from the meaning laden 'undertaker', or unattractive 'mortician', to the descriptive 'funeral director' (Thompson, 1991).

A number of recent changes that buffer the effects of death includes: a decline in public obituaries, a rise in the immediate disposing or cremation of the body, a decline in laying out bodies at home, a decline in the use of restorative

cosmetology, reduced viewing of the body in the funeral home, the shortening of processions of automobiles to the cemetery, and the conducting of memorial service in the absence of the body or the casket (Corr, 1979b; Fulton & Owen, 1994; Parsons, 1994). Cremations are becoming more popular because they are considered 'less emotional' and 'more convenient' options (Molyneux, 2002) and because the lack of a burial plot, which people might feel obliged to visit periodically, removes some reminders of the reality of death.

The realities of a change in values and tight economic conditions explain people's unwillingness to spend a lot of money on a funeral. As Fulton (1979) describes: "For some, the most desirable procedure is also the simplest - one that involves as little material expense as possible" (p. 248). It is also becoming increasingly popular to donate the body of the deceased to medical science (Fulton & Owen, 1994). Likewise, other forms of immediate disposal of the body, without public ceremony, are also gaining in popularity. Business professionals regard viewing as excessively time-consuming, not fitting into the time constraints of their busy schedules.

A combination of the changing values of society and the avoidance of the discomfort presented by the confrontation with death, has led to a general denial of the mourner's need to grieve. Society therefore no longer offers a suitable outlet or the opportunity for the indispensable comfort required by the grieving. Rather than offering personal emotional support, society chooses to provide assistance in the form of tranquillisers that protect them against unwelcome outcries and uncomfortable feelings (Corr, 1979b).

The Role of the Funeral Director in the Death Ritual

Durkheim (1954) emphasises the function of ritualised behaviour in promoting and maintaining the emotional well-being of the individual, and the social cohesion and structural integration of the group. The funeral process is therefore considered to provide a powerful means of re-integrating the group's weakened solidarity and re-establishing its shaken morals (Fulton, 1979) as an essential part of the death

ritual. Everett Hughes (1958) poignantly observes the value of the funeral as a ritual when she states:

If there be any triumph in death, our generation will not be there to see it. As for mourning, we are so fearful of wearing sorrow upon our sleeves, that we eat our hearts out in a mourning which cannot be brought to a decent end, because it has never had a proper beginning...the people who got it into their heads that anything formal is cold - not sensing that ceremonial may be the cloak that warms the freezing heart; that a formula may be the firm stick upon which the trembling limbs may lean; that it may be a house in which one may decently hide himself until he has the strength and courage to face the world again (p. 16).

According to Fulton (1979) the funeral also has a number of important latent functions. The funeral process reaffirms the general social order by offering a particular person a role that reflects that person's position in broader society. The obligations and restrictions placed upon members of the family are often taken as a sign of and opportunity for demonstrating the cohesion of the family unit. Participation in this ritual also serves as an acknowledgement and affirmation of the endurance of an extended kinship system.

The most important functions of the funeral director in the death ritual lies in his or her role as 'aftercare provider' (Sims & Williams, 2001) or 'grief facilitator' (Kalkofen, 1989) and in "offering solace to grieving families" (Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974, p. 417) based on his/her extensive experience of grief reactions. A recent study by Gamino et al. (2000), using the Grief Experience Inventory, concluded that mourners who participated in planning the funeral and/or experienced the funeral as comforting reported lower levels of grief and misery as a later consequence of bereavement. These advantages can easily be undermined by a number of possible 'adverse events' during the funeral that mourners find upsetting and discomforting. It should be one of the prime functions of the funeral director to

assist mourners to be vigilant towards such adversities and to optimise the healing potential of the funeral ritual (Weeks, 1996).

The calm sympathy of the funeral director in emotionally difficult encounters with clients attests to the demands of their professional and authoritative position. The clear contrast between their professional poise and self-command in the face of death and their clients' overt anxiety and grief, commands some respect and deference for their complex and difficult vocation. The undertakers' work, together with their occupational authority and prestige (Cahill, 1999), deserves recognition for the important and valuable professional, humanitarian and personal services they provide. They should also be commended for the positive consequences thereof for the whole of society (Bowman, 1959). An American survey (Fulton, 1979) showed that the majority of the public identified the funeral as a meaningful emotional experience for survivors, while more than half considered the funeral director as a professional person who delivers an essential professional service. The truest reflection of the services the funeral director as genuine helper provides, lies in the extent to which the public finds the work they do unappealing and even dangerous.

As the ritual aspect of the funeral has been established for the sake of the living (Corr, 1979a; Thompson, 1991), funeral directors experience a large measure of emotional work satisfaction and take great pride in providing efficient and appropriate services that give comfort to their customers (Bluford, 1993). The funeral director's firm focus on the positive effect his or her work has on the family is noted during an interview (Thompson, 1991): "I don't want to be thought of as somebody who likes working with the dead - that's morbid. I enjoy what I do because I like working with the living" (p. 411).

The challenges of dealing competently with the client's loss and grief requires appropriate skills and special insights that have to form part of the modern undertaker's training. As the counselling of the bereaved is increasingly becoming part of their duties, some funeral homes have launched a thorough professional grief-counselling programme for its clientele and the community it serves (Riordan & Allen, 1989).

Funeral directors fulfil an extraordinary role in society as professional comforters of the bereaved (Hocker, 1989). The nature of the relationship between the client and the professional is unique because of the levels of intimacy and care that is often established in such a brief period of time with a complete stranger (Hyland & Morse, 1995). Even though the time spent in the company of the bereaved family is short, it is emotionally charged. During this highly privileged and potentially meaningful period the undertaker has to be carefully aware of the impact of his or her actions and has to guard against developing excessive affective ties with the family (Pine, 1975). Their job thus requires high levels of tact, discretion and compassion in dealing with grieving, vulnerable people (Bluford, 1993).

Overview of Existing Research

As has been stated previously, the field of Psychology has almost exhausted subjects like grief and bereavement. In-depth investigations have been done regarding the process of dying as a social phenomenon, focusing on the social and psychological problems experienced by the dying person, the bereaved family as well as the doctors and nurses caring for the dying patient (Koberstein, 1985; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Levenstein, 1980; Thorson & Powell, 1988). The dying patient's experience of the process of death (De Villiers, 1986) and the implementation of death counseling (Benoliel, 1987) has also received attention. The emotional difficulties experienced by the survivors of death, as well as ways to deal with the pain of death, has been identified and widely written about (Kastenbaum, 1992; Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 1972).

A number of studies have been undertaken concerning the role of the funeral director, role conflict (Pine, 1975), as well as the role of the funeral in the acceptance of death (Fulton, 1979; Gamino et al., 2000). Information regarding the needs and experiences of the bereaved during the funeral process have been explored with suggestions on how the grieving process could be further facilitated, or hampered, by the experience of the death ritual (Fulton, 1979; Glick et al., 1974; Hockey, 1996; Howarth, 1996) as well as the importance of the undertaker's role as aftercare provider during this process (Kalkofen, 1989; Sims & William, 2001). As

experts in responding to the feelings of bereaved families (Hockey, 1996) they are often consulted with regard to the needs and the progress of the grieving process for the family (Kalkofen, 1989) and interviews conducted with undertakers supplied information regarding observations on the severity of the family's reactions, and the social responses of others to the bereaved family, when the death was caused by suicide (Calhoun, Selby & Steelman, 1989)

No studies exploring the undertaker's views or attitudes exploring concepts such as life or death could be found. Conceptions of death have, however, been linked to feelings of well-being and other indicators of quality of life (Keith, 1998). The undertaker's perceptions about the quality of life have been measured in terms of orientation towards work, social comparison and the absence of depressive symptoms (Keith, 1997). Experiences of self-actualisation and job satisfaction amongst funeral directors in Ontario have been measured and have been correlated with a shift by the profession away from the traditional funeral-service role (Schell & Zinger, 1985).

The undertaker's experience of his or her world and the emotional impact that the profession has on his or her emotional well-being seems to be a subject that has been mostly neglected (Schell & Zinger, 1985). The limited number of studies available regarding the undertaker has traditionally involved research from a quantitative perspective and includes studies showing them to score lower on a humour scale as compared to men in other professions, for example (Thorson & Powell, 1996; 2001). A number of studies measuring undertakers' death anxiety have produced contradicting results, showing them to have low-to-moderate anxiety about death (Schell & Zinger, 1984; 1985), while others showed no difference in the amounts of death-anxiety experienced as compared to respondents in other occupations (Keith, 1997, 1998). Death education has been identified as a factor leading to lowered levels of death anxiety (Cahill, 1999; Corr, 1979a; Murray, 1974; Schell & Zinger, 1984) while other researchers consider it only to lead to lower levels of distress and not necessarily to lower death anxiety (Keith, 1997; 1998; Morgan, 1977).

The negative perception of death has been portrayed in the removal of dying patients from their homes or moving them into separate rooms in an attempt to distance other patients and visitors from the distasteful fact of death (Corr, 1979a). Hospital staff has also been found to be more reluctant to treat dying patients and it was found that delayed response times to emergency call buttons were recorded when nurses suspected the patient to be dying (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Hospital hallways and elevators were isolated for the removal of corpses and these were transported as inconspicuously as possible (Corr, 1979a). The lived experience of critical care nurses who participated in unsuccessful patient resuscitation revealed the complex and dynamic emotional consequences of having to accept the death of a patient (Cudmore, 1996; Edwards, 1997; Isaak & Paterson, 1996) while Greene's (2001) study revealed the psychological responses that may develop in police officers in response to the handling of human remains and death investigations.

A study that measured the effect of encountering death showed respondents to become more upset on a psycho-physiological level when encountering death stimuli, no matter what they say or think on a more self-aware level (Feifel & Branscomb, 1973). Alexander, Colley, and Alderstein (1957) demonstrated that death-related words, for example 'coffin' or 'hearse', caused a stronger galvanic (electric) skin response and heightened emotional arousal than words with a neutral affective tone like 'chair'.

As has been stated above, the undertaker is subjected to the stigma associated with his or her occupation (Cahill, 1995; Fulton, 1979; Thompson, 2001; Warner, 1959) and has to employ a number of strategies to cope with the emotional and physical distress caused by his or her experiences with death (Howarth, 1996). A number of symbolic and dramaturgical techniques have been examined assisting with the neutralisation of the stigma associated with their work. These techniques include the use of language to symbolically redefine his/her work (Corr, 1979a; Fulton & Bendiksen, 1994; McKay, 1990), redefining their role by shifting the focus of their work away from the care of the dead to caring for the living (Corr, 1979a; Hockey, 1996) and de-emphasising the handling of the body (Schell & Zinger, 1985). They practice role distance through routinising their work (Cahill, 1999) and through

the use of humour (Cahill, 1999; Corr, 1979a; Pine, 1975). By emphasising professionalism (Amos, 1983; Hockey, 1996) and cloaking themselves in the "shroud of service" (Thompson, 1991, p. 403) they are able to remove some of the negative connotations generally associated with them. The tendency to enjoy socio-economic status over occupational prestige (Keith, 1998) has also been identified as a way to curb the negativity experienced due to the stigma of the profession.

Undertakers have been identified, together with other emergency workers (Burns & Rosenberg, 2001; Pierson, 1989; Wilson, Poole & Trew, 1997), as a population that is exposed to critical incident stress. Mitchell and Bray (1990) describe critical incidents as experiences that produce major distress in the individual and that can, because of the powerfulness of the impact, easily overcome a person's normal ability to cope with the stress of the job. The individual nature of the perception of situations as critical incidents has been assessed (Carlier, Lamberts & Gersons, 2000) and it has been estimated that 80-85% of emergency workers have, at some point, developed acute or delayed psychological symptoms commonly associated with critical incident stress. These symptoms include, amongst others, chest pains, difficulty breathing, high blood pressure, dizziness, intrusive unwanted mental images and thoughts that affect attention span and disrupt concentration (Beaton, Murphy, Johnson, Pike & Corneil, 1998; Kroshus, Swarthout & Tibbetts, 1995). Of this sample 3-4% of respondents experienced problems throughout their lives and was diagnosed as having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Mitchell & Bray, 1990) associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety and depersonalisation (Sims & Sims, 1998). These symptoms were attributed to exposure to actual or threatened death or serious injury; other threats to one's physical integrity; witness of an event that involves death, injury, or threat to the physical integrity of another person, family member, or other close associate (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

A study by Kroshus et al. (1995) concerning funeral directors' exposure to critical incident stress, found increased symptomology among respondents among the 30 - 39 year age group. They displayed higher rates of irritability, frustration and apathy, and were more likely to drop out of the funeral business than any other age group. Risk factors that could aggravate the development of PTSD has been

identified as introversion, difficulty in expressing feelings, emotional exhaustion at the time of trauma, insufficient time allowed by the employer for coming to terms with the trauma, the lack of hobbies, subsequent traumatic events, job dissatisfaction and lack of social interaction and support in the private sphere (Carlier, Lamberts & Gersons, 1997; Stephens & Long, 2000).

Research confirming the prevalence of PTSD includes studies conducted with doctors (Alexander & Atcheson, 1998), nurses (Clark & Gioro, 1998; Cudmore, 1996), fire fighters (Beaton, Murphy, Johnson, Pike & Corneil, 1999; Wagner, Heinrichs, & Ehler, 1998), police (Carlier, Lamberts, Fouwels & Gersons, 1996; Henning, 1999; Tarnopolsky & Shammi, 1995), and ambulance workers or paramedics (Beaton et al., 1999; Clohessy & Ehlers, 1999; Grevin, 1996). Suggestions for education (Bendiksen, Bodin & Jambois, 2001) and the implementation of debriefing programmes to alleviate the stress related to trauma (Teherani & Westlake, 1994) has been widely discussed with some accentuating the value of such programmes (Carlier, Voerman & Gersons, 2000; Fullerton, Ursano, Vance & Wang, 2000; Miller, 1995; Smith & De Chesnay, 1994; Tarnopolsky & Shammi, 1995; Well, Getman & Blau, 1988) while others consider its limitations (Tobin, 2001) and believe that it may sometimes impair rather than help individual coping skills (Moran, 1998; Stephens, 1997).

The probability of addiction and a need for exciting or dangerous activities as some other possible consequences of exposure to trauma in the police has been investigated. It was argued that addiction might be a result of physiological and psychological processes that increase the need for exciting and dangerous stimulation (Violanti, 1997). Disrupted beliefs about the meaningfulness of the world has been found in a study of paramedics (Galloucis, Silverman & Francek, 2000) while another study argued that exposure to death could enable individuals to achieve a protective professional distance from aspects of their work, including the debilitating fear of their own mortality (Henry, 1995)

Efforts to find research concerning undertakers functioning in the South African context proved fruitless. The only area that has received some attention in

this regard is the exploration of the effects of occupational stress as experienced by emergency personnel including, for example, nurses (Pienaar, Van Rooyen & Kotzé, 2000) and paramedics (Davies, 2000). Numerous studies have been conducted regarding officials of the South African Police Service and their exposure to stress and/or traumatic events (Nel, 1999) and the subsequent development of PTSD (Boshoff, 2000; Kopel & Friedman, 1997; Nel, 1998; Stromnes, 1999). A particular study estimated that nearly a third of the police officers involved in the research met psychometric criteria for a positive screening diagnosis for PTSD (Kopel, 1996).

Attempts were made to establish the relationship between personality traits and PTSD (Nel, 1999) but also the nature of PTSD leading to chronic illness and work-related dysfunction (Feldmann, 1994). Different coping styles to deal with exposure to stress and trauma were identified and included defensive responses such as avoidance and denial as well as problem focused coping mechanisms (Boshoff, 2000; Kopel, 1996; Kopel & Friedman, 1997).

Although the experiences of undertakers can in a number of ways be compared to those of emergency or rescue workers, it also involves fundamental differences. Medical personnel are exposed to death in certain instances but is also provided with the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of saving the lives of their patients. The funeral director, however, has no such opportunity, as death is a certainty in every case he or she deals with. Emergency workers are confronted with the unpleasantness of death on the scene of the accident but have, unlike the undertaker, no dealings or responsibility towards the family members of the deceased. It can be argued then that, even though both of these occupations are confronted with death almost on a daily basis, their experiences should be acknowledged as very different and it can almost not be considered legitimate to apply the same data to their situations.

Conclusion

From the discussion of the academic literature and past research relating to the profound realities of death, with particular focus on its relation to the occupation

and psychological well-being of the undertaker, it seems obvious that this is a complex and intriguing subject that deserves further study. It seems clear that contemporary Western society needs to find some deeper meaning in this disturbing existential reality through facing up, with the professional help and guidance of undertakers, to death's characteristic finality. If the need for change is overlooked, the opportunity of protecting society against the negative impact of death-anxiety on the individual and his or her relationships with others, will be lost and we will not be able to utilise the potentially meaning enhancing nature of this defining phenomenon.

Psychologically the challenge of finding a well-balanced, healthy-minded, common sense perspective on the admittedly unpleasant reality of death is complicated by the traditional cultural milieu within which it is approached. The historical development of civilisation, the effects of industrialisation, modernisation and technological progress, and the resulting scientism and agnosticism, necessarily defines the possible range of our attitudes toward death. Here the dominant, and currently negative, role of the media should not be underestimated. Society needs to recognise that the isolation of the elderly and the dying, and shifting the responsibility of handling death and its consequences to institutions and professional functionaries, limits the opportunities for meaningful contact with death so that negative attitudes become entrenched and self-perpetuating.

The challenge then is for society to stop taking comfort in the fading presence of natural deaths and to discourage those processes that make it seem inappropriate and unreal by pushing it out of sight. The deepened awareness and practical resolution to develop a more meaningful approach to death, needs to be widely disseminated and vigorously supported. The necessary will and motivation for pursuing the ultimate human project of getting to grips with death should draw its force from the recognition that traditional attempts at excessive control of all aspects of the environment is doomed to failure and that making sense of death is an essential part of making sense of life.

Society's attempts to remove death from its daily existence forces the funeral director into a position where he or she not only has to attend to funerary concerns, but also has to deal with the fact that his/her very existence reminds society of the inevitability of death. Careful reflection on the role and importance of the funeral director points to the need for the profession, more than ever before, to be better informed and receptive to society's needs, demands and values. If dealt with in the appropriate manner the undertaker can play a significant role in tapping the healing potential of the death ritual, thus ensuring the survival of the profession. As their vocation moves beyond the traditional public and non-public duties to include therapeutic activities (like grief counselling) and improve the public presentation of the funeral and its contemporary variations, the industry needs to engage in some shrewd self-promotion to inform the public better. Their role in protecting the unity of society by guiding its members successfully in acknowledging and accepting their loss should break down the stigma to secure the recognition, respect and financial rewards their professional service industry so obviously deserve.

Finally, the limited research that has been done in the past into the nature and importance of the emotional effects of the funeral industry on the funeral director has to be restated. This study aims to do some groundwork in the richer exploration of the undertaker as a human being and on the impact his or her chosen profession has on the whole of his or her existence.

CHAPTER 3

AN ECOSYSTEMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

Introduction

The ecosystemic approach can be regarded as the integration of a number of fields of study including general systems theory, ecology and cybernetics. These theories are compatible as they share certain assumptions and have similar epistemologies. An ecosystemic epistemology should, therefore, not be viewed as a specific theory, but rather as a way of looking and thinking that assists our understanding of the world around us (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1997).

An epistemology can be described as a “set of immanent rules” (Auerswald, 1985, p. 1) that is used to define reality or to make sense of the world that we live in. It is a way of looking at the world that is not always conscious (Hoffman, 1981), but it has an influence on how we know, think and decide (Bateson, 1979; Keeney, 1982). Each time we make an observation, we choose an epistemological position from which the observation is being made. Our epistemological position induces the range of observations that are possible and will become the observer’s stance. This epistemological stance is expressed in the linguistic distinctions with which we think and speak and will therefore not only determine much of our behaviour, but also our interpretations of other peoples’ behaviour (Griffith, Griffith & Slovik, 1990).

This research document is written from an ecosystemic viewpoint and this will be the ‘lens’ that will colour the way that the world is looked at. Our epistemology has such a direct influence on our ways of seeing and describing behaviour that it determines how we define the problem of research, the planning of research, as well as the gathering and eventual interpretation of data. It is thus essential to have a broader understanding of the underlying assumptions and principles of the ecosystemic approach. This chapter will provide an overview of the ecosystemic approach as well as descriptions of the basic concepts inherent to it. It will be preceded by a brief discussion of the development of the approach, including the various fields that influenced, or contributed, to its development. The main focus

will, however, be on second-order cybernetic and constructivist principles as these concepts are most meaningful in the researcher's use of the ecosystemic epistemology.

The Newtonian Worldview of Realism

Traditional Newtonian thinking can be described as the dominant epistemology underpinning scientific theories until the end of the 19th century (Rawsthorne, 1998) and is based upon concepts such as objectivity, reductionism and linear causality. It supports Aristotle's view that the purpose of science is to find the true nature of things, implying that things have a true nature that can be 'found' (Fourie, 1998). Further, an objective and absolute reality can be discovered and studied through objective observation (Meyer et al., 1997) as this process is not believed to be influenced by the observer (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Phenomena are reduced to their smallest elements and studied in their most basic form with the hope of gaining a better understanding of them as a whole. Linear causality is assumed to bind the elements together, resulting in a simplistic cause-effect outlook on individuals and events. This empiricist perspective understands the acquisition of knowledge in terms of a subject looking at an object in order to determine how well that which he or she sees reflects the nature or essence of the object. To know something, therefore, was to know the essence or true nature of a class or species (Matthews, 1992).

This approach had been applied with great success in various fields of scientific enquiry, but became progressively more inadequate for understanding more complex human phenomena (Fourie, 1998; Von Glasersfeld, 1984). The discovery of Einstein's relativity theory and Planck's quantum theory in the earlier 20th century, started a movement that challenged the Newtonian way of thinking (Auerswald, 1987). For example, objectivity of observation was questioned when it was discovered that light could be observed as either particles or waves, depending on the way in which it was observed (Fourie, 1998). The interconnectedness of systems was highlighted and led to much questioning of the classical assumptions of objectivity and reality (Rawsthorne, 1998). It was realised that breaking up

complicated social processes into parts or elements was difficult and that a different, more holistic, approach was needed (Auerswald, 1987; Keeney, 1979). The whole came to be viewed as more than the sum of its parts. This movement away from a Newtonian epistemology resulted in the development of the ecosystemic epistemology that accentuated a more organic, holistic and ecological worldview.

The Ecosystemic Approach

As was previously mentioned, the ecosystemic epistemology developed through the integration of a number of diverse fields. The focus shifted from the reductionistic, cause-effect approach towards a systemic, ecological and cybernetic way of viewing the world (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). This new focus purported that all things in nature are considered to be related to one another in a complex, systematic way (Keeney, 1988). The ecology was, therefore, considered as the widest possible context for studying reciprocal relations and interrelations in and between systems (Le Roux, 1987; Meyer et al., 1997). The interdependence, complexity and contextual interrelatedness of phenomena was acknowledged (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982) and systems were regarded as integrated wholes whose "properties cannot be reduced to those of its parts" (Capra, 1983, p. 266; Varela, 1976). The principles of the ecosystemic approach in psychology developed within the context of family therapy, but can be applied to the observation and description of any facet of human behaviour or functioning (Meyer et al, 1997).

General Systems Theory

During the 1950s the view of the interrelationship of elements became progressively more prominent and the focus shifted from the study of elements to that of organised wholes (Fourie, 1998). Von Bertalanffy (1968) developed and originally applied his general systems theory to the field of psychiatry. His theory proved to be instrumental in the move towards a more holistic view in many other fields such as psychology and sociology to name but a few. With his theory he attempted to account for the behaviour of all systems, with the most important notion of his theory suggesting that all systems consist of smaller subsystems, and in turn

are part of larger supra-systems (Meyer et al., 1997). The individual is, consequently, viewed as a subsystem within a larger family system, for example, but the family also forms part of an even larger community system. Human functioning is therefore not studied in isolation but rather in terms of the interactional patterns that exist within and between the systems (Fourie, 1991).

Systems and subsystems are seen as divided from each other by invisible boundaries that regulate the amount of information that can flow between the respective systems. In physical systems the boundaries can be totally impenetrable, meaning that the system is closed to the flow of information. In contrast, general systems theory regarded human systems to be never completely impermeable as they always allow for varied amounts of outside information to penetrate their boundaries, and are consequently called open systems (Meyer et al., 1997). Systems can thus influence one another through the information that they channel back to each other through the process of feedback. This process can be either positive or negative, depending on the outcome of the feedback. If the feedback causes the behaviour of the system to remain the same or to return to previous limits, it can be described as negative feedback. Positive feedback, however, is change promoting and encourages the system to exceed behavioural limits (Fourie, 1998). Change is not seen as a purely linear process anymore but rather as a process of circular causality where systems influence each other in a reciprocal way and any behaviour is simultaneously cause and effect (Hoffman, 1981).

Despite the fact that information from outside a system can produce change in it, the system will always strive towards a state of equilibrium or homeostasis. It is believed that systems possess a 'homeostatic plateau' which provides boundaries for change, and that systems will tend to remain within these self-correcting limits (Hoffman, 1981). This need to maintain constancy in the face of environmental influences can be referred to as 'homeostasis'. The system's boundaries, and its experience of a sense of equilibrium, will have a great impact on the amount of positive feedback that can be absorbed, or the amount of change that will be allowed to occur in its basic structure. If change does occur and a system is allowed to adapt to challenging environmental conditions, a process of 'morphogenesis' is

said to take place (Hoffman, 1981). A dynamic process of change and stability, referred to as 'morphostasis', occurs in which a system attempts to protect its integrity while also allowing a certain amount of flexibility (Meyer et al, 1997).

General systems theory regards systems as synergistic in that the whole is always regarded as being more than the sum of its parts. The focus is now placed on the patterns of interaction within and between systems, and, although this theory has moved away from the reductionistic view of the Newtonian approach, it still upholds the notions of linear causality and a belief in an objective observer (Anderson, Goolishian & Windermand, 1986; Keeney, 1983b). The observer continues to have a position of authority and has the power to influence the system from outside. It was, however, the first step away from a Newtonian perspective on the social sciences and paved the way for further developments.

First-order Cybernetics

The mathematician, Norbert Wiener, lay claim to the term 'cybernetics' during the 1940s when he developed a theory that focused on the interaction and communication between systems in terms of the principles that regulate the dissemination of information (Meyer et al. 1997). Cybernetics was closely linked to general systems theory in that it also focused on the interaction between and within systems, but approached this interaction more in terms of the control, regulation, exchange and processing of the flow of information (Hoffman, 1985; Loos & Epstein, 1989).

Gregory Bateson (1979) was particularly instrumental in the inclusion of cybernetics in the field of human sciences. He postulated that the interaction between sub-systems should not suggest only one-way connections, but that two-way recursive feedback loops can be expected as well. Individuals are viewed in terms of their bi-directional interactions, as each part of a system interacts with every other part of the system and consequently has a reciprocal influence on the whole (Keeney, 1983a). He therefore concluded that:

If you want to understand some phenomenon or appearance, you must consider that phenomenon within the context of all completed circuits which are relevant to it (Bateson, 1972, p. 244).

The notion of feedback as a mechanism to maintain stability was eventually rejected by Bateson as he realised that the participation of the observer was not yet included in these recursive loops (Keeney, 1983a). The total circuit must be included to avoid the tendency to “chop up the ecology” (Hoffman, 1981, p. 342) and to ascribe control to any one part of the system.

The importance that cybernetics placed on the interactional, recursive patterns within and between systems has clearly influenced the development of the ecosystemic approach, but the observer is still regarded as taking up a position outside of the observed system. This led Von Foerster (1981) to refer to this form of cybernetics as first-order cybernetics or cybernetics of the observed system.

A concise overview has been given of the development of the systemic movement since it started influencing the study of social sciences. The strongest influences on the ecosystemic epistemology have come from second-order cybernetics and the constructivist approach and both are instrumental in this study. These approaches will consequently be discussed in more detail and in-depth descriptions of some of the concepts will be given.

Second-order Cybernetics

The Observer as Part of the System

The idea of a system as a ‘black box’ that interacts with a context outside of itself is characteristic of a first-order cybernetic view. The observer is clearly placed outside of the system that is being observed and is considered to have the ability to purposefully control that system (Keeney, 1983a). The second-order cybernetics perspective can be described as a higher-order cybernetics as it regards the observer as part of the system under observation and realises that the observer

cannot be objective (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987). The observation of human interaction is considered to be a complex process that will ultimately alter the observer as well as the observed (Fourie, 1996b; Loos & Epstein, 1989). The two 'black boxes' of the observer and the observed thus become one recursive system and the observer becomes part of the ecosystem (Hoffman, 1981). A second-order cybernetic perspective encourages a collaborative approach, instead of a hierarchical structure, and approach phenomena through a process of circular rather than linear assessment. Von Foerster (1981), who can be described as one of the 'fathers' of second-order cybernetics, refers to this inclusion of the observer as the observing system and says:

It is at this point where we mature from cybernetics (where the observer enters the system only by stipulating its purpose) to cybernetics of cybernetics (where the observer enters the system by stipulating his own purpose) (Von Foerster in Keeney, 1983a, p. 76).

The observer cannot observe or describe a system objectively as the very act of observation influences the behaviour of those being observed. Descriptions cannot be separated from the observer's own construction processes (Fourie, 1996a) as observations are coloured by the observer's own way of observing, his or her epistemology or specific way of thinking. The observer can only observe a whole within the restraints of his or her own perceptions and ideation. Descriptions of what is being observed can often reveal more about the observer than about the systems under observation (Loos & Epstein, 1989), and can even be a commentary about the observer's own organisationally closed system (Kenny, 1989). The description of an observation should therefore account equally for the observer as for each other member of the system (Fourie, 1998), as the observer is included in the recursive connections within the observed system (Meyer et al., 1997).

Observations are not Objective

It was further emphasised that objective observation was impossible when two biologists, Maturana and Varela, proposed that perception was determined by the perceiver and not by the perceived (Fourie, 1998; Maturana, 1975). They illustrated this concept in the article "What the frog's eye tells the frog's brain" (Maturana in Le Roux, 1987), which described an experiment of a frog catching a fly. The frog's eye is compounded by a number of cells that form a unified whole. Each structural unit in the eye has its own awareness as it can only respond to specific stimuli, for example an insect that is entering the field of sight from left to right, or the other way around. That would mean that the image that is perceived by the eye and that is projected onto the brain does not merely represent an image of the "real" world as it is observed. The frog does not have access to the reality outside of itself, but can only 'see' reality as filtered through its own process of observation. The same concept was applied to humans and it was concluded that no person could describe a world 'outside' of him- or herself (Le Roux, 1987) as each person must be regarded as the creator of his or her own reality (Maturana, 1978).

Structural Determinism

The idea that perception is determined by the 'structure' of the perceiver, and not by the object perceived, questioned the belief that any linear influence by one system on another is possible (Efran & Lukens, 1985). It was realised that one system can only perturb another system in a specific way as systems can only behave in accordance with the way that they are 'built' (Dell, 1985). Systems have a particular composition, or configuration of components, and the functioning of a system is therefore determined by its own organisation and structure at every moment (Kenny, 1989).

The organisation of a system is vital for its survival and it would cease to exist if its specific organisation was relinquished. The structure of a system determines the way in which it can be used and also restricts it in terms of its reaction to perturbations (Keeney, 1988). If a system is faced with a critical perturbation, it can

only respond in a way that is available to it (Efran & Lukens, 1985; Fourie, 1993). This self-determination renders a system as informationally closed and as a self-organised entity that cannot be directly influenced by the environment (Bateson, 1972; Fourie, 1998). The environment, as a perturbing agent, merely provides the context for the system to behave according to its structure (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Efran and Lukens (1985) describe it as follows:

people do what they do because of how they are put together, and they do it in connection with (but not on direct instruction from) the medium in which they exist, which includes other people (p. 25).

Autonomy

As has already been mentioned, a system's organisation is of utmost importance to its survival and is always conserved in order to maintain its viability (Keeney, 1982). The system has to be able to determine its own actions or else it will cease to operate as a system (Fourie, 1998). This process of self-regulation, or conservation, is referred to as autonomy and is achieved through the process of autopoiesis (Varela, Maturana & Uribe, 1974). The system relates to its environment in such a way as to set up boundaries and to distinguish itself through its own dynamics. Boundaries, however, do not cause a system, just as a system does not cause the boundaries. It is rather a case of each requiring the other in this unitary process of autopoiesis (Becvar & Becvar, 1996).

Systems can be described as recursive as each part interacts with every other part and can, as a result, only be described through reference to each other (Keeney, 1983a). Behaviour is constructed according to the information produced through the recursive feedback loops and is used mainly for the conservation of the system's organisation (Griffith et al., 1990). In an attempt to conserve itself, a system might even get stuck in dysfunctional patterns as all external sources of reference are excluded (Fourie, 1993; 1996c).

The feedback that is involved in second-order cybernetics is of a higher order

as it provides feedback of feedback, homeostasis of homeostasis, and change of change (Keeney, 1982). The feedback that is received during interactions will therefore not have a linear influence on an autonomous, recursively organised, closed system, but will rather provide 'inputs' that could lead to the perturbation of the system (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). If the system responds to perturbations, the structure of the system could change but the organisation, or the system's identity, will remain intact (Keeney, 1983a). A system that is disconnected from the medium in which it needs to survive will not be able to maintain self-correcting circuits, and because of this the possibility of disintegration or death could increase (Bateson, 1979). All systems can therefore be regarded as competent as they know how to survive in the best way that they can. It becomes clear that what may look like instability at one level might actually be part of stability at a higher order of recursion (Becvar & Becvar, 1996).

Structural Coupling

From a second-order cybernetic perspective systems are considered to be unable to influence one another directly and are therefore only able to exchange ideas. Systems do, however, share a context with other systems and have to be able to coexist, or to fit, in order to survive. When two or more human systems come together ideas are exchanged in the form of symbols and verbal or non-verbal expressions. The sharing of ideas can lead to the coupling of these systems with each other as determined by the structure of each respective system. Through structural coupling systems are able to mutually co-exist or fit together. Together they will then form a composite autonomous system that will determine its own actions (Fourie, 1996c).

Two parties that are interacting can be described as two sets of eyes, each seeing the world in a particular way. Each person will be able to give a monocular view as seen from his or her own perspective. If both the individual views are described in terms of the relationship that exists between the two people, a more in-depth, binocular view would be possible (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982)

The interactions between systems are determined purely by the individual structure of the systems, as they are considered to be informationally closed. This would mean that ideas can be presented by one system to another but that the second system will probably not extract the precise meaning that was intended by the first system, as it will autonomously create its own meaning. Each system will attribute meaning to the words and behaviours of another system as determined by the perceiving system's structure (Fourie, 1996b). The presented ideas thus only perturb the receiving system, and although the newly created meanings might resemble the original or intended meanings, they remain an autonomous creation in response to a perturbation (Fourie, 1996b).

The reciprocal perturbation could trigger structural changes in the systems and might encourage the systems to begin to think and behave differently (Fourie, 1996b). Behaviour can be regarded as an expression of a system's ecology of ideas, where every expression becomes an input into the ecology and perturbs this ecology. The effect of the perturbations will depend on the structure of the ecology of ideas at that time (Fourie, 1998). This structural plasticity is necessary, as systems must be able to change their structure when triggered by one another. Maturana and Varela (1987) suppose that:

The plastic splendour of the nervous system does not lie in its production of 'engrams' or representations of things in the world; rather, it lies in its continuous transformation in line with transformations of the environment as a result of how each interaction affects it (p. 170).

In second-order cybernetics the system is hence regarded as self-regulating and informationally closed. This means that the system's behaviour is determined by its structure and not by outside influences or actions. The system only acts in the ways allowed by its structure and can therefore be described as autonomous. The second-order cybernetic perspective and constructivism are closely linked and the most important concepts underlying constructivism will be discussed in the following pages.

Constructivism

Constructivist thinking has been informed by second-order cybernetics in that it supports the idea that objective observation, especially of human behaviour, is impossible (Tomm & Lannamann, 1988). According to Von Glasersfeld (1984), the structure of our nervous system dictates that we can never know what is 'really' out there. That which we know is only our own construction of others and the world around us (Von Glasersfeld, 1984). Uncontaminated or neutral observation of reality is replaced by constructivism and can be described as:

...essentially a theory about the limits of human knowledge and the belief that all knowledge is necessarily a product of our own cognitive acts. We can have no direct or unmediated knowledge of any external or objective reality. We construct our understanding through our experiences, and the character of our experience is influenced profoundly by our cognitive lens (Matthews, 1992, p. 2).

The radical constructivists believe that no 'real' reality exists and that everything is purely a construction of the observer (Maturana & Varela, 1980). They deny any recursive interaction between the observer and the observed and, as reality exists only in the mind of the observer, the process of observation cannot be influenced by any feedback from that which is observed (Meyer et al., 1997). Von Glasersfeld (in Matthews, 1992) argues that:

The realist believes his constructs to be a replica or reflection of independently existing structures, while the constructivist remains aware of the experiencer's role as originator of all structures...for the constructivist there are no structures other than those which the knower constitutes by his very own activity of co-ordination of experiential particles (p. 2).

This extreme stance does not, however, mean absolute solipsism, or an 'anything goes' mentality (Fourie, 1998). Apart from the idea that realities are created, all realities are not equally useful or valid (Fourie, 1993). As we share our world with other people, the validity of our 'reality' is primarily determined by the way that it either fits, or does not fit, with the wishes, attributions, ideas and conceptions of the people partaking in the co-construction of this 'reality'. This would imply that reality is "a consistent frame of reference for at least two observers" (Hoffman, 1985, p. 384) that agree on an observation and co-create, or share, a meaning system (Meyer et al., 1997).

Constructivism consequently asserts that our perceptions are influenced by our observations as we can only see that which we are able to see, as determined by our structure (Fourie, 1998). Keeney (1983a) further states that what one perceives and knows is largely due to the distinctions that one draws. Observations are a co-construction by both the observer and the observed (Hoffman, 1990). This construction of reality is mainly done in language and social systems exchange meanings that lead to the co-construction of realities for those systems.

Punctuating Realities

People create their own 'reality' according to the meanings that they link to that which they observe. As Heisenberg (1962, p. 58) explains: "We have to remember, that what we observe is not nature in itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning". What is being observed does not have independent or objective meaning, but takes on the meaning that the observer attributes to it (Kenny, 1989; Meyer et al., 1997). It therefore means

that all knowledge of the world is the result of our own constructing, ordering, inventing, languaging, constituting, creating (and so forth) processes, and not the result of our discovery of how the world really is (Held, 1990, p. 180).

It is impossible for human beings to observe reality as it really is, even assuming that a fixed reality exists (Von Foerster, 1981; Von Glasersfeld, 1979; 1984). An observer is merely a person who is able to draw distinctions and specify these distinctions as different from the self (Le Roux, 1987). The observation of an object itself is even impossible, as only ideas about an object can be formed. A reality is invented, or generated, according to the individual's mental images, or ideas, and is coloured by the perceiver's existing attributions of meaning (Von Glasersfeld, 1984). We construct our own reality by means of the eyes with which we see and, subsequently, only a filtered reality is possible (Meyer et al., 1997).

The creation of 'reality' is not just an arbitrary process as it also suggests meanings, and any meaning implies a set of rules for behaviour (Hargens, 1999). A person will necessarily act in accordance with this 'reality' and seek corroboration for it. The perception of environmental events that are incongruent with a person's private constructions will be limited and will be organised in such a way as to confirm the validity of that person's beliefs. Watzlawick (1984) proposed that the perceiver's expectations would also play a role in bringing about that which has been expected, in other words, could lead to so-called self-fulfilling prophecies. Efran, Lukens and Lukens (1990) agree that:

Human beings are inveterate and skilful storytellers – and they have a habit of becoming the stories they tell. With repetition, stories harden into realities, sometimes trapping the storytellers within the boundaries that the storytellers themselves have helped to create (p. 80).

According to Watzlawick (1984) any so-called reality can then only be a construction of those who believe that they have discovered and investigated it, while actively creating a view of the world. A good constructivist has to acknowledge the active role of an organism (himself or herself) in creating a view of the world and interpreting observations in terms of it (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1988). During this process mental images are created that represent the organism's 'inventions' about what is out there.

It becomes clear that what we know, and can know, is based on the distinctions that we make. Our punctuations organise our experiences in a particular way and determine the kinds of relationships or patterns that we are able to see (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Each person's interpretation of his or her environment is just one particular interpretation among many possible ones. Any 'invented' reality, however, becomes just as real and solid as any other reality that is created, and is potentially equally valid (Wick, 1996).

Language and Consensual Domains

Language can be regarded as the means by which individuals come to know their world and, in their knowing, simultaneously to construct it (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). As has been discussed above, we can have no direct or unmediated knowledge of any external or objective reality and, therefore, our total understanding is constructed through our experiences (Matthews, 1992). If an object is observed, that which is represented in the brain is not the object itself, but rather ideas about the object (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Efran & Lukens, 1985). Our 'reality', or meaning, is mainly constructed through the distinctions that we draw in language, both verbal and non-verbal, and this can be regarded as the main way in which these meanings or ideas are communicated (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). Any description of that which is being observed becomes a distinction that will not only enable the observer to observe, but also to describe that which is being observed (Keeney, 1983a). Dell (1985) even asserts that meaning or reality cannot exist prior to language.

The construction of meaning can, furthermore, be either internal or external. An observer has to draw distinctions internally between that which is observed and that which it means according to this observer's own personal constructs. And then, externally, language is used to exchange meanings in communication with others (Fourie, 1996a). Meaning and reality can then be regarded as inter-subjective and as evolving from dialogue with oneself and with others (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). According to Anderson and Goolishian (in Wick, 1996)

Human systems are language-generating, and simultaneously meaning-generating systems...Hence, any human system is a linguistic or communicative system...In the domain of meaning, social systems are communication networks that are distinguished in and by language (p. 73).

Meaning and understanding is then constructed socially through communication or dialogue (Jankowski, Clark, & Ivey, 2000; Von Glasersfeld, 1979).

The distinctions that are made by an observer through language can result in various cognitive domains. The observer experiences them as realities that are independent of his or her cognitive activity or experience of the world, and this means that as many 'realities' can exist as the number of distinctions that the observer can create (Griffith et al., 1990). Knowledge thus becomes the invention of an active organism interacting with an environment. Although this knowledge is important for survival, it is not necessarily a correct depiction of the world out there (Hoffman, 1990).

Where there is consensus about observations, it means that a consensual domain has been created in language, but not because the phenomenon about which people are in agreement has intrinsic existence independent of its observation (Meyer et. al., 1997). Rather, a consensual domain evolves through the ongoing process of mutual perturbation of one's own and other people's ideas and behaviours (Maturana, 1975). Consensual domains or meanings are not static but rather dialogically constructed and inter-subjective, and thus continually evolving.

Language therefore modifies one's experiences and in turn is modified by experiences (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). Language ties human beings to each other, and to the world that they share, as it becomes an environment in which they can create a consensual domain (Von Foerster, 1973; 1984). Together they construe realities that are more or less constructive and will fit with their environments. Based on this construction, Maturana (in Le Roux, 1990) believes

that problems are social constructions in language and exist, or are qualified only, as a problem when 'language'd about (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Fourie, 1998).

Meanings can be regarded as linguistically co-created in a particular social context (Fourie, 1996c) and because of this fact everything said is said from a tradition and only has meaning within that tradition. The moment that something is taken out of context it becomes meaningless, or it will take on a whole new meaning in a different context (Hargens, 1999). It can be said that we live our lives according to our interpretations and our attributions of meaning. Our attributions are nothing more than linguistic creations that enable us to name the things that we consider to be real (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

Multiple Realities

The constructivist view does not deny any one reality, it just stresses that we do not have any direct access to an absolute reality, while acknowledging that we can create and share common meanings (Hargens, 1999). We live in a world with many equally valid observer-dependent realities (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). The different distinctions that are drawn by different observers each represent a separate reality. Just as that which is being observed is dependent on the observer's ability to discriminate, each observer's description of a series of events will similarly be unique. The observer will, in this way, ascribe meaning to everything that he or she comes into contact with and will regard this construction as his or her 'reality'. Just as each person will construe 'reality' in a different manner based on his or her own unique combination of heredity, experience, presuppositions and perceptions, different 'realities' will co-exist side by side (Becvar & Becvar, 1996; Meyer et al., 1997).

We create our environment and our reality through the assimilation of our cognitive conceptualisation of our own personal view of the world. It is thus important to understand the presuppositions and assumptions according to which we perceive, and in turn construct, our reality. In conclusion,

the theory of constructivism rests on two main principlesPrinciple one states that knowledge is not passively received, but is actively built up by the cognizing subject...Principle two states that the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organisation of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality....Thus we do not find truth but construct viable explanations of our experiences (Wheatley in Matthews, 1992, p. 3).

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism can be described as part of the postmodernistic movement in that attempts to “replace the objectivist ideal with a broad tradition of ongoing criticism in which all productions of the human mind are concerned” (Hoffman, 1990, p. 1). It is so closely related to the constructivist perspective that it is necessary to mention it as part of the ecosystemic approach. Social constructionism resembles constructivism in that it supports the importance that is placed on the role of language in the creation of meaning. There is no ‘real’ world that can be discovered as ideas, beliefs and memories emerge in social exchange through language. All knowledge is, therefore, a continuously evolving social invention, and a co-created story about the world (Hoffman, 1992). As Gergen (1985, p. 266) describes it: “Social constructionist views discourse about the world not as a reflection or a map of the world but as an artefact of communal interchange”. We thus build up ideas about the world in conversation with other people. The most important difference between the two approaches is that social constructionism refutes the assumption that meaning is created internally as a cognitive process while constructivism appears to place more emphasis on the individual’s internal structure (Hoffman, 1992).

Conclusion

The movement away from the Newtonian perspective can be described as a slow and gradual process. General systems theory made the first attempt to discard

the scientific concepts of reductionism, linearity and objectivity. Although a more holistic view was then possible, the observer was still regarded as objective and able to take a position outside of the system. Linear causality was also implied through the emphasis hierarchical interaction and power (Fourie, 1998). The ecosystemic approach made a more deliberate attempt to reject the concept of objectivity when it took on a constructivist stance. The focus shifted to the autonomy of systems and the creation of multiple realities.

The ecosystemic approach can be described as a co-evolutionary model in which systems are viewed as continuously changing in unpredictable and non-linear ways. The system can experience fluctuations around its range of stability but the fluctuations can also, at any time, become amplified to the point of surpassing the system's existing threshold of stability. This could result in the system being pushed into a new and dynamic range of behaviours or functioning. Change can come about in so many ways that it is impossible to predict when or how a system will reach a new or more complex level of organisation (Rawsthorne, 1998).

The implications that the ecosystemic epistemology can have for the field of psychology should now be obvious. It has contributed, and will continue in future to have a great impact on therapy. It is also of tremendous importance for this specific research, as it will pave the way for the manner in which this research is approached, conducted and interpreted. The brief explanation of the concepts in this chapter should be regarded as the researcher's individual punctuation of this perspective and not as the only way of describing it. The views of the researcher will be just one possible construction of 'reality' and will enable further dialogue with the reader. The readers will no doubt consider the ideas of the researcher and create new ideas in his or her own process of co-construction.

CHAPTER 4

A NATURALISTIC RESEARCH PARADIGM

Introduction

Social research can be defined as a critical process of collecting information with regard to an area of interest, or as a way of finding answers to questions about the world around us (Dane, 1990; Neuman, 1997). The general approach to research, and the methodology utilised, is significantly influenced by the researcher's choice of epistemology and the inquiry paradigm applied.

As has been set out in Chapter 3, this research document is based on an ecosystemic epistemology and thus emphasises holism, relationship, complexity and contextual interconnectedness. The goal of research is not to uncover 'reality', or a single truth, but to explore the multiple constructed realities embedded in human nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to accomplish this goal, a research paradigm that will allow the holistic study of human behaviour is needed. New paradigm research, or naturalistic research (as it will be referred to throughout the remainder of this document), has been chosen as the research paradigm to ecosystemic epistemology, as it best suits this form of complementary research and provides the greatest congruence with the research topic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Reason & Rowan, 1981).

This chapter will be devoted to the exploration of naturalistic research, as opposed to traditional positivistic research, in order to illuminate the rationale for the use of this paradigm. The basic conditions for this mode of inquiry, as well as the influence that this style of research has on the process, will be discussed in more detail. The aim and purpose of the study will be set out, illustrating the emergent design, as well as the pragmatic considerations that may facilitate the evolution of the design. As naturalistic research attempts to uncover the intricate interactional processes between and within systems, a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, methodology is required. Qualitative research emphasises social context, multiple perspectives, complexity, individual differences, circular causality, recursion and

holism. These concepts will be illuminated in terms of the gathering of data and the interpretation of results.

The naturalistic, qualitative and descriptive approach used in this study should hopefully allow the research to unfold in a spontaneous manner and allow the researcher to grasp the complexity of the meaning-generating systems under investigation (Moustakas, 1990). This chapter will thus attempt to make the research process as transparent as possible to enable the reader to decide if the researcher's way of understanding the phenomenon does in fact make sense (Fourie, 1996a).

The Basic Principles of the Positivistic and the Naturalistic Paradigms

Naturalistic research has been grounded in a basic set of assumptions or beliefs that can be referred to as a paradigm. Michael Quinn Patton (1978) described a paradigm as follows:

(A) worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. As such, paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialisation of adherents and practitioners: paradigms tell them what is important, legitimate, and reasonable (p. 203).

The chosen paradigm will, therefore, serve as the guide to research activities and will directly influence the aims, the process and the methods to be used.

The differences between the positivistic and the naturalistic paradigm can best be described in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology refers to the discussions around issues of existence or being, and is concerned with questions regarding the nature of reality (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999). The positivist paradigm is associated with Newtonian thinking and is based on a realist ontology as it asserts that a single reality, independent of the observer, exists (Meyer et al., 1997). This reality can be discovered and operates according to immutable

natural laws mostly described in terms of a linear cause-effect relationship (Fourie, 1996a; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Bogdan and Taylor (in Guba, 1978) conclude: "The positivist seeks facts or causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective states of individuals" (p. 11).

In contrast, the naturalistic paradigm believes in the existence of multiple, socially constructed, realities that are not governed by causal laws (Gergen, 1985). The positivistic belief in an ultimate 'truth' is rejected and 'facts' are regarded as purely theory-determined, having no meaning in isolation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research does not attempt to reveal the truth about reality but simply to explore different realities, or the many equally accurate ways to describe events in the social world (Atkinson, Heath, & Chenail, 1991; Meyer et al., 1997). It is thus concerned with understanding human behaviour from the participant's own frame of reference in an attempt to bring forth a co-created map of reality.

The conventional scientific approach assumes that a real social world exists and therefore the observer is expected to be completely objective and remain detached and distant from that which is being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The observer's values are regarded as having no influence on the process of research as reality is objectively examined from outside, under strictly controlled conditions (Meyer et al., 1997). Rigorous attempts are made to remove every aspect of subjectivity and researcher bias from the inquiry in order to eliminate the contamination of data as a result of the researcher's values.

The naturalistic approach represents:

(A) shift from a monological paradigm in which the observer is not allowed to enter his descriptions to a dialogical paradigm in which descriptions reveal the nature of the observer (Keeney & Morris, 1985, p. 549).

It does not regard the researcher as an objective observer, but rather as a participant involved in the interaction processes within the system being

investigated. The observer is actively involved in the construction of the observation as the very act of observation may change the phenomenon being observed (Atkinson et. al., 1991). Objective inquiry is not possible as the knower and the known become interactive and inseparable. The researcher's values can be observed in the nature of the problem selected, the choice of paradigm, the choice of instrumentation and analysis, as well as the choice of interpretation and conclusion (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The researcher's values cannot be separated from the facts and his or her view becomes but one of the many multiple constructions in this co-created process of discovery.

The traditional paradigm attempts to strip the context of any contaminating influences in an attempt to uncover general laws that can aid explanation, generalisability and prediction. This process of searching for the 'truth', however, disregards the intricate complexities of social relationships and contextual factors, as it is believed that they should be completely eliminated or at least controlled (Keeney, 1979). Naturalistic research relies on a hermeneutic, or interpretive, methodology as it involves a continuing dialectic of iteration, analysis and critique in order to formulate a joint construction between the inquirer and the respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). An expansionist stance allows for a holistic view that will permit the understanding of the total process, as opposed to the fragmented approach that reduces phenomena to their simplest and most basic form (Guba, 1978; Moustakas, 1981).

From the brief comparison above it can be deduced that positivistic research relies on models derived from linear, reductionistic paradigms that ignore context and may be inadequate for systemic research tasks, especially those with a human interest (Rowan, 1981). The naturalistic paradigm seems to aim for a more holistic understanding of the essential meanings of the experience for the person under study, and therefore better suit the ecosystemic epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). It involves a process that can be described as a dialectic between experiencing and explanation, or description, - a process that feeds back recursively into itself (Keeney & Morris, 1985; Meyer et al., 1997). In order to clarify

this statement, the basic assumptions of naturalistic research will be discussed in more detail.

An Inquiry Paradigm to Uncover Multiple Realities

The naturalistic paradigm promotes the acceptance of a 'not knowing' stance that encourages description and understanding of the view of the world held by those people involved in a situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Contrary to the positivistic paradigm, its primary objective is not proving, or 'finding', but rather investigating, or 'searching', guided by a curiosity about what is not yet known (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The naturalistic inquirer takes on a much more flexible view of the nature of reality (Guba, 1978). Bateson (1972) describes this as follows:

We social scientists would do well to hold back our eagerness to control that world which we so imperfectly understand...Rather, our studies could be inspired by a more ancient, but today less honoured, motive: a curiosity about the world of which we are a part. The rewards of such work are not power, but beauty (p. 269).

Research can simply be done "to create novel observational experiences from which new ideas (and richer descriptions) about the social world can emerge" (Atkinson et al., 1991, p. 163). The researcher takes on a detective stance and research is entered into with as open a mind as possible – "...a detective story that starts out with no suspects" (Orford, 1992, p. 128). This will allow the discovery of phenomena whose empirical elaboration and testing could be worthwhile, along with the development of new theories and hypotheses.

The exploration of the meanings people attach to social life is consistent with the constructivist approach in that as many constructed realities can exist as there are people that engage in them. Realities exist only in the minds of individuals and depend heavily on their separate perceptions and punctuations. As Alexander (1988) states:

...(R)esearch into human activities in general...will proceed more coherently and effectively if process and outcome are seen by researchers as merely 'punctuations' in a complex, ongoing phenomenon (p. 184).

Structural determinism and the autonomy of participants have an influence on the findings of research as it is determined by the complex and mutual creation of ideas of the equal partners involved in the process (Le Roux, 1987). Research becomes a process of co-evolution, collaboration and mutual participation that generates knowledge through a reciprocal exchange between the inquirer and the researched (Reason & Rowan, 1981). It can be described as a process of co-ownership and shared power that necessitates the constant awareness of the circularity amongst the human systems (Le Roux, 1987).

Reality is thus not 'discovered' in a realist fashion, but rather 'created' through dialogue and consensus. As has been stated in the epistemology chapter the fact that reality is 'created', once again, does not mean that 'anything goes'. Even though human behaviour can never be fully predicted or unilaterally controlled, it does not mean that all attempts to predict should be abandoned (Keeney & Morris, 1985). Constructions are compared with one another to determine which is preferable, resulting in some ideas becoming more legitimate than others, in a scientific sense (Atkinson et al., 1991.) The chosen construction does not necessarily better approximate reality, but is merely the most informed and sophisticated construction possible to evolve as a result of the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As understanding is regarded as consensual, and judged by other people, deductions must be logical and have to fit with available information (Fourie, 1998).

The Researcher as Human Instrument

In naturalistic research the researcher is referred to as a participant observer in an observing system, as he or she interacts and actively participates in the inquiry. The research context is entered into with his or her complete repertoire of human

experience. The naturalistic paradigm stresses the intrinsic and ineluctable interconnectedness of all phenomena, and therefore admits the impossibility of the researcher stepping outside of his or her own human-ness. Heisenberg (1962) agrees that the observer constantly alters that which is being observed through the obtrusive act of observation and argues that the result of any study depends upon the interaction between the inquirer and the object. This acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of the observer and the observed renders the research situation an observing system, a term borrowed from second-order cybernetics (Keeney, 1983a).

The researcher is usually regarded as the primary data collection instrument as sufficient adaptability is required to adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered during the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The human being is able to collect information about multiple factors, at multiple levels, and process this information almost simultaneously, continually developing and testing new hypotheses. It is, therefore, necessary for the researcher to enter the context without a priori assumptions in order to allow for the emergence of the possible salient elements. This encourages the observation of subtle communications and other unexpected events, picking up on the nuances of attitudes and behaviours that might not even be anticipated, or recorded, otherwise. This is something that would traditionally be excluded from a study but which could provide valuable information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Propositional knowledge can be described as knowledge that is gained through past experience and that can be stated verbally. It includes all information that can be brought into awareness and that can be made explicit. Lincoln and Guba (1985), however, argue for the legitimisation of tacit knowledge, to be used as an addition to propositional knowledge, as it adds to the understanding of the nuances of multiple realities. Tacit knowledge entails intuitive, or felt, knowledge that cannot be verbalised. It involves implicit beliefs that will guide what we attend to in particular situations and the conclusions that we will draw (Wynne, 1988). This process of discovery renders the researcher's own values, experiences and constructions very much a part of the inquiry that "depends heavily on intuitions,

flashes of insight, 'vibes', or mental experiments to provide the propositions that can then be tested in authentic scientific fashion" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 59). It is therefore important, and the researcher's ethical responsibility, to explicitly set out his or her own subjectivity and biases during the design, throughout the implementation and finally when reporting the findings of the research project.

The researcher actively constructs an understanding of a situation based on, and influenced by, his or her acquired knowledge and own assumptions about the situation (Fourie, 1998). The researcher does not only influence the observed, but is also constantly influenced by that which he or she is trying to describe. As the researcher forms an integral part of the ecology his or her punctuations and subjective perceptions are of utmost importance. The naturalist needs to keep cognisance of the impact that the selectivity of his or her attention has on the collecting and understanding of research data, and should report on his or her awareness of this. As Varela (1984) explains:

The observer is in ever-receding discontinuity...and wherever we choose to delve we find it equally full of details and interdependencies. It is always the perception of a perception of a perception...Or the description of a description of a description...There is nowhere we can drop anchor and say, "This is where this perception started. This is how it was done" (p. 322).

The process of co-constructing realities requires, therefore, that the researcher continuously negotiate and re-negotiate the outcome of his or her research and, as punctuations are dependent on the researcher's subjectivity, different interactions will yield different findings. The researcher can make particular punctuations but must keep in mind that other punctuations are equally possible and/or valid (Keeney & Morris, 1985). The outcomes of research, or meanings, are therefore shaped during the course of the inquiry through the inseparable and mutual interaction of the researcher and the object(s) of the study (Dillon, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Heron, 1981).

The researcher can safeguard against his or her own prejudicial observations through debriefing interviews and work sessions with peers, experts, interested parties and colleagues. Emerging theories and insights can be tested on other people who can be used as sounding boards to check for possible biases. When working alone the researcher can be aware of the tendency of first impressions to endure in the face of considerable data to the contrary, and adjust his or her assumptions if necessary (Babbie, 1992). Thorough introspection, reflexivity and the examination of one's own thoughts and feelings should enhance the understanding of what one has observed and how one came to any such understandings. Sensitivity and an awareness of the possible pitfalls in understanding the products of naturalistic research may prove to be sufficient safeguards. The relevance of this process of reflexivity is to point out that the conclusions drawn by the researcher say as much, or more, about him or her than they do about the objects of inquiry.

The Importance of Context

Conventional research wishes to render context as being as unrelated as possible to the inquiry, so as to screen out any uncontrolled variation. In order to do naturalistic research, however, one needs to be totally immersed in the context so as to do research from a "participant" perspective (Moon, Dillon & Sprenkle, 1990, p. 359) and to understand any human phenomenon as it is lived in its context (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The naturalistic approach can therefore be described as a form of field research as it includes the "direct observation of naturally occurring events" or "observing events as they unfold" (Dane, 1990, p. 147). The naturalistic researcher attempts to understand the context so that its meaning for, and its impact on, the elements being studied, can be assessed (Guba, 1978). Research must take place in the natural context of the entity under study, as it is only then that the question or problem can become interesting or relevant to the researcher.

Findings cannot be fully understood in isolation from the context itself as the phenomena to be observed take their meaning from the participants' context and from the participants themselves. Kelly (1999a) explains it as:

'(C)ontextual' research which is less immediately concerned with discovering universal, law-like patterns of human behaviour, and is more concerned with making sense of human experience from within the context and perspective of human experience. This approach has as a starting point the belief that we cannot apprehend human experience without understanding the social, linguistic and historical features which give it shape (p. 398).

The researcher can only come to know a system, or understand an ecology, by interacting with it. The individual's experience has to be observed in terms of how his or her social context is punctuated and by describing the epistemology with which he or she punctuates realities (Keeney, 1982). A much more flexible view of the nature of reality allows the inquirer to take into account the fact that 'reality' can be different at different times. The variety of realities will depend on the specific context or situation, and does not merely imply a lack of reliability in the chosen methodology (Guba, 1978). As knowledge is gained within the process of social interchange, the aim of the research method is to reproduce the actions, experiences and thoughts of the co-researcher as completely as possible in order to satisfy the criteria of understanding another's world ecosystemically.

Finding a Research Focus

The purpose of naturalistic research inquiry is often, as also in this project, exploration (Babbie, 1992). It is, however, not entered into empty handed but tentative theories derived from earlier investigations, and the researcher's own tacit knowledge, are used to identify an area of interest. Dane (1990) proposes that "(I)f you concentrate on nothing in particular, that's pretty much what you will observe – nothing" (p. 151), but offers that one can be informed by theory in as much as it can help to guide research and the research question. The realities of the participants, or co-researchers, will also contribute to shaping the emerging focus of the research problem.

The research endeavour can be entered into with an interest in a certain topic without necessarily having any clear idea about what to expect in way of relationships among variables. The relevant variables may not even be clear at first, and the initial research may have, as its primary purpose, the job of identifying the possible important variables (Babbie, 1992). The researcher thus starts with a “reasonably blank slate” (Babbie, 1992, p. 43) and goes where the action is – he or she “simply listens and watches, without working from a priori assumptions” (Babbie, 1992, p. 293). As the inquiry proceeds the research problem will become more focused, salient elements will emerge, insights will grow, hypotheses will be formed and more questions will be posed. Refining the area of interest is possible if the researcher engages in continuous data analysis from the start of the study.

An Emergent Design

The incomprehensible number of multiple realities necessitates the research design emerging from the experience of the study instead of being constructed pre-ordinately. Babbie (1992) believes that the naturalist’s design needs to be fluid, flexible and especially responsive to the growing body of data. The researcher must anticipate that the questions may change during the course of the study, and allow the answers evoked by the initial questions to shape subsequent ones. Preliminary and ongoing data analysis will therefore have an influence on the conduct of further stages of data collection.

The researcher should keep questions open-ended and unstructured in an attempt to do exploratory work as part of a general plan of inquiry (Moon et al., 1990). The widest possible range of answers to the original question is sought to allow for the raising of new questions not originally thought of. The primary goal of this ‘receptive’ style would be to see events in a new way, not trying to prove or disprove suspicions before making any interpretations. The researcher should, throughout the process of the study, be careful not to select data in order to confirm a specific tentative hypothesis that may already exist.

Research should allow for meanings and interpretations that are negotiated with the people participating in the inquiry, as it is their constructions of reality that the researcher ultimately seeks to reconstruct. The accuracy of the reconstruction will therefore depend heavily on the nature and the quality of the interactions between the knower and the known, as the respondents will have to assist in the researcher's understanding of interactions and influences observed during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Grounded Theory

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that no researcher would be able to guess the number of multiple realities likely to be encountered before joining the relevant context/s. The theory behind the research should, therefore, emerge from the data only as the study progresses. This is referred to as grounded theory as it is a theory discovered or generated from data rather than being abstract and tentative as in the case of positivistic research. Most hypotheses and concepts come from the data, and are worked out in relation to the data, during the course of the research. The field work phase of the research is thus entered without a hypothesis and through the description of what happens, explanations as to why things happen are formulated according to the observations being made (Bailey, 1987). Babbie (1992) views it as a process where "(S)ocial life is observed in order to discover patterns that may point to more or less universal patterns" (p. 61). As grounded theory is based on the idea of discovery as opposed to verification, it is sensitive to the mutual shaping and values of a particular context and allows the researcher to enter into the process as neutral as possible.

Limited Applicability

Naturalistic research ideas are generated from a phenomenological perspective which holds that one can only understand the meaning of complex, naturally occurring events and actions in their context. The very specificity of naturalistic research findings is often believed to be that which makes them valid and reliable. Qualitative researchers should be careful not to over-generalise, but should

rather make tentative conclusions about the particular case under study, believing that one gains validity at the expense of generalisability in research (Babbie, 1992; Moon et al., 1990).

The researcher may be interested in universal principles, but the study is actually conducted by examining a small number of cases intensively. The findings can only be generalised to theory and not to a 'representative population', and the researcher can talk of a 'working hypothesis' that describes his or her individual case. Orford (1992) debates that the naturalist can then start to form links with existing theory which seem to tie in with his or her findings, but that this should only be done in the later stages of the study, when concepts are better understood. The emerging hypotheses are then best verified and confirmed by the people in that specific context, and the onus for generalisation will be on other researchers, who then become the consumers of the report. More importance is placed on confirmability, the agreement among a variety of information sources, than on objectivity. The process whereby confirmability is increased is referred to as triangulation as qualitative and quantitative data is compared with existing data as well as confirmed through discussions with other sources, including colleagues and supervisors.

The Product of Research

The chosen focus may very likely change, which in turn will determine the procedures chosen. The theory that will emerge from the inquiry and the data analysis is open-ended and inductive and, as a result, the expected end products are very difficult to specify. Findings would be applied tentatively as the findings will be dependent upon the empirical similarity of different contexts. What we can expect is that the researcher will develop a rich description of the phenomena observed, and the only promise a naturalistic researcher can give is that "understanding will be increased" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 225). As the researcher is actively constructing an understanding of the situation based on his or her acquired knowledge, research conclusions are constructed, or invented, in a constructivist fashion (Keeney & Morris, 1985).

Reporting on the Products of Research

The naturalistic researcher would follow an inductive analysis of field data in order to make sense of the problem, whereas positivistic researchers would follow a path of deductive analysis that narrows down the information to a thin conclusion. Inductive analysis involves the building up of thick descriptions from the information seen and experienced by the researcher him- or herself. The case study reporting mode, instead of a scientific or technical reporting mode, is preferred as it is more adapted to a description of multiple realities. In reporting the findings of the study a working hypothesis would be put forward that describes the individual case concerned, rather than making a generalisation to a population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this light the report will suggest a tentative, not a broad, application to any similar context. It is acknowledged that the researcher's understanding of the inquiry is value-bound so as to allow the reader to make a reasonable judgement relating to the validity and transferability of the findings.

Findings should be regarded as simply another construction to be taken into account in the move towards consensus (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Researchers can do no more than relate their stories of a story and then to leave it up to those who read it to create their own stories from that (Keeney & Morris, 1985). The importance of a transparent research process is underlined which will enable the reader to decide if the research does make sense.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology values the concept of naturalism as it involves the study of real-world situations and is open to whatever evolves out of the inquiry. A holistic approach allows for the study of phenomena as a whole in order to capture the complexity of any system (TerreBlanche & Kelly, 1999). As qualitative research can mostly be described as inductive, it promotes genuine and open exploration in a context that will capture the essence of experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research process, usually referred to as field research, is thus

discovery orientated and could allow for unexpected meanings to emerge (Babbie, 1992).

In the section that follows the research procedures applicable to this study will be discussed. This will include the methods of sampling, of data selection, as well as data interpretation and methods of analysis employed during the inquiry.

Sampling

Considering the scope and the purpose of the study, it was decided to give comprehensive descriptions of three undertakers' perspectives. As the research was exploratory, attempting to identify important issues that could form the basis for further research, the amount of detailed information that was collected from the three participants was regarded as sufficient material to reach this goal (Kelly, 1999a; Moustakas, 1990). During the research process, however, two of the respondents terminated their participation. The reasons for termination varied, and although this happened in the relatively early stages of the study, the information that was gathered was still considered valuable and was therefore included in the discussion and interpretation of the three detailed cases.

Research participants for this study were selected on the basis of purposive sampling. The selection of respondents took place with a specific purpose in mind, namely, to gain a better understanding of the world of the undertaker, someone who is confronted by death on a daily basis. The researcher therefore used her own judgement about which respondents to choose in order to select information-rich cases (Bailey, 1987), who would qualify as extreme cases, of the 'target population' (Kelly, 1999a). Only undertakers that were active in the profession at the time of the study were considered and selected according to the extent of their involvement, as an undertaker, in the death ritual. Their daily duties had to include the removal of the body, the arrangement of the funeral, the preparation of the body for viewing by the family and burial, as well as the conduction of the funeral itself. Undertakers who only ever dealt with a specialised part of the process were therefore excluded from the study.

The selection of participants was further done on the basis of convenience. As it was the researcher's view that undertakers in smaller communities would be more likely to deal with the complete process of the death ritual, undertakers in towns that were easily accessible to the researcher were approached. Participating undertakers in cities were chosen according to the size of the branch that they were working at, as the researcher believed that undertakers at smaller branches would suit the study better. Research participants were thus selected if they were thought to be able to provide rich descriptions due to the extensive personal experience that they have on the subject of working with the dead (Babbie, 1992).

The researcher telephonically contacted participants to request their participation in the study. The nature and aim of the study was briefly explained and potential respondents were then evaluated to determine if they were in fact suitable for the study, as according to their exposure and participation in the death ritual. As the participants were considered to be co-researchers, they were expected to have good communicative skills in order to describe their experiences in detail. It was also necessary for them to show an interest in the research topic and participation in the research process. Their willingness and openness to participate in the study was then confirmed and arrangements were made for them to meet with the researcher.

As it was important to gain participants' informed consent (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999), details that were discussed telephonically were later confirmed through a faxed letter. Written consent to tape record the interviews and to use this material solely for the purposes of the study was then obtained. Assurance was given that information would be treated with the strictest of confidence and that all names and identifying particulars would be changed to ensure anonymity. As they were willingly and freely participating, withdrawal from the research process was voluntary and at the respondent's own discretion. Although inconvenient, participants could exclude themselves from partaking any further at any time.

Research on the sensitive topic of death requires extreme ethical caution as information disclosed could be highly threatening to participants (Kelly, 1999a).

Participants were, therefore, assured that no harm would be done to them, or any other person involved in the study, either physically or emotionally (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). Potential risks that could be harmful were considered, and these included the problem of disclosing emotional and personal experiences in an uncontained environment, for example. The researcher therefore had to ensure that the setting for discussing the topic of death would be safe and supportive.

Data collection

The manner in which data was collected during this study can be described as a form of field research as it includes various forms of observation and, mostly, qualitative means of gathering information regarding this naturally occurring event (Babbie, 1992; Dane, 1990). As this was a more informal research project, field observation was the primary data-collecting activity, later supported by quantitative data collected by means of objective testing.

Field research provides the inherent advantage of interaction between data collection and data analysis, affording greater flexibility than other forms of research (Babbie, 1992). It provides the researcher the opportunity to continually modify the research design according to observations, and to change the direction of study. This advantage is, unfortunately, also accompanied by a realistic danger. There is the constant risk that the researcher will observe only those things that support his or her theoretical conclusions (Kelly, 1999a). The researcher of this study attempted to avoid this problem of selective perception and misinterpretation in a number of ways.

In the first place qualitative observations were augmented with quantitative information. The constant assistance of colleagues was requested to help with the refinement of theoretical conclusions through discussion. In the third place the researcher treated this problem with sensitivity and awareness throughout the research project. The research, furthermore, included a process of introspection where the researcher constantly examined her own thoughts and feelings to gain a better understanding of that which was being observed.

Qualitative Interviews

As discussed previously, the researcher herself was “the instrument of choice” in this naturalistic research inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). Interviews were mainly driven by interest and curiosity formed the starting point for dialogue. Conversations became a research method in their own right and the researcher’s honest display of interest in the participants’ versions of their realities assisted in the creation of a secure environment and the resultant establishment of rapport with the individuals. It was made clear that the intention of the researcher was not to challenge the respondents’ stories but rather to learn from them.

The data was mainly collected by means of interviews involving the researcher and the selected collaborators. An interview can broadly be defined as a face-to-face interpersonal situation where the researcher or interviewer asks questions orally and records respondents’ answers in order to obtain information that is relevant to the research problem (Babbie, 1992). The method of interviewing can be described as unstructured and qualitative as it consisted of mostly broad and open-ended questions to enhance the discovery of detailed descriptions of the respondents’ own lived experiences. This method of interviewing is almost totally reliant upon neutral probes and thus requires only a general plan of inquiry, not a specific set of questions that must be asked in a particular order. An unstructured interview can essentially be regarded as a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and then pursues specific topics raised by the respondent. Giorgi (1997) therefore described the unstructured qualitative research interview as “more rambling and disorganised, but more spontaneous” (p. 245). The unstructured interview is thus driven by itself, the conversational event, and is believed to facilitate collaboration between researcher and respondents (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). The researcher decided on this type of interviewing situation as it was believed that communication would have been impeded by the use of a rigid, highly structured, interview schedule (Bailey, 1987).

Information was gathered over periods of two days spent with each participant. A formal, sit-down interview of approximately three hours was conducted with each of the participants. These interviews were recorded on tape for later transcription and analysis. The remainder of the interviews were informal as information was gathered while observing the respondents perform their various tasks. The researcher did not take note only of the verbal communication, but also closely observed the more subtle non-verbal communications. During these interviews and observations the researcher relied on field notes, as it was not practical to record information while attending a funeral or while preparing a body for burial, for example. Data was gathered from only one participant at a time to allow for a more holistic picture to be formed (Moustakas, 1990).

Interviews were flexible and adapted to each individual's situation in order for rich descriptions and emergent themes to be generated (Sells, Smith & Sprenkle, 1995). The researcher attempted to remain attentive to each participant's language and metaphors, as used to describe their specific experiences, in order to gain a better understanding of their accounts of the experience of life and death (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). The wording of questions were also adapted in order to meet the understanding of every respondent (Bailey, 1987). Meanings could be explored and the researcher was able to confirm, through constant verification, whether or not participants were understood correctly.

In the researcher's view the interviews provided a context for the development of a relationship between the researcher and the participants over time. The relationship did not only allow for each participant's unique pattern of interaction to emerge, but encouraged honest descriptions of their experiences. The sharing of information and the relationship that accompanied it was considered a form of support to respondents and could therefore be regarded as having potential therapeutic value. The researcher believes that she succeeded in establishing meaningful relationships with respondents, influencing the quality of the interaction, and through that ensuring higher validity of the research.

Quantitative Tests

Qualitative research, in the true spirit of constructivism, allows for the accommodation of quantitative tests as well (Keeney & Morris, 1985). The formal quantitative tests were, therefore, included in this study to assist in the generation of a holistic understanding. Any research technique is regarded as acceptable during naturalistic research provided that the assumptions on which it is based, and the implications of these assumptions, are clearly understood and considered in the drawing of conclusions. In the case of this research inquiry, the quantitative tests were not used to 'prove' anything or relied upon for their predictive or diagnostic abilities. The information gained was, rather, used to clarify particular research issues and to broaden the researcher's understanding of the participants involved. The test data, together with the information gathered during the interviews, would be considered as just another form of communication about the system under observation.

The two quantitative tests that were selected for this study were the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) and Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 PF), both of which will be discussed in further detail below.

Test material was given to the participants and the prescribed methods of administration were explained in detail. The tests were then self-administered in order to save time and to allow respondents the opportunity to complete them at their own convenience.

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) - The MMPI was developed by Starke Hathaway and Jovian McKinley while in the employ of the University of Minnesota hospitals. The test was first published in 1943, but is today still regarded as one of the most widely used objective measures of personality assessment (George & Cristiani, 1990; Golden, 1979). It can also be described as one of the most extensively researched assessment instruments in psychology, with more than 10 000 estimated studies published on the test (Barlow & Durand, 1995;

Phares, 1992). Although the MMPI has been used for a number of predictive purposes, the main goal of the test was the creation of a diagnostic instrument that would aid in the classification of psychiatric patients (Golden, 1979).

A pool of items were assembled from a large collection of self-reference statements from sources such as textbooks, case histories, psychological reports, and other previously published tests of personality (Meyer, 1983). These items were then administered to a group of over 700 normal subjects, as well as to more than 800 psychiatric patients (Phares, 1992). Their responses were compared and patterns were noticed for people with specific disorders (Barlow & Durand, 1995). The method used to differentiate a given clinical group from a normal group is referred to as empirical criterion keying. The responses of one clinical group were compared with the responses of other groups with different diagnoses, and patterns of answers were developed.

The most recent version of this test, the MMPI-2, was developed as problems arose with the original version. A growing number of studies have been published regarding the initial research done on the revised edition, that supports its usefulness (Barlow & Durand, 1995). The MMPI-2 retained the 550 items of the original MMPI, but items were added to bring the total to 567 true or false items that reveal scores based on the following psychiatric categories: hypochondriasis (Hs), depression (D), hysteria (Hy), psychopathic deviate (Pd), paranoia (Pa), psychasthenia (Pt), schizophrenia (Sc), hypomania (Ma), masculinity-femininity (Mf) and social introversion (Si). Three additional scales were included to assess the possibility of respondents to 'fake' answers, namely the Lie scale (L), the Infrequency scale (F), and the Defensiveness scale (K). The scales are explained briefly, but in more detail, in the table below.

The test was originally designed for individuals 16 years or older with at least six years of schooling (Graham, 1987). There has, however, been some indications that the MMPI-2 can be properly scored for individuals under 16 years if they can read adequately and can maintain attention sufficiently (Phares, 1992).

Table 4.1 The MMPI Validity and Standard Scales

| Scale | Name | Description |
|----------|------------------------|--|
| Validity | Scales | |
| ? | Cannot say | Cooperativeness with the test. The total number of items that the test taker did not answer. |
| L | Lie scale | Tendency to distort answers to give the impression that a person is excessively virtuous. |
| F | Infrequency | Tendency to exaggerate the extent of a problem. |
| K | Subtle defensiveness | Measure of test defensiveness. A willingness to disclose information on the test. |
| Standard | Scales | |
| Hs | Hypochondriasis | Abnormal concern with bodily functions. |
| D | Depression | Pessimism, hopelessness, slowing of action and thought. |
| Hy | Conversion Hysteria | Unconscious use of physical and mental problems to avoid conflicts or responsibility. |
| Pd | Psychopathic Deviate | Disregard of social custom, shallow emotions, inability to profit from experience. |
| Mf | Masculinity-Femininity | Items differentiating between men and women. |
| Pa | Paranoia | Abnormal suspiciousness, delusions of grandeur or persecution. |
| Pt | Psychasthenia | Obsessions, compulsiveness, fears, guilt, indecisiveness. |
| Sc | Schizophrenia | Bizarre, unusual thoughts or behaviour, withdrawal, hallucinations, delusions. |
| Ma | Hypomania | Emotional excitement, flight of ideas, overactivity. |
| Si | Social Introversion | Shyness, disinterest in others, insecurity. |

Reliability of the MMPI is exceptional when it is interpreted according to standardised procedures, and there are thousands of studies on the original MMPI

that attest to its validity across a range of psychiatric problems (Barlow & Durand, 1995). As this study did not use the MMPI strictly as a quantitative measure, to predict psychiatric categorisation, the interpretation and application of the results may not have relied fully on the standard methods of interpretation. Results were interpreted more qualitatively, considering patterns, allowing the researcher to form a picture of the individual's behaviours, traits, underlying dynamics, level of adjustment, contact with reality, attitude towards the world, and characteristic beliefs (Golden, 1979). The picture generated by the MMPI was then integrated with knowledge about the patient's life and other demographic characteristics (Sundberg, 1977). This method of interpretation could compromise the instrument's reliability and validity, but the researcher believes that the collaboration of the additional information available, and the extensive picture generated in this way, allowed for a holistic picture that provided another form of validity and reliability.

Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 PF) - The 16 PF was primarily developed by Raymond Cattell and Herbert Eber to assess clients' ongoing personality functioning. In contrast to the MMPI, which is primarily oriented towards categories of psychopathology, the 16 PF was designed with more emphasis on day to day personality traits and conflicts, concepts central to general personality theory (Cattell, Eber & Tatsuoka, 1992; Meyer, 1983). Its main purpose is to delineate the major personality factors in such a way as to allow the clinician to form a broad picture of the individual's personality functioning, including strengths and weaknesses, even for individuals regarded as 'normal' (Golden, 1979). The 16 PF is based on the personality sphere concept, ensuring initial item coverage for all the behaviours that commonly enters ratings and dictionary descriptions of personality (Cattell et. al., 1992). An extensive amount of research literature on the 16 PF is already available and the growing literature, aimed at the clinician, indicates a valid and growing use of this test in clinical practice.

Form A of the 16 PF was administered as it the one most commonly used and is considered the most reliable. The questionnaire consists of 187 items with each item contributing to only one of the sixteen scales on the 16 PF. Respondents answer by choosing between 'True', 'False', and 'Undecided'. Testees were,

however, encouraged to give the most accurate responses they could and to answer every question if possible. They were advised to reduce the use of the 'Undecided' responses to the minimum and not to spend extensive time answering questions, but to give their first clear response (Meyer, 1983).

The 16 PF consists of sixteen scales, each reflecting a basic aspect of personality structure (Golden, 1979). The scales are indicated by letters or letter number combinations: A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, L, M, N, O, Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4. The main factor measured by each scale is presented in the table below. As with the MMPI, the 16 PF also includes two validity scales, namely the Motivation Distortion scale (MD) and the Faking Bad scale (FB). Second-order factors have been identified to represent broader and more basic trends in personality than the individual scale scores alone. The five factors that have been identified are important in a more generalised clinical impression of an individual and include aspects such as extroversion-introversion, anxiety and independence.

Table 4.2 The 16 PF Primary Scales

| Scale | Main factor measured |
|-------|----------------------|
| A | Warmth |
| B | Intelligence |
| C | Ego strength |
| E | Dominance |
| F | Impulsivity |
| G | Group Conformity |
| H | Boldness |
| I | Tender-mindedness |
| L | Suspiciousness |
| M | Imagination |
| N | Shrewdness |
| O | Guilt |
| Q1 | Rebelliousness |

| | |
|----|------------------|
| Q2 | Self-sufficiency |
| Q3 | Compulsiveness |
| Q4 | Anxiety |

Table 4.3 The 16 PF High Order Scales

| Scale | Low Score | High Score |
|-------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| I | Withdrawn Introvert | Sociable Extravert |
| II | Calm and Relaxed | Anxiety Prone |
| III | Intuitive and Emotional | Rational and Unemotional |
| IV | Subdued and Dependent | Radical and Independent |
| V | Impulsive and Unconstrained | Compulsive and Controlled |
| VI | Confident and Realistic | Insecure and Worried |
| VII | Prefers to be led | Takes the lead |

The basic descriptions of the MMPI and the 16 PF above are in no way an attempt to give an extensive and detailed explanation of the tests, but have only been given as a brief introduction to the tests. As the tests are used for supplementary information only, the researcher does not believe that a more comprehensive discussion of these tests is needed here.

Interpretation of Data

The interpretation of data refers to “the process whereby recorded observations are used to describe events, generate hypotheses, or test hypotheses” (Dane, 1990, p. 156). An interpretive approach analyses socially meaningful actions in peoples’ natural settings, in order to arrive at an understanding of how people create and maintain their social world (Neuman, 1997). Data analysis is, therefore, a process whereby order, structure, and meaning are imposed on data collected in a study. This includes the search for similarities and dissimilarities, as well as patterns of interaction and events that could provide a better understanding of the world of

the participants. The analysis of data did not focus only on the discovery of universals, and possible explanations for why this could be the case, but also involved a constant awareness of differences or deviation from the general norms (Babbie, 1992). The body of information, or data, was thus reduced to common themes and categories.

In order to create a more global sense of the data, all of the raw data was read through repeatedly before any interpretations were attempted. The entire set of interviews and field notes for each participant was read separately at first, to create a full picture of the person's world. In collaboration with the quantitative test results, thematic development took place in the form of a pattern-finding process (Kelly, 1999b). Original transcriptions were read, and reread, to allow for patterns and themes for each participant to be elicited. The researcher maintained a constantly questioning attitude and "move(d) back and forth between individual elements of the text and the whole text" (Tesch, 1990, p. 68). Common themes and qualities between the experiences of the different participants, if any, were then identified and discussed.

The final step of the evaluation process entailed a creative synthesis of the whole research experience in which the researcher could come to recognise a developing awareness and knowledge of the phenomenon under study. The researcher undertook a comparative analysis between the common themes accentuated during the study and the literature available regarding these themes.

Throughout the process of interpretation it was important to apply "bracketing", or "the suspending of one's own framework and letting the data talk for itself" (Kelly, 1999b, p. 405). This involved an awareness of, or an orientation towards, the intrinsic meanings of the descriptions of experiences that were then concentrated on. It also required the acknowledgement that the researcher is not entirely indifferent to the outcomes of the research and that an amount of pre-understanding is brought to the research process. The contextuality of the researcher's engagement was therefore also recognised.

Conclusion

In this chapter the overarching naturalistic research paradigm was set out along with the qualitative research methodology. The study aimed at creating a context in which both the respondents and the researcher could express their experiences. Research findings were 'created', and these co-created descriptions of the undertakers' experiences evolved as a result of an interactive, and dynamic, process that emphasised the inclusion of contextual and attributional elements. Attempts to understand, or make sense of, the world of the undertaker during this study should be regarded as examples of multiple possible descriptions, and not as a way of determining whether explanations provided were true or false. The research was oriented towards a search for descriptive applicability, and not generalisability.

The entire research project was based on Fourie's (1996a) view that:

...(R)esearch should cease to aim at finding universal 'truths' and enter the contextually messy arena of clinical work. Researchers should be contextual detectives, finding out how the 'crime' was committed, using both quantitative (e.g., forensic) and qualitative (e.g., interview) data to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the situation or event (p. 18, italics added).

The inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods was decided on in order to assist in the development of descriptions and emergent themes as identified by the researcher. As this process of 'making sense' does not involve only the researcher a detailed description of the research process was given to allow the people involved, as well as the reader of the research report, to evaluate the conclusions that were drawn for their usefulness. The themes that emerged during the interactive research process will be presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

CO-CONSTRUCTED STORIES

Introduction

This chapter offers a reconstruction of three stories about the world of the undertaker. The stories are based on the transcribed interviews the researcher conducted with the respondents. It should be reiterated that the observations that were made have been punctuated according to the researcher's frame of reference. Descriptions presented are not 'objective' statements about the participants, but merely a construction of reality as seen through the eyes of the researcher. The researcher is relating her story of the respondents' stories in the hope that those who read it will create their own stories in turn.

Participants were given the assurance that information would be treated with the strictest confidence and identifying particulars would be changed to ensure anonymity. Pseudonyms have therefore been used for each respondent. The case presentations begin with a description of the setting in which the interviews occurred, followed by a brief account of each participant's background. This is followed by the presentation of the participants' experience of the profession of undertaking, including their views on life and death. Their personality traits are then discussed based on information provided by the interviews and are complemented by explanations of the quantitative tests results of the 16PF and the MMPI. The results of each respondent are attached in an Appendix. It should be pointed out that the information that was gained through the quantitative tests was used merely to clarify particular research issues and to broaden the researcher's understanding of the participants involved. Brief reflections on the researcher's experience of the research situation are offered, as well as a concise, concluding summary for each undertaker.

Jack: Case Description

Jack is a 44 year old male. He is married and has two children, a daughter of 20 years and a son of 17 years.

Conversational Setting

The researcher spent three days with Jack at the branch of the funeral home that he manages. Although somewhat cold and clinical, the building was light and modern in style and did not remind one of the 'typical' sombre environments that would normally be associated with a funeral home. The first two days were spent observing Jack while performing his duties with much conversing in-between. The researcher became familiar with the premises, the total funeral process involved, and also participated in the execution of a funeral with one of his assistants. In this time the researcher had various informal conversations with Jack's wife and his two children. The third day involved more formalised, but unstructured, interviews of approximately three-and-a-half hours in total. Interviews were conducted in the administration office and, despite efforts to create some privacy, numerous unavoidable interruptions in the form of telephone calls or queries that needed attention occurred.

Background Information

Jack left school and joined the police force for three and a half years. He then held various positions at, amongst others, a car manufacturer, a car merchant, and a number of mines. He eventually started his own steel business but had to close it down after a couple of years due to financial reasons.

At that time a friend worked for a funeral company, and as work was hard to come by, his wife suggested that he should discuss the possibility of a position with him. Jack refused at first, as he was not willing to work "with dead people". He was against the idea to such an extent that he was even willing to consider working underground at the mine, something that he was really afraid of and had promised

himself that he would never do. After three weeks of relentlessly pursuing the matter his wife finally managed to convince him at least to make an appointment to discuss the position with their friend. On the day of the appointment it was explained what the job entailed as well as the salary structure. Careful consideration of the financial benefits persuaded him to accept the position and the company employed him a week later.

He received seven months of in-house training and also completed the embalming course. He started as funeral director in a small town with his wife assisting in making funeral arrangements. After two years he was offered the position of managing a larger branch on the grounds of his track record. Jack has been in the funeral industry for the past nine years and has improved his current branch's turnover status to the fourth highest in the country. His branch also houses the state mortuary and all autopsies done by the police in that district are performed on the premises. His wife is not involved with the funeral arrangements that much anymore but spends time at the branch every day, as she is responsible for the flower arrangements they provide for the funerals.

Experience of the Profession

For Jack undertaking is more than just an occupation. He considers it his calling to pursue this extremely important and noble vocation. As he really enjoys his work he puts in every effort to make a success of it. He regards patience as the most important attribute in this profession, which requires him to be, at the same time preacher, psychologist, doctor and policeman.

Jack considers it important to reassure the family that the undertaker has the family's concerns at heart, to deliver a professional service, and not to be in it only for the money. He should, therefore, not rush proceedings, but must help them appreciate the fact that they are getting value for their money. Jack believes that he has had good training, which makes it possible to deliver a professional and quality service. He is meticulous in his duties and in the upkeep of his equipment, something that clients notice, and believes that this distinguishes the funerals that

he performs from those of his colleagues. He attempts to stay in control of the proceedings and executes them in an orderly fashion without overriding the client's requests.

The Positive Rewards

Jack enjoys his work tremendously and finds it satisfying to deliver a service to the bereaved in their time of need. He savours the recognition that he receives when clients thank him for the successful course of events and he finds it rewarding to observe their satisfaction. He takes pride in the fact that clients refer other people to him by name, and not just to the company, and this proves to him that he must be doing something right.

His focus is mainly on the family and every action is geared towards assisting them through the procedure. He believes that he can guide people through a time when they might feel lost and are at a loss of what to do. The information that he offers, and the fact that he can accept responsibility for most of the funeral functions, provides the clients with a sense of calm and relief. With the family aware of his competence he, in a sense, becomes the 'saviour' that takes control of the process in a respectful and accommodating manner.

The undertaker's main goal, according to Jack, is to make every attempt to render the process as undemanding as possible. He states that death and funerals are morbid enough as it is and attempts not to increase this feeling by dressing the whole procession in gloom. In order to relieve the morbidity he prefers white cars and bright, colourful flowers to 'liven' up the occasion. Clients tend to experience the replacement of the black cars and the black suits as positive.

Jack believes that carefully preparing the body for the viewing is another way of easing the impact of death. He finds the restoration of the body satisfying, as he believes that it can provide the family with a positive image that they can keep with them for the rest of their lives. He considers it a challenge to get the body to look as natural as possible and to allow for a 'helpful measure' of denial of the reality of

death. The body is always treated with the necessary respect and this helps to put the family at ease.

Jack regards it as essential to keep the public away from the 'ugly' part of death. He never allows clients into the preparation room as they might find it upsetting. In exceptional cases, when no bodies are on display, he will show people the mortuary, but the refrigerators are completely out of bounds. He believes that the way one puts a person's head on the wooden block, the procedure of dressing a person, and closing the mouth to be aspects that "you almost don't want to see".

The financial reward of this profession is an important motivating factor. Although he finds his work extremely satisfying, he concludes that one does work for money all the same. He regards his income as enough to live on more than comfortably and would not consider doing the same work for a meagre or scanty salary. If he does, however, accept a new position it would have to be something that he enjoys and not merely because he can earn more money.

The Negative Aspects

Jack described the negative side of his profession as something that one has to get used to or as a skill that has to be acquired. In a time of want, as it was for him, one has little choice but to learn to accept it very quickly.

Jack downplayed the negative side of his occupation and at first said that no part of it was "really negative". He did admit, however, that he, like most other undertakers, finds the death of children harder to deal with. When death is associated with his own child in some way it really touches him and he therefore finds it harder to deal with children the same age as his own. It necessarily reminds him of the reality that his own children can die and enhances his awareness that he has two children that he could loose to death.

As Jack regards the family as an important entity he finds the death of young parents especially difficult. It usually moves him to contemplate in what way the

children's lives will be influenced. People who die over the age of sixty are easier to deal with, as he believes that we tend to grow up with the idea that old people die. Interestingly, the two cases that touched him the most and that he found traumatic, confirmed this stance and again underlined his strong feelings about family. These two cases have stayed with him and involved a father who wiped out his family by gassing himself and his two sons, and a family of four that was killed during an accident in the snow.

For Jack the most difficult aspects of the undertaking process are during the removal of the body and when selecting the coffin. He regards it as emotionally testing times for the family and states that it is difficult to remove a body in a "sensitive" manner. Some people prefer spending time alone with the person to say their good-byes, but most prefer a quick removal, as they may feel uncomfortable with the body.

The Death of Family Members

Jack distinguishes deaths in his own family from other deaths. He made a point of saying that the work has not made him callous, but that he is deeply touched when somebody close to him dies. At the time of the interview Jack had buried his brother, his brother-in-law, as well as his cousin and his cousin's wife. A few months after the interview he buried both his mother and his brother-in-law from his wife's side, within two weeks of each other.

Jack's brother specifically asked him to perform his funeral. The family was prepared for his brother's death, as he had been terminally ill with cancer for a long time. Because of the suffering that his brother had to endure Jack often thought that it would be better if he died. As he did not have the nerve himself, the friend who gave Jack his training prepared his brother's body and this provided him with more peace of mind. The funeral was difficult for him, but he knew that the ceremony would proceed without any disruptions if he arranged it. According to Jack his family also seemed to find it easier and this shows Jack's tendency to place others' needs above his own.

The fact that he believes that his brother is in heaven made it easier for Jack to accept his brother's death. For a couple of days before he died his brother repeatedly asked his family to photograph the most beautiful place that he had visions of. Jack therefore feels assured that his brother is in a better place. Because of the slow deterioration of his brother's health his death did not come as a shock and Jack believes that it probably would have been more traumatic if he had died suddenly, as in the case of a car accident.

It is difficult for Jack to think of having to bury one of his own children. His daughter has requested that he should not put her into the refrigerator when she dies, but he realises that he will probably have no other choice, as this is a necessary part of the process of preserving the body. As he is not sure if he will have the strength to embalm her body, refrigeration would be essential.

Jack does believe, however, that his profession equips him to deal better with death in general. It enabled him to stay rational after his brother's death and to make all the arrangements, as he knew exactly what was required. He feels that he also accepted his brother's death more readily and believes that it would have been more traumatic if he were not in the funeral industry. The fact that death becomes more of a reality seems to encourage a tendency to deal with it more successfully.

The Experience of Stigmatisation

Jack believes that people are extremely ignorant about death and have tremendous misconception about it. It is, however, something that they do not want to talk about and prefer to consider as far off, only happening to other people. People only become aware of the funeral director's role once they are in the situation of needing their services, but even then they never fully come to realise the amount of work that is done behind the scenes in order to prepare the body for burial. Due to client's ignorance concerning the death ritual they are often inclined to complain about frivolous details which makes it hard work to fulfil each family's requirements.

According to Jack the public generally views the undertaker as “that morbid guy” who drives the hearse and never smiles. He is generally considered different from other people and as “coming from another planet”. His work is usually associated with “dirty” things, and most people are surprised to see the clean and hygienic mortuary. He holds, however, that others people’s opinions about him and his profession has no influence on him.

People tend to react with surprise when they hear that he is an undertaker, unlike when meeting a doctor or a pharmacist. Initial contact is usually characterised by their burning curiosity to find out more about the interesting details, while friendships are marked by frequent jokes about his vocation. People soon get used to it though and realise that undertakers are people just like them. Before he became an undertaker he also thought that undertakers were “weird” and totally removed from the norm. He now knows that this is not true and reiterates that they are also people who drink beer, tell jokes and watch rugby.

Despite their light-heartedness, his friends are aware that he does not share any personal information about the people in his mortuary. He treats questions discreetly and maintains his own integrity by not creating the impression that he discusses things said in confidence with other people.

The public seems to find the fact that an undertaker makes money from dead people the most upsetting. Some families behave almost as if he had killed the person himself or “stolen” their loved ones to get money from them. But according to Jack, he only knows about the death of a person because somebody has telephoned him for his services. Others believe that he will be glad that their relative has died as it means more money for him. It is, however, a fact that people die and he is simply delivering a service.

He admits that “the more that lay there (in the refrigerator) the better for me. I mean, people die. I don’t wish for people to die, but I wish that I can bury them”. The person is dead and nothing can be done about it. As the body has to be

disposed of anyway, he would prefer the person rather to lie in his refrigerator than in somebody else's.

Perceptions About Death

Death was never something that Jack thought about much before he started in the funeral industry. Through his work he has come to view death as a practical reality - a person lives and a person has to die. Death is something that nobody can escape.

Despite the fact that he regards death as such an absolute reality he still recognises that it will never be an easy reality to face. Death is still "bad" and regardless of the knowledge that everybody will die eventually, it remains a shock because we tend to assume that the people around us will live forever and that death will only touch others.

Jack does not fear his own death, but is afraid of the way that he might die, because of all the terrifying things that he has seen in the course of his career. He would prefer to be cremated as he regards a grave as something that just "takes up space". He believes that nothing is to be found at a gravesite and has therefore never visited his brother's grave. As death is a topic that is openly discussed in his family, they are aware of this wish, but because they are completely against cremation they refuse to comply.

Perception of the Body

Entering the funeral industry was not the first exposure that Jack had to dead bodies. A friend of his worked at the State Mortuary and he regularly saw corpses while visiting him. He was also exposed to dead bodies during his own duties as a policeman where he was often confronted with death.

Jack described himself as having been very nervous when he first started his duties as an undertaker, but that this feeling did not stay with him when he went

home at the end of each day. His first removal, however, was a “riller” and he remembers himself being “very, very scared”. He trembled uncontrollably the first time that he had to close a mouth and was anticipating that the corpse might make a sound. The embalming was only introduced later in his training and was easier as he was more familiar with bodies at that stage.

Jack’s approach to the physical body is at the same time intimately personal and harshly impersonal. On the one hand the body is regarded as “just another guy that we have to get ready for burial “, often referred to as “that one” or “those at the back”. The body is dehumanised to such an extent that it is seen as less human than a photograph of a person and the process of preparation is compared to that of manufacturing a car. You simply have to do it to get to the next point.

The body is, however, treated with a tremendous amount of respect and he invests great effort in making the body appear as natural as possible, hiding the realities of death. The most common way of referring to the body amongst colleagues and in front of the family is calling them by name. This adds a personal touch as the person is referred to as if still alive. He later also admitted that he does sometimes wonder about the person’s soul, how the person lived and where the soul is now.

Perceptions About Life

Life and death are concepts that he has come to view very differently since he entered the profession. Even though both have become more of a reality, he experiences himself as a calmer person because of this influence in his life. Life has become more precious to him and he now believes that life should not be wasted on conflict. He lives for the here-and-now without specific dreams about the future, but instead believes that you should do things while you still can.

The realisation that any person can die at any time has brought him closer to his family and he values spending time with them at home. Dealing with death as a part of life has also made him see the dangers of life more clearly. He is, therefore,

very protective, and sometimes even over-protective, of the people that he cares about and is deeply concerned, for instance, when he knows that they are on the road. The fear of losing a child is so intense that he sometimes believes that, knowing what he knows now, he probably would have chosen not to have children. He is content with the rest of his life and would not, apart from his marriage situation that has been unhappy for a number of years, choose to have anything different to the way that it is at the moment. His only wish is that his children will survive and get through life "in one piece".

Ways of Coping with the Profession

In order to oppose the stigma associated with being a funeral director, Jack insists on always portraying a professional image with regard to his physical appearance and grooming, but even more importantly with regard to his own proficiency and the quality of service that he delivers. He accentuated the value and importance of the emotional support that he provides to families in need and of his facilitation of their grief process. He fiercely guards against contributing to the criticism that the vocation receives regarding financial gains by abstaining from defrauding people. Despite the short-term financial gain that could be achieved he prefers to increase his business honestly and ethically by delivering a professional service that clients can recommend to others.

Despite the stigmatisation undertakers constantly have to deal with, they also have to find ways of coping with the negative impact of physical death on a more personal level. For Jack his gradual introduction to the profession assisted with the progressive familiarisation and demystification of death to the point that handling the bodies becomes "nothing". After the first or the second time of performing a specific task he realised that nothing untoward happened and, according to him, it took approximately two to three months to lose his fear and to get 'settled' in the vocation.

Jack creates emotional distance from the impact of death by focusing on the task at hand and not thinking about it too much. As he explained: "Well, it is my job! I must do it. And it doesn't bother me. I mean...someone has to do it...because I

know it must be done so that...the guy can look right". Rather than focusing on the person lying in front of him, he simply considers him or her as a body that has to be prepared for burial and the tasks around it simply as something that has to be performed. Putting the body into the refrigerator, cleaning it, getting it dressed and placing it in the coffin all become part of a process that one has to start with in order to get to the next step. He accepts that when a person is dead there is nothing that he can do about it. At the end of each day he tries to switch off and does not talk about the disturbing events again. He says it is imperative not to let the things that you see or do affect you emotionally, "otherwise you will go crazy".

Jack's choice of words helps to soften the stark realities of death and makes it easier to talk about. The term 'body' (liggaam), for example, is favoured above 'corpse' (lyk) as the latter is deemed to sound coarse. Humour also serves as an 'emotional alleviator' or buffer in this emotionally taxing profession. Behind the scenes the staff tend to make jokes amongst themselves, but they avoid ever doing this in front of the public. It is functional to acknowledge the humorous side of situations within the profession as this can make the work lighter.

Jack's strong belief in heaven and life after death renders it all less final for him. It is just the body that stays behind while the soul is not there anymore. The idea that the person is "better off" where he or she is now provides some comfort and he is convinced that God takes every person when the time is right. Although death is always untimely for the family as it is hard for them to be without the person, Jack believes that the "flower will be plucked when it is at its most beautiful".

The Man Behind the Profession

Jack described himself as calm and composed, patience being his best attribute. He is hard working, conscientious and sets high standards for himself as well as for others. He is often overly conscious of his own mistakes and acknowledges them with a degree of embarrassment. He is disciplined in all areas of his life and fosters an exceptionally high sense of responsibility.

Jack regards himself as a perfectionist. It is important for things to be neat, especially in his working environment and on his person. At times he can come across as slightly obsessive-compulsive with things such as his car and his cupboards. Something that really annoys him, for instance, is when people put money into their wallets in an indiscriminate manner. Money should be arranged from big to small with the faces all pointing in the same direction. He is meticulous about being punctual and regards this as a sign of respect.

Jack's neat, disciplined and perfectionist way of life could be interpreted as a way of binding and alleviating free-flowing anxiety. He establishes a feeling of control by placing things in suitable compartments and by introducing structures that render life more predictable and manageable.

Jack holds honesty and sincerity in high regard and he considers himself to be a person of integrity. It is important that he knows exactly where he stands with people and he does not believe in buying the favour of others. According to Jack he is always the same and 'what you see is what you get'. The high value that he attributes to sincerity could be associated with his need for predictability and control, but also with a fear of rejection.

Jack considers himself to be a good leader and recognises his underlying competitiveness. He also displays a strong need for acknowledgement and a desire to distinguish himself from others. Although he is extremely modest and tends not to attribute his successes to his own doing, he nevertheless enjoys mentioning his achievements with the hope of some kind of recognition. He is proud of what he has managed to accomplish in his career and treasures the fact that people with far more experience ask him for advice. Despite the fact that he has no tertiary education he does not feel that he has to stand back for anyone. In spite of all this, he often creates the impression that he doubts his own abilities or does not consider himself to be 'good enough', resulting in a constant need to prove himself.

Jack values fairness in business and in life. People's reactions and disapproval must be perceived as fair and warranted, and he dislikes being blamed

for something that he is not responsible for. This can be related to a need for acceptance and a sense of connection, a theme that can be traced throughout his life. The fear of disappointing others by not doing the 'right thing' compels him to comply with other people's expectations and he puts in every effort to avoid criticism. His attempts to help and please others have sometimes been to his own detriment and his generosity is often abused.

Jack can be described as an introverted and quiet person who enjoys spending time alone. He is not very sociable and said that he can go for two days without talking to anybody. Jack considers his personal affairs to be extremely private and he prefers to keep people at a distance. A very large personal space protects him from getting too close to others and, although he is willing to do almost anything for them on a practical level, they must not intrude on his 'intimate personal circle'. This could indicate a fear of getting hurt and a distrust of others. It seems that he does not trust people enough to know that they will not hurt him and therefore does not show his emotions easily.

The issue of trust seems to be prominent in Jack's life. In most of the stories related during the interview he described being severely disappointed by others and his experience of people in general seems to be negative. Others are either mocking him, hating him for his achievements, abusing his generosity or treating him unfairly. He feels very strongly about keeping one's word and seems to have been let down by people on a number of occasions. Throughout the years and because of all the disappointments he believes that he has become a good "judge of character". He instinctively likes or dislikes a person and every time that he has distrusted someone, that person has proven to be someone to be careful of. Because he knows how painful it is to be let down by others, he makes a point of keeping the promises that he makes and, in return, expects other people to do the same.

Jack finds it extremely difficult to show his emotions and believes that this is something he learnt from his father. He very seldom saw his father cry and up to this day Jack has never cried about his brother's death. The only way that he is able

to show love is by treating people with respect, by not abusing them and by offering his help. Like his parents he shows affection on a more practical level. As he works with sad people in his profession all day, he often does not feel like showing his own emotions. It is also not possible to be emotional in front of every client because they might consider him to be insincere, as he did not know the deceased.

Jack is uncomfortable with emotions and therefore has to suppress them as quickly as possible. He tries hard not to show his feelings and can easily hide them without anybody noticing. He is always consistent with other people and will remain helpful and courteous despite having had a bad day. The only clue might be that he is slightly quieter at home. According to Jack it would be unfair to burden other people with his problems. He feels that he must sort them out for himself. Despite the fact that he believes that every person has the right to cry, he has the idea that people will think that he is a "softie" if he cannot handle life's struggles alone. He recounted sharing something personal with a friend and finding it a very pleasant experience, but straight afterwards felt so guilty about burdening the friend with his own problems that he never did it again. Jack feels so strongly about not being dependent on others or bothering people that he would "rather walk than to ask anyone for a lift". This feeling of being a burden to others links up with a feeling of not being acceptable and with his low self-worth, as he almost literally does not believe himself to be worth helping.

Although Jack finds it extremely difficult to show his emotions, he has a tremendous need to find some outlet for these emotions. He said that it is not always pleasant to keep everything inside and that he often wishes that he could just talk to people. The fact that he, after the three days that I spent with him, felt that we still had a great amount to talk about illustrates the overload of emotions seeking a means of expression. I do get the feeling, however, that Jack needs to talk about things as they happen or else they will be stored away very quickly, never to be looked at again.

Jack related that, as a young man, he used to be very moody and short-tempered, easily breaking things out of frustration. Now, however, he sees the world

differently and hates arguments or any form of conflict. Despite the fact that his previous emotional expressions were largely of aggression, it did at least provide some form of outlet for the emotions that he experienced. It seems that he presently has very few opportunities to channel his emotions and no opportunity to release aggressive feelings, except through his competitiveness and the financial success that he is achieving.

I had a sense that Jack's emotions were overpowering him, and there were signs and symptoms of depression throughout our exchanges. He said that he sometimes gets down, but that he could not talk about this feeling even if he wanted to, as he does not know where it comes from. He stated that his emotions have been building up over the last while and that it feels like he is losing control. He described this feeling as a septic boil that he sincerely hoped would go away, but might instead just be putrefying slowly. When asked what he considers to be his biggest disappointment, he replied the whole of his life. Nothing really warms his heart at this stage and it seems as if things are just not running smoothly in his life. At times he comes across as someone whose spirit has been broken and who is literally just surviving from day to day.

The cool and calm exterior that Jack portrays to the world can be considered as a consequence of his attempt to conceal the very sensitive part of him that experiences emotions so intensely; the part nobody ever gets to see because of his fear of getting hurt. It seems that he has, with years of hurt, learnt to live on a more practical level without ever showing his "vulnerable side".

Interpersonal Relationships

Jack maintained that interpersonal interaction in the working environment is a cardinal factor of job satisfaction and he therefore always tries to adapt his approach to people to his circumstances. He needs to experience a sense of belonging and avoids situations where he feels "left out". He has no close friends and his socialisation comprises of meeting a couple of guys for a beer at a pub. In general,

he does not share anything personal with them, but explains how meaningful it was when, on a single occasion, he was able to share something personal.

Jack is the fourth of six siblings in his family. The experience of being the third brother was not always positive, leaving him with the impression that he 'did not deserve' new clothes. It made him feel neglected that he always had to be content with the "hand-me-downs". He further described his youngest brother as the only one that received affection from parents that rarely showed love for the rest of the children. This often made him feel that he was not 'good enough' and created the desire to distinguish himself from others.

Jack appears to have a tremendous craving for love and warmth. Childhood memories paint the picture of a family that did not display their emotions openly and he desperately wanted a show of affection from his parents. He described his mother as a "good woman" who worked hard for them. He recognises that it could not have been easy to raise them all, but that his parents provided them with a good upbringing and education. Although not lacking on a practical, care level, there seems to have been no experience of nurturing love.

The family of Jack's cousin, with whom he spent a large amount of time, served as a substitute family, exposing him to the strong bond that can exist within a family. Although he never experienced his family of origin as warm and accepting, he values the concept of family. The importance of family ties is illustrated by the fact that one of his biggest disappointments was a fistfight he had with his brothers and he commented that: "It is something that brothers don't do".

Jack's own family is very important to him and from the interaction that was observed between them, he seems to be exceptionally close to his children. He does not often display his affection openly, but regards the love that he gets from them as very special. His son of seventeen, for example, still insists on sharing a bed with his father when his mother is away. Jack said that people might say that he spoils his children, but he feels that, as he can afford it, he would like to do these things for them now. The extraordinary care he takes to keep them happy is

obvious. It is no effort, for instance, to surprise his daughter, who lives almost 900 km away, for the weekend. Jack is very protective of his family and does everything in his power to raise them in a healthy environment according to strong family principles. He wants to keep them away from situations that can be harmful in any way and, as an illustration, finds it unacceptable for people to use strong language in front of his children.

Jack's marriage has been unhappy for a number of years and he reports deriving no warmth, affection or satisfaction from it. They live past each other completely and he finds no solace in their relationship. They have considered divorce on numerous occasions, but have decided against it every time for the sake of the children. His perception is, however, that it is the road they will inevitably have to follow.

From our initial introduction Jack's wife seemed to be uncomfortable with the research situation and came across as exceedingly jealous. She had an antagonistic demeanour and frequently interrupted our sessions physically to 'check up' on us or phoned in to find out how long we were still going to be. When I gave her the chance to tell me more about Jack, she used it as an opportunity to 'get her knife in'. She explained how little Jack appreciates her work and that he does not acknowledge her contribution towards his management of the branch. Her attitude towards him was openly aggressive and it was clear that their relationship held very little constructive communication.

In discussing his relationship with his wife Jack confirmed that she was fanatically jealous and constantly checking his whereabouts. She even seems to be jealous of the relationships he has with his children and is suspicious of every woman he has contact with. Her constant 'nagging' about his inability to show his care for her often makes him feel trapped and as if he is being treated like a child. Her constant criticism of everything he does leads him to retreat from her even further. According to Jack, their relationship has deteriorated to such a degree that he now rejects her affection and discourages any attempts to approach him.

The Research Experience

Jack reported sincerely enjoyed being involved in the study. He initially had serious trepidations about being interviewed, but in the end found it to be an extremely valuable experience. He feels that our interactions brought about a significant change in his life and he found it therapeutic. It felt good just to be able to talk to someone and he describes it as a heavy burden having been lifted through sharing some of the things that he had kept bottled up for so long. He found it easy to talk to me as he experienced me as having 'both feet on the ground', despite the fact that I "had a degree".

He believes that we just "clicked", as he immediately felt comfortable and safe enough to reveal things to me that he had never told anyone before, and maybe never will again. He felt that I was listening sincerely without judging him in any way and that I was, furthermore, able to understand what he said. The fact that I also do not know anyone that I could talk to about him also provided a degree of safety and anonymity for him.

Jack's experience of the research is captured well in the symbolic expression of his feelings in a dream that he had the night after our first interview. He reported that it was the first dream he had had in six years and described it as follows: Dreaming that he had just woken up, he found that the shower was suddenly located on the washing-line, so that he was forced to shower outside. He was very self-conscious because everybody would be able to see him. When he got to the line, however, it was full of washing. He took it down, but found the line full of washing again every time he returned. He was unable to find the servant to tell her not to put washing on the line again and eventually decided to go to work without having showered or else he would be late.

Just like he felt self-conscious to shower outside, so our conversations probably left him feeling exposed. Discussing emotional issues was presumably experienced as hard work and felt like repeatedly having to take washing off a line. In the end, although it was difficult, he was able to move beyond the barriers that

usually guard his emotions in order to satisfy a greater need. Despite the fact that personal hygiene is extremely important to him and something that he does not easily sacrifice, his desire to be on time was considered to be of greater importance.

As Jack found it difficult to discuss issues with an emotional content it was important for me to take a relatively confrontational stance and to be persistent in my line of questioning. He generally stayed on a cognitive and concrete level, and found the more 'emotional' questions threatening. He showed a lack of insight into his own behaviour and clearly did not tend to question his own motivations.

As it was the first interview of my research, I was somewhat nervous and it took me longer to get the interview to flow. Although my persistent questioning ensured the exploration of emotions I, at times, found myself repeatedly asking the same question because I was not getting the 'right answer'. I pursued confirmation of my own expectation that undertaking must be 'difficult' work.

I experienced our interactions as comfortable and we continued with informal contact after the research was concluded. I was kept informed about deaths in his town on a regular basis as well as developments in his marriage and his personal well-being.

It is of interest that Jack admitted himself to a treatment centre for depression and alcohol abuse a few months before my writing up the research. He stated that he was unable to get up in the morning and felt that he had nothing to live for anymore. He started drinking alone often and frequently drank to the point of being unable to remember what happened. He attributed his emotional state mostly to his unbearable marital situation and approximately a month after his return they finally decided to file for a divorce.

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Jack displayed a tendency to portray himself both more positively (faking good) and negatively (faking bad), but his random responses could invalidate the profile somewhat.

According to Jack's profile he appears adequately adjusted and should be able to deal with life realistically. He is likely to feel easily threatened and this could be expressed in shyness and a general fearfulness. He seems inclined to worry, to be moody, and to have a limited ability to withstand emotional pressure, especially criticism. He appears to have a lack of emotional control, tending to react somewhat hysterically, with little ability to restrain himself. He could easily present as inconsistent, disorganised and evasive. He is likely to have difficulty discussing his problems with others and will often leave them to turn into crises. He might take life too seriously, hardly ever loosening up or laughing. His underlying dynamic of anxiety and frustration could present as symptoms of stress and tension. A history of failure and punishment could be responsible for establishing obsessive routines.

A high degree of rigid self-control could be an elaborate front, leaving him out of touch with his feelings, often denying them completely. He might come across as moralistic, harshly socialised and is likely to have a highly internalised view of 'correct' behaviour. His assertiveness, sense of responsibility and honesty might be regarded as strengths, but conflict between his emotional instability and his high standards could lead to exhaustion and despair.

The profile shows Jack to be socially introverted, cautious and inhibited in communication, with an emotionally constricted affect. He seems to be sensitive towards people, but generally tends to avoid them because of a sense of threat to his emotional safety and security. His poor insight into social relationships could render him gullible and his high concern for approval makes it necessary to seek constant feedback. He displays some willingness to approach others and seek their help, but due to his low self-confidence and his negative self-perception this could

be difficult to follow through. His great need for interpersonal involvement is thus coupled with a fear of social rejection, which could result in feelings of anxiety.

Signs of pathology are evident in his high levels of self-reproach and guilt. Internalised difficulties could present in illness or a fatigued state, while phobic symptoms are to be expected. He shows a depressive pattern with low self-esteem, apprehension of the future, fear of failure, cynical distortion of reality and coldness towards others. Once again this might be attributed to bitterness about his past history.

MMPI

As all three the validity scales on the profile were raised, the results of Jack's MMPI was interpreted with caution. The fact that his scores on most of the scales of the profile were high seems to suggest turbulence and instability in his emotional and psychological well-being.

Scale 1 (Hs) indicates the possibility of an abnormal concern with bodily functions and vague hypochondriacal complaints, as well as passivity and a withdrawal from contact with others. It also indicates a tendency to listlessness, anxiety, irritability, a lack of self-confidence, and a defensive stance towards others. There are very strong signs of depression, which is supported by the score on scale 2 (D). His two-point scale comparison, based on the two highest scores, gives further indication of a real possibility of pathology related to depression.

Scale 2 (D) shows a high likelihood of a depressed mood, poor self-concept, suicidal thoughts, psychomotor retardation, anxiety and agitation. As Scales 1 (Hs) and 7 (Pt) are also elevated somatic symptoms, as well as disturbances of sleep and of appetite could be expected. This scale indicates feelings of helplessness, poor morale, dejection, distress, and apathy. The results should be considered carefully, however, as they tend to be quite variable depending on the respondent's mood at the time the test was taken. This scale also suggests pessimism and feelings of guilt about past behaviour and thoughts. As Scale 7(Pt) supports this, the likelihood

of an obsessive-compulsive disorder is increased. It is likely that Jack could feel useless, withdraw from business, and sleep excessively. He is also likely to feel ambivalent and unable to make decisions. Depression could furthermore be suspected due to the lowered Scale 9 (Ma), indicating low energy levels associated with feeling lethargic, listless and fatigued.

The raised Scale 4 (Pd) could suggest some asocial tendencies, assaultive thoughts, acting out behaviour, hostility, irritability, and antisocial ideas. In Freudian terms this would indicate a lack of effective super-ego development. This scale is often associated with an inability to form close relationships, difficulties in work and marriage, poor judgement, and impulsive actions. The narcissistic and egocentric tendencies this scale indicates would imply that the respondent could be interested only in what he can get from other people. If suicide is considered it would probably represent an attempt at manipulation. Jack's goals may tend to be short term and to vary on impulse. He is likely to be cynical, aggressive, and prone to worry, especially when he is not in control of a particular situation. On the positive side, he should be successful in working with people if he is intelligent, energetic, and sociable.

The raised Scale 7 (Pt) indicates obsessive-compulsive traits or phobias, as well as high anxiety, which correlate with tension and depression. He probably appears highly-strung and jumpy and might experience difficulty in concentrating, thinking, planning, and understanding. This scale is often associated with feelings of guilt and general lack of self-confidence, which presents in excessive worries and the inability to reach decisions. It also indicates perfectionism that presents as exaggeratedly organised and neat. Respondents with a raised Pt scale often have physical problems, like heart disease, headaches, insomnia and exhaustion, and psychologically they tend to rationalise and intellectualise excessively.

Jack's raised Scale 8 (Sc) indicates feelings of alienation, isolation, and of being misunderstood. Respondents with a raised Sc scale usually have few friends and avoid emotional contact, which is supported by the slightly raised Scale 0 (Si) that is characteristic of a socially introverted individual. Together with Scale 7 (Pt)

this should be carefully considered as a possible sign of an impending psychotic break.

In Conclusion

Information derived from the interviews is well supported by the results from both the 16 PF and the MMPI. Jack obviously seems to be experiencing tremendous psychological distress and emotional upheaval. His sensitivity and his inability to withstand emotional pressure could explain why he experiences his emotions as overwhelming and has a sense of losing control. Life is contemplated with seriousness and encountered with intensity. It is specifically because of his sensitivity that he tends to take life too seriously or to worry too much, and he seems to be unable to 'let things go'.

Jack is clearly portrayed as a perfectionist with obsessive-compulsive routines. He is exaggeratedly organised and neat which could be regarded as attempts to lower his anxiety and to render life more controllable. Together with the rigid self-control that he displays, his routines might act as protection against his true feelings and could leave him completely removed from his emotions.

The presence of stress and tension due to underlying anxiety and frustration is confirmed and his fearfulness seems to be reaching a climax at present. He comes across as highly-strung. His anxiety could be linked to his low self-confidence and self-esteem contributing to generalised apprehension and a fear of failure. Although he might feel pressurised by his emotions he is currently managing to control his moods without a hysterical display.

His strict self-control and 'correct' behaviour reflects his strong need for approval and positive feedback from others. He attempts to avoid criticism at all costs as it can be very destructive to his emotional well-being, he attempts to avoid it at all costs. Conflict between the high standards he sets for himself and his emotional instability often leaves him exhausted and in despair.

Despite his need of approval he is socially introverted and inhibited in his communication. Interactions with other people are often seen as a threat to his sense of security and are therefore approached with caution. His poor insight into social relationships renders him vulnerable to exploitation and results in a defensive approach to people around him. He shows an inability to form close relationships and rather withdraws from contact with others. His great need for involvement in close interpersonal interactions, combined with his fear of rejection, often leads to elevated anxiety.

Jack exhibits a depressive pattern including anxiety, listlessness, irritability, apathy and feelings of helplessness. This correlates with the emotional 'breakdown' he experienced after the research was completed and is indicative of his psychological state at the time of the interviews.

The overall picture that Jack portrays is one of alienation and a tendency to be misunderstood by others. Although he is very caring towards other people, relationships tend to be one-sided and painful. He seems to give a tremendous amount to others, but appears to receive little in return. Emotionally he seems to be completely isolated and he does not have anything that provides him with pleasure. He lives from day to day and in a sense can be described as 'already dead'.

Sarah: Case Description

Sarah is a 47 year old woman who has been married for 28 years to husband Peter. She has five children, four boys and a girl who is the youngest. Their ages range from nine to 26 years.

Conversational Setting

A single two-and-a-half hour interview was conducted with Sarah in the main office of the funeral home. Peter was also interviewed for just over two hours. The room had an exceptionally high ceiling, and the atmosphere was cold and impersonal. Apart from her husband quietly entering every now and again to get something from the office, interruptions were limited to the minimum.

Background Information

Ten years ago Sarah and her husband befriended the local undertaker of a small town, where her husband was working as a missionary. As they had a computer, they assisted the undertaker with the drafting and printing of his handbills. In time their friend began to ask Sarah to stand in for him at the funeral home during the times that he was away and he slowly started training her to perform all the undertaker's duties. She, therefore, became his natural successor when he accepted a promotion to another branch and remained the undertaker for the small community for another two years.

Before becoming a missionary Sarah's husband used to be a pastor. He was offered a congregation in another town, but after moving to take up the position it was retracted and the family was left without an income. Sarah started selling funeral policies while her husband brought in extra money by doing picture framing. As Sarah was familiar with the industry she encouraged Peter to apply for a position as an undertaker. It took six months, however, before he was appointed, on Sarah's credentials, as undertaker at a small branch in a rural community. They have been jointly managing this branch for the past five years and although Peter is regarded

as the formally appointed undertaker, Sarah is still involved full-time and takes care of most of the preparation of the bodies.

Peter and Sarah enjoy living in the small town where they are intensely involved in the community and their church congregation. Despite offers to manage bigger branches they prefer to raise their children in the positive environment of this close-knit community.

Experience of the Profession

Sarah described her entry into the funeral industry as a turning point in her life and regards it as a calling. She takes her job very seriously and repeatedly emphasised the importance of the funeral director's role in the family's experience of the death ritual. For her the discerning factor that turns something impersonal into a warm and meaningful ritual, is the fact that she performs her duties 'with the heart and not just the head'. Aftercare is also an aspect of her service that she considers to be unique, as she believes herself to be one of only a few that will telephone a client afterwards to enquire about their well-being.

She is meticulous in her work, setting high standards for herself and her employees. A genuine concern for her clients inspires her to "walk the extra mile" while her ability to identify other people's needs enable her to see the "inside of their souls". In order to be aware of the clients' vulnerabilities it is imperative to be able to put oneself in their shoes.

The Positive Rewards

Her job provides her with tremendous satisfaction, and she said that the reward of being thanked for calming someone down is extremely valuable to her. Providing the family with support in a testing time and the ability to re-instate a sense of direction assists in the grieving process. She is proud to say that she can make a difference in an industry that most people would rather avoid.

Sarah stated very clearly that her focus is not on the dead person's body, but rather on the needs of the family. The family receives the attention as the deceased is "not with us" anymore. A considerable amount of effort is invested in preparing the body, "...not for the sake of the person, but for the sake of the family that is sitting in front of you". Every attempt is made to make the body appear as natural as possible to make it easier on the family. The body is treated with respect and dignity at all times, as the family loved that person.

The Negative Aspects

Although it can be unpleasant to work with the corpse at times, Sarah manages the negative aspects by stating that it is a mere 10% of her work. She was exposed to the industry progressively and was not expected to deal with the deaths of people close to her immediately. This helped her in getting used to the work and made it much easier. Unexpected deaths are more traumatic and she therefore finds the death of a child difficult to deal with, especially if they are of the same age as her own children. While it is emotionally draining to prepare the body, it is also more challenging to console the parents of such a child. As the death of an older person is almost expected, it is easier to understand and accept.

The Death of Family Members

Sarah has been involved in the preparation of a number of people that were close to her. While a friend's assistants prepared her mother-in-law, she performed the funeral and pressed the button to lower the coffin herself. Hours before the funeral she took leave of her mother-in-law alone and, as the preparation that had been done appeared too impersonal, she started to comb her mother-in-law's hair to make her look exactly the way she used to. It had a positive effect on the rest of the family when they eventually arrived and made it easier for them.

Arranging her brother-in-law's funeral was a "terrible experience", as she did not have anyone to remind her of what still needed to be done. As she had been arranging funerals for ten years she found it even more unsettling not to be

completely in control of the situation. In her disorientation she left behind the tape recorder with the song her sister requested to have played at the grave. She therefore had to sing the song herself while they were lowering the coffin and describes it as “one of the most difficult things I had to do in my life”.

Sarah personally prepared a good friend’s body, considering it a special and privileged moment. Talking to the friend while dressing her body allowed her the time to say her farewells and enabled her to remain calm during the funeral that she performed.

In the past Sarah used to be afraid of death. It was not so much her own death, but rather a fear of how she would handle it if something happened to her husband or her mother that seemed to trouble her. As thinking about this frightened her, she always used to question whether she would be able to arrange their funerals. She now believes, however, that God will give her the strength just as He gives strength to the families sitting in front of her. If they are capable of handling it, so will she be.

The Experience of Stigmatisation

Before Sarah entered the profession she never paid any attention to the work of undertakers. Although she attended numerous funerals she could not have pointed out what the undertaker’s duties were. As soon as she started standing in at the funeral home she realised that they were ‘normal’ human beings, like anybody else, and that doing the work herself gave her a completely different perspective on the profession. Despite sincerely enjoying her work and making a meaningful contribution, she at times does look forward to her husband going back to the ministry. As a pastor’s wife she would probably have more status and receive more acknowledgement for her position.

Sarah does not feel that her profession has had a negative impact on her interpersonal relationships, but rather feels that her and her husband are generally well regarded. Her husband confirmed that the community accepts the whole family

and that they are extensively involved, especially in their congregation. She regards them as fulfilling an important role that is deeply appreciated by their community.

Perceptions About Death

Sarah regards death as a reality that, although sad, does not terrify her. Everybody has to die at some time. Her Christian faith prescribes that God has planned one's life long before birth and that, as He has counted every hair on each person's head, death will come at the 'right' time.

Perception of the Body

Sarah described her first experience of having to comb the hair of a corpse literally as a 'hair-raising' experience. At first it was "creepy", but she soon realised that the deceased person's hair was the same as her own. It could be said that Sarah denies death by stating that she was combing the hair of a "human being" (mens). Likewise, that the only difference between a deceased and a living person is that the one is cold and the other is warm. She also realised there, for the first time, that death was not really unsightly. A further attempt to deny the 'shocking' side of death can be seen in the amount of effort she invests in the preparation of the body to make it appear as natural as possible.

Sarah personalises dead bodies by displaying tenderness and empathy while talking to them. She furthermore takes ownership of the corpses by referring to them as "her bodies" and, despite the fact that she shows tremendous care for them, she uses diminutives when talking about them. This could be interpreted in a number of ways, as an indication of the sympathy she feels for them or of a patronising attitude since they 'belong' to her.

Sarah's account of how she experiences the body is marked with contradiction. On the one hand bodies are personalised and the presence of death is denied, but in direct contrast to this, they are depersonalised and stripped of all human qualities. The body becomes "a shell" as the "real person" is no longer there.

All the attributes that are distinctly human, such as talking, hearing and communicating, have disappeared and the extent of this 'dehumanisation' is illustrated by the fact that she, at times, refers to a female body as "he".

The body is treated with respect at all times as "one of God's children" and, as He paid such a high price for that person, she has to acknowledge the value of the person lying in front of her. Her main focus is on the family, however, and she believes that she would become afraid of the body if it remained her only focus. While working with the body she thinks constantly of the person's family whom she met face to face and the reminder that they loved this person makes it easier for her to handle the remains. The body is therefore treated with dignity and it is easier for the family if they are assured that their loved one has been handled with care.

Ways of Coping with the Profession

Christianity is central to Sarah's life and she believes that she could not do this work without being dependent on God. He provides her with the strength to stay calm and be strong for others. As she finds it hard to rely on others, God is the One she leans on when she needs support. If she realises that a negative thought is staying with her, she merely prays to God to take it away and He always does so.

Sarah regards it as imperative to distance herself from death and not to allow herself to get personally involved with the family's grief. Despite the fact that death is sad, she stated that one should not "let it hit (tref) your soul" or "allow it to go in deeply", otherwise one would not be able to "get over it quickly". If she gets involved with the family she might lose perspective and would not be able to do any good for them. She cannot afford to carry these things around with her, as she would become a "rubber walking-stick that will give way", quite useless.

Sarah stated that she is able to remember the good instead of the bad of each person without conscious effort. She does not remember "that face" of a woman who committed suicide by shooting herself in the head, but rather the

woman's long, curly blonde hair. She remembers the beautiful nightgown with the fine stitch-work that the woman wore, and the smell of her perfume, but nothing else.

Sarah uses softer language to distance herself from death by denying its consequences. The use of the Afrikaans word 'ontslapene' implies that the person is compared to someone who is merely sleeping, while the preference for the word 'body' (liggaam) to 'corpse' (lyk) softens the stark reality of the unpleasantness of death. This demystification of death turns death into something 'ordinary' that a person can get used to.

The Woman Behind the Profession

Sarah described herself as a "go-getter" who is able to handle a tremendous amount of pressure. She believes that she can deal with any crisis and endure a lot before it "gets to her". If something becomes a problem for her it never turns into a permanent concern that she struggles to work through. She seems to take everything to the extreme, at times coming across as overly dramatic. She "works hard and plays hard" and when she gets sick, for example, she "does not only get sick, but ends up in hospital".

Sarah is "always on the go" and believes that, because she is very organised, she manages to get things done. She is currently giving home schooling to three of her children, is involved at the funeral home full time and is also very active in their church congregation. Despite this she still gets time for leisure activities such as reading and knitting, and feels guilty if she is not doing something constructive all the time.

Sarah sets high standards for herself and also for those around her. She can be described as demanding and the type of person that is not willing to compromise on anything. As she is highly opinionated and impatient, her style of interaction can be described as confrontational and aggressive, with few attempts to avoid conflict. Things have to be done her way and due to her "strong personality" she initially found it difficult to "submit" to her husband's wishes. Her view of others can be

somewhat critical and patronising, and she often becomes punitive if others do not comply with her wishes. She denies her condemnatory comments by specifically following them up with a statement that she is not judging anybody.

It is essential for Sarah to be in control, not just of her own life, but also of the lives of the people around her. She feels that she has to be prepared for any situation and does not want to be caught off guard. Being in control also means that she must be able to predict things and she sets very definite boundaries to introduce structure into her life. Everything is considered either black or white, leaving no room for the unexpected.

Sarah believes that portraying an image of calmness signifies strength. When she feels that she is losing control in any way, she has to regain it immediately. She usually visits a pastoral psychologist as soon as she experiences any signs of 'weakness'. She considers the fact that she does not hesitate to seek help as recognition of her mistakes and of not having time to waste when she wants to be there for others. She further deems it necessary to offer an 'excuse' for the fact that she sometimes experiences feelings of being out of control. According to her "a normal person" might not come into contact with 20 broken families in the course of his or her life, while she sees that, or even more than that, in a month.

As already stated, Sarah comes across as domineering and critical of those around her. Her reaction towards a woman who committed suicide illustrates the fact that she views a lack of control as a weakness. The woman had a fairly large build and Sarah remembers that she had a small rose tattoo on one breast. She was struggling to dress the woman as her arm kept on falling off the table. Eventually she got so frustrated that she took the make-up brush that she was busy working with and hit the woman on the arm three times, telling her that she probably thought that her husband would find the rose tattoo attractive, but that she never considered him when she committed suicide. Furthermore, that this woman obviously thought that she was in control, but that she clearly had not been.

These sentiments capture Sarah's emotional reaction to and her disapproval of the woman's behaviour. She condemns her for selfishness in not considering her husband when she killed herself. It could, however, also be an expression of Sarah's frustration at having to "submit" to a husband and to consider him even when taking one's own life. From a Christian perspective the act of suicide is obviously condemned and regarded as sinful, but maybe, more importantly, she appears to disapprove of the woman's inability to display the same amount of control Sarah expects of herself.

As has been stated above, Sarah's main focus is on the family that is left behind and she expect herself "always" to be there for them in their time of need. It is her responsibility to act as the "pillar of strength" and to provide direction to those who do not know where to turn. She finds it necessary to become the 'saviour' of bereaved families, who will take care of their responsibilities for them and who will 'carry their pain' in as many ways as possible. The family has to place "complete trust" in her and has to feel safe enough to entrust her with their emotions.

Sarah seems to 'spare' others the emotional impact of death by taking responsibility for making the funeral process as easy as possible. Even in her own family Sarah is the one that 'had to' prepare her mother-in-law in order to provide the rest of the family with a comforting memory of their mother. Her desire to be the 'saviour' of others could be an indication of her need to be appreciated and accepted by others. Sarah's value is acknowledged by clients revealing to her that they would never have been able to get through their family member's death without her, and this confirms how much she means to others. Her compulsion to 'save' the families from their despair and her sensitivity towards other people's needs could, however, show her own underlying 'neediness' and her hope that someone would 'save' her in the same way.

Sarah undoubtedly has a tremendous capacity to feel empathy for other people and admits that she often becomes emotional when she has to listen to the family members uttering their last words of farewell at the gravesite. Overall she seems to be very uncomfortable with the expression of her emotions, but also of

others' emotions. It is important for Sarah to calm people down as quickly as possible and to subdue the open display of emotion the moment it becomes visible. She literally described herself as standing outside the door of the visiting room and listening for any emotional display as a cue for her to enter and provide comfort to the person concerned.

Sarah feels very strongly about never showing her emotions to other people. After the death of her friend, for example, she waited until everybody had left before she started crying alone in the car and during funerals she wears sunglasses to hide her tears. It is important to regain control immediately and she often prays to God just to take it away so that she can be calm again. In a sense her strong identification with her role as funeral director protects her against experiencing her own emotions. As she 'has to' be strong for others and 'has to' make it easier for them, she has a good excuse to distance herself from her own inner struggles.

It seems important to Sarah to distinguish herself from other people by always doing things differently, or better, than they do. There is a "different atmosphere" during her funerals and her preparation of the body is not "common" or "traditional". This could indicate compensatory behaviour to relieve possible feelings of inferiority or of low self-esteem. To her it is significant that she is able to make a difference in an industry that nobody wants to be in. She regards it a distinguishing factor that she is one of a select few women in this male dominated profession. She further stated that God "threw away the mould" after He made her the way she is, because He knew that one person like her was more than enough for this world to handle. In an attempt to be humble she attributes the fact that she is 'special' completely to God. God made and left her the way she is and He plans her life for her. It seems that her religious life is the only place where she is not in complete control and where she does not have to take responsibility for her behaviour.

A very significant incident in Sarah's life, and one that could contribute to a greater understanding of her behaviour should be mentioned. She remarked that she was the only child for 12 years, establishing a special and extremely close bond

in more than one respect with her parents. They have a very open relationship and she considers them more than just parents.

Then her parents had another baby, a sister who only lived for five days after being dropped by a doctor under the influence of alcohol. This was apparently so traumatic for Sarah that the doctors told her parents that she could go insane. She also remembers the letters she wrote to God in order to try to come to terms with her sister's death. In an attempt to make this tragedy easier for her, Sarah's parents adopted another sister to fill the space that was left. Sarah helped to raise the new sister right from the start and she described them as being very close. Two years later a third sister was born and, because of the small age difference, the two youngest sisters became very fond of each other.

It seems obvious that Sarah must have experienced immense rejection and jealousy when her parents decided to have another child that would "steal" their undivided love and attention. Not only did she have to share her parents, but she was also deprived of the privileged and unique position as the only child. It seems that Sarah, in her childish innocence, might have wished the sister dead and that when it actually happened, she experienced enormous guilt.

Taking care of the adopted sister could have been a way of 'correcting her mistake' and compensating for not saving the other sister by preventing her new sister from dying as well. Her urgency to be the 'saviour' for the families she deals with now and her complete immersion in this helping profession could indicate an effort to counterbalance the guilt feelings she might have for not being able to save her sister.

The fact that she feels guilty if she does not do anything about somebody else's needs accentuates the possibility that she feels that she 'failed' her sister by not preventing the accident. Through the use of diminutives and by "rubbing the family member's arm like that of a baby" to calm them down, she in a sense turns them into her baby sister. By caring for them and taking their pain away she can, in a way, atone for her inability to do the same for her sister.

Interpersonal Relationships

Sarah seems to control affairs in her family 'with an iron fist'. She needs to be in control and is the one to resolve any problems that a family member might experience. Her role seems to be that of 'saviour' in the family and she relates that her son once said: "Mother, if I did not have you, what would I have done?" She can be considered the complete opposite of her husband, who she described as caring, calm, quiet and equable. He is sensitive and somewhat of a 'scatter-brain'. Throughout the interviews he was very complementary about Sarah and stated that he preferred to avoid conflict. Sarah believes that they complement each other well, as things would have been in complete chaos if they were both patient and placid like her husband.

Peter described their marriage as "normal" and asserted that they both have high expectations of marriage. Although he stated that it can be difficult when "one of them feels neglected", the statement seems to refer to Sarah. Peter's recognition that she complains that he is spending too much time at work, while neglecting his family supports this interpretation. Sarah claimed that she relies mostly on God for help, but sometimes asks her husband to "just hold her". As they are both in the profession and have an understanding of what the other person is going through, they believe that they can support each other especially well.

Sarah believes that she is very close to her own children because of the very open relationship she had with her parents. She portrayed the relationship with her eldest son as especially meaningful. At times there were suggestions of subtle sexual undertones in her descriptions, for example, riding with him on his motorbike people might question whether she is indeed his mother. When he comes to visit she always "sneaks" out of her bedroom in order to talk to him until the early hours of the morning with secrecy like that of an affair.

The Research Experience

Sarah took the research situation seriously and willingly volunteered information. She spoke in a slow and pronounced tone of voice, expressing each word with precision. In the interview she came across as domineering and seemed to 'know what she was talking about'. She did not allow for any interruptions and ignored my own and her husband's attempts to add to, or clarify, whatever she was saying. Her part of the conversation was carried out mostly like a monologue without allowing any distractions.

Despite various attempts to engage Sarah on a more intimate level our interaction remained impersonal and for the most part uncomfortable. I experienced the atmosphere between us as awkward and tense. At times she came across as aggressive and I invariably felt that I had to be careful. Despite her outward display of control, she gave me the impression of underlying instability and, said with extreme caution, almost of pathology. It seemed like she was close to emotional 'breaking point' and that the slightest perturbation could 'push her over the edge'.

Another aspect that deserves to be mentioned is the fact that nowhere during the extended discussions did Sarah make any reference to or showed any interest in the positive aspects of 'life' as a necessary opposition to death. While she presented as a person with healthy liveliness there seemed to be a lack of attention or recognition of human vitality. This could be explained as an extension of her disproportionate involvement with the reality of death.

16 PF

Sarah showed a tendency to distort her responses by sometimes portraying herself more positively (faking good) and sometimes more negatively (faking bad). Her results were treated with care, as random responses were given which could invalidate the total profile. Information from the 16PF was therefore only used in a supportive manner or as indications of tendencies already found elsewhere.

Sarah appears to be quite well adjusted. She seems unrestrained and unafraid of conventionally fear-evoking situations, although she perceives the threat accurately. Her emotional control and inner resources to face emotionally charged situations are average and therefore not troubling, but cannot be considered as exceptionally good either.

Sarah's results indicate that she is socially somewhat extraverted, showing a certain dependence on approval from others. She comes across as self-confident, rather uninhibited and self-centred in her demand for attention. She is likely to show personal dissatisfaction because of a pressing need for admiration and is therefore likely to become easily dissatisfied with others, thereby maintaining superficial relationships.

There are mild indications of a lack of restraint and a need for excitement, though it should be contained by her need to conform and to have group support. She may appear "clinging" and insecure, disliking being alone. Her average concern for the results of her actions and rather poor inhibitions could make her somewhat unpredictable.

A lack of emotional stability, difficulty coping, and a likelihood of serious disturbance in her relationships are insinuated, which could be a source of anxiety. She is somewhat suspicious of others, with a tendency to dwell on life's frustrations. Her general approach to life seems rather cold, unemotional and critical of others.

It appears that Sarah has an extreme internalised locus of control, showing an excessive need for self-reliance. This could reflect a violent independence, radical outlook on life, and lack of respect for social values and norms, which points to inner conflict with her aforementioned group dependence.

Her results seem to indicate slight emotional instability, together with high aggression and hostility, which need to be explored as signs of deeply internalised, unexpressed difficulty. High levels of social masking could accompany an assertive,

socially deviant, and hedonistic impulsivity. As she might be antisocially adapted, it could be difficult for her to tell the truth, as she has to preserve her image.

MMPI

As all three the validity scales on Sarah's profile were high, her results were treated tentatively.

Sarah's raised Scale 3 (Hy) is associated with a mild inability to handle hostility and stress, though she would appear friendly, talkative, sociable, and enthusiastic. The slightly raised Scale 6 (Pa) supports this description, and is further associated with a mild suspiciousness and a moderate over-sensitivity. Her Scale 3 (Hy) could also indicate a certain lack of psychological insight.

Her slightly raised Scale 4 (Pd) indicates some mild tendencies of acting-out behaviour, hostility, irritability, and antisocial ideas. Her goals may tend to be short term and vary on impulse. She is likely to be cynical, aggressive, and prone to worry, especially when she is not in control of a particular situation. Her two-point scale, considering her two highest scores, indicates the possibility of antisocial behaviour and a general disregard for rules and conventions. On the more positive side, she should be successful in working with people if she is intelligent, energetic, and sociable.

Sarah's highly raised Scale 9 (Ma) shows a friendly, sociable exterior, though she might be irritable and inwardly aggressive, or even in a manic phase. A raised Ma scale is usually associated with over-productive thought and behaviour, an expansive self-concept, elevated mood, loud speech, impulsive acts, flight of ideas, increased motor activity, and lability of mood. At its worst this means that she could be confused, delusional, suspicious, and paranoid. She could present with poor memory, disorientation, and an inability to concentrate.

The extent to which Scale 0 (Si) is lowered indicates someone that gets along well with the opposite sex. She may be childish, impulsive, self-indulgent, tending to

form superficial relationships with others. It is also suggestive of a manipulative and opportunistic individual. A low Scale 7 (Pt) shows that she is likely to value success, recognition and status.

In Conclusion

Sarah can be described as a person who appears to be very self-confident. She has a friendly and sociable exterior, but seems to be inwardly aggressive, irritable and hostile. Her general approach to life comes across as cold, unemotional and critical of others, displaying a slight suspiciousness and over-sensitivity.

Sarah seems to be exceedingly self-reliant and independent with a strong need for control. She appears unafraid of conflicting situations and as she herself confirmed, "not afraid of the Devil".

A dependence on the approval of others renders her unable to handle hostility and could indicate her underlying insecurity. She displays a strong need for attention and admiration, considering success, status and recognition as important. She seems self-centred, demanding and 'clingy' in an attempt to avoid feeling neglected.

A social facade often accompanies this strong need for acceptance and she takes great care to preserve her image. It does, however, lead to superficial relationships, basically leaving her disconnected and isolated.

Sarah appears somewhat emotionally unstable, displaying impulsive and unpredictable behaviour. She creates the over-all impression of someone who is running away from something - always on the go, avoiding the time for introspection. It could be that Sarah is aware of her emotions on some deeper level and that she is fearful that they might overwhelm her if they were allowed to surface.

Anton: Case Description

Anton is a single man of 31 years and the eldest of two children, his sister being two years his junior.

Conversational Setting

A full day of interrupted interviews was conducted, amounting to approximately three-and-a-half hours in total. The offices are situated in a residential area and are decorated in a professional, yet homely, manner. Wooden furniture and richly coloured upholstery creates a warm atmosphere with little to remind one that it is in fact a funeral home. The interviews were regularly interrupted and, as Anton had to attend to appointments at his clients' premises, field notes were taken while accompanying him at these times. The opportunity was also there to converse with the rest of the staff members in the office, which contributed to the information acquired about Anton.

Background Information

Anton's father was introduced to the funeral industry by his brother 25 years ago and is currently the manager of one of the biggest branches of a well-known funeral firm. Anton was six years old when his father became a funeral director and fondly remembers this time of financial prosperity. The family always lived in the accommodation provided on the company's premises and Anton never thought of his father's occupation as "weird". His mother was also permanently involved in the business, assisting mainly with funeral arrangements and administrative duties.

Initially, while they were still small children, Anton's father kept them away from the bodies, but at the age of approximately 16 years he allowed Anton to assist with removals. By the age of 18 years he assisted his father during every school holiday and was considered capable of conducting funerals on his own.

After school Anton considered pursuing medical studies or aeronautical engineering, but a last minute decision led him to study theology. During his studies he was, however, gravely disappointed by the profession and felt unable to give expression to his personal views and beliefs. In the last few months before completing his studies his father needed an assistant manager and, at the end of that year, Anton decided to join his father at the branch. He worked at his father's branch for three years before the company offered him his own branch in an affluent residential area. After terms and conditions for the promotion were discussed and financial guarantees put forward, he accepted the offer.

Anton has been managing his own branch for the last two years. His branch does not house a refrigerator and the bodies are transferred directly to the central branch of the funeral home. He, therefore, does not have direct contact with bodies that often anymore and also does not perform funerals as the main branch coordinates specialised funeral directors to perform this function. The clients he currently deals with are mostly prosperous young professionals who are hardly ever interested in viewing the body at the main branch due to time constraints and because they frequently consider this as "too much effort".

Experience of the Profession

Anton believes that he is able to put people at ease through his show of sincerity and that his presence often encourages the volunteering of information about the deceased. He is able to deal with people in a practical, yet also considerate and thoughtful, manner and offers peace of mind to the family. He regards himself as an undertaker who is in it with his heart and does not perform his duties clinically or simply as part of his job.

The Positive Reward

Anton finds it extremely rewarding if people come back to thank him for making the funeral process easier and for helping them through a troublesome time. As his clients are normally in such an emotional state, the smallest thing that he

says or does can make the world of difference. In a sense, he often has to fulfil the role of psychologist and has to be someone who simply listens to them as well.

Anton enjoys the contact with people tremendously and regards the family to be the main focus of his efforts. His main goal is to make it easier for those who are left behind and to soften the sometimes brutal impact of death on their lives. He regards it as a privileged position to be able to mean something to them and to be trusted with their emotions. Although his focus is never on the body, he regards it as important to treat the body with respect for the sake of the family. He understands the emotional distress that they would endure if something had to happen to the body

Anton derives considerable satisfaction from his work and is convinced that he will never return to the ministry. He considers his job easier than that of a doctor, since doctors have to deal with human suffering and are not always able to do anything for the patient. Even though it might, at times, be difficult for the undertaker to be exposed to the family's sadness, he is always able to be helpful in some way. As a doctor one is forced to deal with death at times, but one is also constantly aware that the preservation of life is the primary goal. The undertaker does not need to be concerned about a person's painful death and it is possible to focus on the life hereafter. This idea presents the tragic irony that death is considered better than suffering. Death is therefore regarded as more manageable and controllable than suffering and the final outcome is never unexpected or unpredictable.

The financial gains of the profession proved to be pivotal in Anton's decision to accept the position at his current branch. When his opportunities for promotion were made dependent on taking a considerably lower salary, he declined the offer and was content with remaining in the same position without the prospect of upward movement in the company's structure. His income enables him to live a comfortable life and seems to provide him with a sense of security.

The Negative Aspects

Anton considers only 10% of his duties as negative and believes that it is completely overshadowed by the more prominent positive side. He admitted that he does see “terrible things” while doing removals, but that he tries not to make an “issue” out of this. Being on call 24 hours a day poses some difficulties but, as he is not stationed at the main branch anymore, he is hardly ever called out during the night. He does not always feel appreciated and, despite the fact that he really enjoys his work, sometimes feels that the amount of effort that he has had to invest overshadows the satisfaction derived from it.

As with most undertakers, the death of a child poses a real challenge for Anton. Obviously an unexpected death is more difficult for the family concerned and also for the undertaker. He argues that younger people are better able to deal with the death of a child than older people, because the latter are more aware of their own immanent death. It is harder to accept the death of one’s own child as parents expect their children to outlive them. Anton finds the death of people of his age or younger more difficult as he identifies with it more closely.

Anton considers being face to face with really “broken” people the most difficult part of his work. It is not necessarily the person who screams the loudest, but the person that is most sincerely filled with grief that touches him the most. He even believes that he speaks in a lower tone of voice in reaction to the sadness and loss that he encounters every day. Although very satisfying, he believes that the most difficult emotional part of his involvement in the death ritual starts when the family comes in to do the arrangements. They are usually calmer at the time of the removal than when they are sitting in the office, as a greater sense of reality has usually set in by that time. The fact that Anton focuses on life (the family) instead of death (the body) seems to create another paradox as the grieving family (life), instead of dealing with the body (death), becomes the most difficult part of his work. ‘Life’ in a sense becomes more painful and disturbing to deal with than ‘death’.

The Death of Family Members

At the time of the interview Anton had lost both his grandfather and an aunt. He regards family deaths as “slightly different” because they “come closer” to him and even thinking about it makes him “kind of” scared and sad. It is also not the death that is “scary”, but rather the fact that the person will be missed by those who stay behind. It seems as if he is attempting to soften his own fear of a family member dying by using the words “kind of”. Eventually he softened it even further by saying that death is not something that “scares” you, but rather something that “bothers” you. He does believe, however, that his involvement in the profession has made it easier for him to deal with and accept death than it would be for most other people.

The Experience of Stigmatisation

Anton was subjected to stigmatisation due to his father’s profession since childhood and it continued until his days as a student. When he was younger he sometimes regarded other children as cruel because they often mocked him. Anton believes, however, that children were nasty out of jealousy of the financial success that his father achieved and not necessarily just because he was an undertaker. The idea that the children were actually envious of him seems to represent a positive reframe that allows him to deny the negative stigma attached to the occupation.

The mockery was, however, not only restricted to children as a professor who lectured at the theological seminary often ridiculed his father’s occupation. According to Anton he is not the type of person who minds being made fun of and says that his sister was most affected by this. She was very sensitive about their father’s occupation and he attributes this to the fact that she regarded herself as ‘too good for the industry’ and because she was not as involved in the company as he was.

His interpersonal relationships have been characterised by varied amounts of curiosity. At school his friends were always initially very inquisitive, but after realising that his father's work was 'not that bad', it became normal to them as well.

Anton refrains from revealing his profession straight away and prefers to allow the relationship to develop before he tells people that he is an undertaker. Contact with younger men can be especially uncomfortable as they sometimes ask about the fact that he "sees naked women".

Anton agrees with the idea that the public's perceptions of undertakers include seeing him as "that morbid guy" with the black suit. Undertakers are commonly believed to be people who do not listen to pop music, do not drive sports cars, do not live in proper houses, and are not allowed to make jokes. He believes that television has had a great influence on the image of the undertaker as they are usually portrayed as people with sombre expressions walking behind a hearse.

As most people find it unimaginable to do this work, they often think that anybody who does it cannot be in his or her right mind. Most people find it unpleasant and upsetting to think about it or to enter the funeral home. Dealing with "dead people" all day long, therefore, seems to be something that most people cannot understand and some people do not even want to shake his hand because of the nature of the work. Anton admitted, however, that he is often suspicious himself of shaking hands with the mortuary assistants and approaches this very "carefully".

Anton believes that funeral directing is not regarded as a prestigious profession and that it is considered an occupation for uneducated people. Although it is possible to compete financially with other occupations, undertakers are never mentioned along with other professionals like doctors or lawyers. His sister, who is a chartered accountant, felt embarrassed about the funeral industry and wanted to distance herself from the profession as soon as she possibly could. She wanted to have an 'esteemed position' and to prove that she could 'be something', obviously believing that she could not achieve this as a funeral director. Although Anton

confirmed that the funeral industry often accommodates people who were unable to achieve success anywhere else, he is proud of what he does and would not change it for anything else. Despite experiencing a lot of negativity about the industry, he is in it because he truly wants to be there.

Throughout the interview Anton worked hard at convincing me that he is different from the 'normal undertaker'. He related a number of instances where people who got to know him better said that he was completely different to how they thought an undertaker would be. He was, therefore, taken aback when we saw a client about a tombstone and she told him how her colleague saw us through the window as we were walking towards the building and commented that she was certain that he was the undertaker. It puzzled him to think what it could be about him that could portray the image of an undertaker and it clearly annoyed him that he was not regarded as "different" from the stereotype.

Anton clearly tried to deny that other people's hurtful comments have any effect on him. Although he tries to joke about it and deliberately tells people that he is an undertaker, instead of a funeral director, for the sake of watching their response, he regards this as something that you have to get used to and learn to live with. Despite feeling that the public's experience of undertakers is becoming more positive, he still questions their sincerity by saying that some people just hide it better. In the end, he came across as a 'tragic hero' when he stated that people do not always realise that undertakers are people just like everybody else, that they also have things they strive for, and that they can also find life enjoyable.

Perceptions About Death

Anton was exposed to death from an early age because of his father's profession and it became something that seriously perplexed him. Death represents a rather negative part of a person's life and he therefore found it necessary to familiarise himself with the religious meaning of death. He believes that he decided to study theology because he wanted answers to his burning questions about death and the hereafter.

Anton believes that most people try to avoid death because they see it as the end. He does not deny the “unpleasantness” of death and agreed that it is not “something pretty”, but for him, because of his faith, death does not represent the end. The negative part is not death itself, but rather the suffering that might accompany it.

Anton does not “worry” about his own death and has the attitude that “if it must happen, it must happen”. The effect that his death will have on other people fills him with emotion and he would like to protect his parents against the pain of losing a child. Anton seems to be rationalising his fears about death in an effort to displace them with more ‘acceptable’ concerns.

Perception of the Body

Anton cannot remember the first body he was exposed to, but clearly remembers that there was nothing strange about it for him. He attaches a different meaning to a dead body than other people do, not because it does not mean anything to him, but because it simply means less. Most people, for example, still see the body as ‘their father’, because they cannot accept the reality of the person’s death. His faith also holds that we will inhabit the same body with the resurrection of Christ.

For Anton the body is not “a big issue”, because the “genuine person” is not there anymore. He is unable to do anything for “that shell” lying in front of him and he depersonalises the body to the extent of viewing it as merely mechanical. The ‘dehumanised’ body of a female corpse cannot even be compared to the impersonal photo of a naked woman. The “magical parts”, the emotions and everything that makes a person human, are not present anymore.

For these reasons Anton hardly ever visits a graveyard and expects to find nothing there. At times he does think about the person he loved, now lying under the ground, but when this happens he immediately concedes that there is an error in

this thinking and he corrects his 'mistake'. It seems that Anton is thus able to rationalise death to such a degree that it becomes a more acceptable reality for him.

Perceptions About Life

Anton believes that his profession accentuates both life and death. It offers a realisation of what is important in life and encourages a greater appreciation for all that is positive in life. It is therefore important for Anton to focus on the positive things in life and to reduce the negative to the minimum. The awareness of the negative things that can happen in life and a mindfulness that these things can happen to a person at any time has caused his interpersonal bonds to become stronger and more intense in a shorter period of time. He, therefore, cannot stand it when people fight or make a huge "issue" out of "nothing". The fact that he hardly ever saw his parents fighting may have contributed to his need to avoid conflict, but he has also seen the guilt and the sense of lost opportunities families experience once their loved ones are dead.

Anton is extremely passionate about life and believes himself to be "99% happy". His enjoyment of life is expressed in his favourite 'hobby', gardening. He cherishes the growth and vitality that he observes in his plants. He regards himself as very fortunate because he has always received more from life than he expected. He considers himself grateful for what he has, content with his life, and he has no extravagant hopes or dreams for the future. He is focused on the present and does not believe in planning too far ahead. Dreams should be lived now and he takes the opportunities as they come along. Still, he would like to work less and to spend more time doing the things that he enjoys.

Ways of Coping with the Profession

As Anton grew up in the funeral industry he never considered it strange or abnormal. He was, however, exposed to all the facets of death in a slow and systematic way, which allowed him to become familiarised in a controlled manner. Regular exposure led to the "mystery of death being unveiled" and due to his

desensitisation it was no longer regarded as something extraordinary or peculiar. Even though he said that he has managed to get used to it, he still gets sad when he sees other people cry. Although it touches him in varying degrees and he becomes emotional every time, he has learnt how to deal with it more effectively.

Religion is central to Anton's life and he explained that: "It is all a person can hold on to, or otherwise I would not have been able to do this job". His faith keeps him from being afraid of death. He believes that few people would be able to handle this job and he considers his ability to see beyond death as the discriminating factor. Religion provides the promise of an afterlife and as he said: "I know there is something waiting for me". Death is not the end and it is only because of the existence of a life after death that he is able to console others. He finds solace in the fact that the person is in a place that is better than he can dream of being in at this stage.

Anton seems to have the ability to distance himself from the negative images that he is exposed to because he does not remember the "bad things". Gruesome car accidents "stand out", but he is also able to forget about them very quickly. Instead of remembering the "ugly" aspects, he rather remembers things like how hard they had to work or how they struggled to get the person onto the stretcher.

Anton considers it important to acknowledge the unpleasant side of death, but also that a person should not think about the negative side too much. In a sense, a person must see and not see at the same time. For him any thought about when the person was still alive and about his or her suffering is detrimental. If a person gets attached to someone who has died and allow these images to stay in one's head they may eventually become too large to handle, resulting in more important issues being neglected. It is therefore important to "get past that", to stay on a superficial level rather than to allow oneself to go into it "too deeply". He admitted, however, that it is not usually his thinking that catches up with him, but his heart, which shows that his cognitive rationalisations are not always effective.

Fortunately it seems that Anton has always been able to put things aside and to leave the negative aspects behind without any deliberate attempts at doing so. From the moment that he walks up the stairs of the mortuary, for example, he does not think about the dead bodies anymore. It seems as if he is literally able to switch his thoughts on and off. He deals with things as they happen and he does not fret about that over which he has no control. He generally tries to focus on the more unemotional tasks at hand, while promoting professionalism throughout.

Anton uses humour selectively to make the work easier and he is generally regarded as the “joker”. He believes that the right humour at the right time can defuse any situation and turn it into something more positive. He related that most people in the funeral industry use humour on a regular basis in order to stay positive. Furthermore, that it is an environment that inherently lends itself to comical things happening.

The Man Behind the Profession

Anton described himself as individualistic and obstinate, a black-or-white kind of person. He has the need to distinguish himself from others and dislikes being regarded as ‘just normal’. He stated that he is a “genuine” perfectionist at heart and although he does not always manage this, he sincerely wants to be one. He enjoys being in control and prefers doing things himself when he wants it done properly. He regards himself as hardworking and competitive, and is proud of the success that he has achieved thus far in his profession. His financial success also provides him with social status, which fulfils a part of his need for acceptance.

Anton is clearly a sensitive, soft hearted and caring person who often comes across as altruistic. He displays tremendous empathy towards the people around him and would do anything in his power to spare them the slightest suffering or heartache. His sensitivity is apparent in his dealings with the bereaved and their sadness often touches him deeply. He does, however, seem able to contain their emotions, allowing for an open display of grief without needing to calm them down as quickly as possible.

Anton regards honesty, sincerity and fairness as very important. He dislikes judging other people or being judged by them and as he has been exposed to undue stereotyping himself, believes in getting to know a person before forming set ideas about him or her.

Anton tends to believe others naively and would quite willingly entrust his life to another person. His staff members described him as a poor judge of character, because he has been repeatedly exploited and disappointed in his quest to do the best for others. His inability to gauge other people's intentions therefore makes him extremely gullible and exposes him frequently to being taken advantage of.

On a deeper level Anton seems to be an extremely private and intense person who does not easily trust people with his most intimate feelings. He tends to guard his emotions furiously against being abused, because people, according to him, generally make promises they never intend to keep.

Anton stated that he has had his fair share of disappointments in his life, but that his biggest disappointment thus far has been a romantic relationship where he felt "stabbed in the back". He considered the relationship as very serious and was contemplating marriage when he found out from the woman's parents that she was getting married to someone else in three month's time. The series of hurtful and devastating lies revealed the extent of the 'emotional manipulation' he had been subjected to. He believes that this episode made him see people in a different light, not only making him question the intentions of other people, but also his own judgement. He experienced tremendous feelings of rejection and disappointment that seriously damaged his overall trust in people. Even after two years he still seems to become emotional when talking about this incident, which clearly has not been resolved.

Anton supposed that his parents would describe him as an extremely positive person who usually does not "worry" too much, while his friends generally think of him as "happy-go-lucky". His father finds the jokes, which Anton considers one of his defining characteristics, frivolous at times. This seems to have a negative impact

on his sense of being accepted as one of his core attributes is being rejected. He thinks that neither his parents, nor his friends, would consider him to be emotional at all, despite the fact that he thinks of himself as very sensitive. The awareness that nobody truly knows him or can see him for what he really is seems to strengthen the perception that he is not being accepted.

Despite his sensitivity and the ability to contain the emotions of people around him, Anton seems unable to show his own emotions. He finds it extremely difficult to talk about his feelings and can easily hide his true emotions from the people around him. Most people are not aware of his sensitivity and would therefore not notice if something should touch him deeply. The only clue might be a slight change of expression on his face or the fact that he would tend to be quieter. While relating other people's inability to notice his true feelings, Anton came across as intensely lonely and isolated.

Although he considers himself to be the type of person who does not discuss his problems with others, he displays a strong need to share his emotions. After our first interview he emphasised, on numerous occasions, that only a small part of him had been exposed and that there is still a large part of him that could be explored. He seemed to experience conflict between his desire to find an outlet for his cropped-up emotions and his fear of exposing himself completely. He appeared anxious that I might discover something that I am 'not supposed to' because he has been trying to hide it for so long.

Although Anton presented himself as self-confident, he seems to feel insecure and to question his own self-worth. He displayed a constant need for validation and acceptance. He therefore regards the recognition he receives from his clients as valuable and he says that he has become an "emotional glutton". He longs for people to show their emotions and finds it a tremendous honour if people trust him enough to express themselves freely.

Anton has a strong need to be accepted and has a real desire to belong. His fear of rejection engenders a tendency to deliberately 'impress' people without

showing his true self. As a result his relationships tend to be superficial, never providing him with the gratification he yearns for. The absence of fulfilling relationships seems to be intensifying his need for love, intimacy, and nurturing. Although he describes his family of origin as exceptionally close and involved, they hardly ever openly display their love for each other. The fact that he is considerably overweight could point to his excessive need for nurturing. By over-eating he might be trying to fill the void that he experiences due to his inability to make authentic emotional connections with other people.

As Anton is striving to portray a kind and understanding image, he has little outlet for his aggression. At the moment he finds release in speeding with his expensive sports car when things get too much for him. He related that he enjoys hearing the screeching tyres and often reaches speeds that even frighten him. It could be that the excitement and the adrenaline that he experiences while driving at these speeds makes him feel more alive than in other areas of his life.

Interpersonal Relationships

As a child Anton used to be shy and withdrawn. He credits the funeral industry for showing him that other people are “just like him” and in his dealings with bereaved families he has learned to predict more accurately how others will react towards him. Now he is “crazy” about people and enjoys going out or spending time with them.

Anton seems to fall in love easily and judging by his staff members' comments seems to go out of his way to indulge the person he is pursuing by overloading her with gifts. According to Anton, his romantic relationships have certainly been influenced by his vocation. Because of the awareness that he could lose a person at any time, his relationships tend to become more intense and he describes himself as becoming almost “manic” about the person he is in love with. As he sees life in a 'different light', he attaches more value to love and intimate relationships therefore have a strong emotional impact on him. All these factors, but particularly the fact that he has lost trust in women and that he is not emotionally

over a very disappointing and damaging break-up, serve to explain why Anton is not married yet. It also seems clear that his overly enthusiastic approach is not achieving the desired results, as it tends to scare women off.

The Research Experience

Anton experienced the research as positive because he had the impression that I was not only interested in how “weird” undertakers are. He rather interpreted my intentions as looking for a more holistic image of the person behind the profession. The fact that I was unfamiliar to him provided him with a sense of anonymity that allowed him to share some intimate details more freely. It was a positive experience just to be able to talk and he therefore regarded the process as therapeutic.

Anton supposed that funeral directors in general do not have any outlets for their emotions, for as he explained, they all see dealing with emotions as “nonsense”. He regards undertakers as the type of people who believe that one should just “get on with it, because life goes on” and that it would be a difficult task to convince them otherwise. He does believe, however, that the influence of the profession is noticeable amongst his colleagues in that they tend to find socialisation difficult. Anton purported that they often have low self-esteem, which allows them to socialise only with a select group of people. Their built-up frustrations also seem to show themselves in the form of aggression and “touchiness”, which they tend to take out on their families.

The research helped Anton to realise for the first time to what extent his chosen profession has had an impact on his whole life. He never realised before that he needed an outlet for his emotions, but after the study he realises the importance of being able to ‘let off some steam’. In his opinion it would be extremely beneficial if undertakers could be convinced to talk to someone, like a psychologist, at least once a month, though he supposed that it would be a difficult task.

16PF

Anton showed a tendency to distort his responses and to portray himself, at times, more positively (faking good), and sometimes more negatively (faking bad). His tendency to respond randomly could invalidate his profile to a degree and results were treated accordingly.

Anton appears adequately adjusted and should be able to deal with life realistically. He comes across as self-confident and resilient, acting with little concern for the approval of others, but seems somewhat sensitive to pressure. He shows a balanced sense of social responsibility, in line with societal expectations. He appears to be coping adequately, with relatively low levels of anxiety. He is likely to blame anxiety on work pressure. There is a small likelihood of emotional instability and difficulty in coping.

Anton seems to have average emotional control and should have the inner resources to face emotionally charged situations. He shows an average regard for convention and internalised social norms, which implies the ability of self-restraint and compliance to socially acceptable standards.

Anton appears to be neither introverted, nor extroverted. He seems trusting and open with others, although conservatively opposed to those that differs with him. He is likely to appear strong and effective because of his self-reliance and independence, but his dominance and assertiveness towards others might come across as authoritarian.

Anton could, at times, appear somewhat cold and indifferent towards people, with a reduced interest in group membership and average social expressiveness. His occasional low emotional warmth shows a cynical distortion of reality and a pessimistic view of life, which could indicate a history of dissatisfied or hurtful relationships. His adequate emotional adjustment and positive sense of self, however, reduces the risk of social withdrawal. He shows a logical, balanced approach to life and the ability to be warm, though distant enough from others to

make sound and rational decisions.

Anton appears to have a need for excitement and may lack restraint in related situations. His need for excitement might be balanced by a need for stable routine, which may present as a lack of ambition.

Anton's aggression and hostility points to possibly unexpressed and deeply internalised difficulties, while his moderate cautiousness could indicate light depressive episodes. He manifests a high level of social masking, accompanying his potentially assertive, socially deviant, hedonistic impulsivity. In order to preserve his social image he might be prone to bending the truth. He appears personally dissatisfied because of a pressing need for admiration, thus quickly becoming disappointed with others and therefore maintaining superficial relationships.

MMPI

While most of the validity scales are normal, the ?-scale is very high and this might be an indication that Anton was tired or suffered from depression at the time of taking the test.

Anton's Scale 2 (D) is the lowest in his profile, and combined with Scale 4 (Pd), indicates mild impulsiveness, lack of inhibition, and a tendency to conflict with authority. It could also show that he generally does not have strong feelings of guilt. A low Scale 7 (Pt) is often taken as a very positive sign of a calm, capable, and well-adjusted individual that tends to be realistic and able to handle stress, while valuing success, recognition, and status. His slightly raised Scale 9 (Ma) indicates a friendly and sociable nature, enjoying the company of people and having a good sense of humour.

Scale 3 (Hy) is highly raised, which could suggest an inability to handle hostility and stress, though he might appear friendly, talkative, sociable, and enthusiastic. It is often associated with an egocentric, childish or narcissistic person that lacks psychological insight. Respondents with a raised scale 3 tend to act out

sexually, come across as seductive, may be sexually promiscuous, and are likely to be unhappily married. They are often resentful towards authority figures, including psychologists.

Anton's raised Scale 6 (Pa) indicates tendencies to be suspicious and overly sensitive. It is often associated with depressive feelings, hostility, resentment, and an eagerness to blame others. It also suggests a tendency to lie and a rigid personality structure.

His two highest scores, forming his two-point scale, gives some indication of possible somatic symptoms, like gastrointestinal difficulties, as well as anxiety and nervousness. This might present as hostility towards family members or individuals in close relationships. It also supports the likelihood of a rather rigid, self-centred and blaming individual, found elsewhere in the profile.

In Conclusion

Anton seems to be a trusting and open individual with a friendly and sociable nature. He enjoys being around people and has a good sense of humour. He comes across as self-confident, displaying a balanced sense of social responsibility. He is assertive and has the need to do things 'his own way', often resulting in conflicting situations with authority. As Anton is self-reliant and independent, he tends to come across as domineering and authoritarian.

Anton's need for excitement is expressed in his impulsiveness and the seeming lack of self-restraint. Underlying aggression and hostility remains unexpressed and could lead to serious internalised difficulties.

He displays a need for admiration and has an inability to handle hostility. He tends to avoid conflict, but displays some egocentric, self-centred and narcissistic traits. In order to preserve his social image, he is prone to social masking and not being completely truthful. As he seems to be trying to impress those around him deliberately, his relationships are mostly superficial and unfulfilling.

In general he has a logical and balanced approach to life, but can, at times, display a cynical distortion of reality. This is usually characterised by a pessimistic and hostile view of life with a resentful and blaming attitude towards other people. His history of hurtful and dissatisfied relationships, combined with his poor psychological insight, results in suspiciousness and a tendency to be overly sensitive. In addition, it renders him slightly emotionally unstable, including mild depressive episodes.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to convey to the reader the essence of the participants' experience of the world of the undertaker. An overview of the research findings will be discussed in the following chapter, as well as the shared themes and categories identified from the participants' accounts.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

In considering the three case studies discussed in Chapter 5 a number of shared themes were identified and punctuated according to the researcher's frame of reference. The themes represent the common threads connecting the stories of the three participants as outlined in the previous chapter and will be presented in two broad categories. Firstly, the ways in which the undertakers in this study manage the impact of the profession on their everyday lives will be described. The second grouping will include the participants' view of themselves as well as consider the personality traits or characteristics that the respondents shared.

Occupational Stigma

A prominent theme that emerged from all three of the research participants' stories is the awareness of the stigma associated with being an undertaker. Erving Goffman (1963) defined 'stigma' as any attribute that sets people apart and which discredits them or disqualifies them from full social acceptance. The two men, Jack and Anton, specifically confirmed that members of society often viewed them as 'deviant' and indicated that the stigma could primarily be attributed to the "misconceptions" and "ignorance" that the general public has about their work (Cahill, 1995). Jack, Anton and Sarah's husband (Peter) complained that the public do not understand what they do and tend to ask 'dumb' questions regarding the preparation of the corpse. As supported by the study of relevant literature, the two most stigmatising features of the funeral industry that emerged are, firstly, physically handling dead bodies and, secondly, profiting from other people's death and grief (Cahill, 1999; Thompson, 1991).

Despite the awareness of the general public's attitude towards undertakers all three the respondents endeavoured to convince the researcher that other people's opinions did not matter to them or that the overall attitude was in fact not that

negative. This is in line with Pine's (1975) view that funeral directors are often defensive about the way that other people regard them. They tend to be especially sensitive about the idea that other people have an aversion to them and they often prefer to deny completely that this exists.

Kathy Charmaz (1980) conducted a study regarding the stigma experienced by funeral directors and others involved in 'death work', and the negative impact that working with the dead can have on self-image. She notes that it is important that "who they are should not be defined by what they do" (p. 174). Each of the three respondents in this study strongly supported this idea in some way or another.

Managing the Stigma

In spite of society's current preoccupation with death it has in no way lost the taboo status, which implies a great deal of underlying fear and anxiety. As a consequence, mankind has developed a number of strategies to ease its fears and to protect itself against death. In order to manage the stigma attributed to their career, funeral directors have to reframe and conceal their stigmatising attributes. Kastenbaum (1992) argued that undertakers accept "death signals", but that they are transformed through perceptual, cognitive and symbolic arrangements to something less threatening and more controllable (p. 118). The main ways in which the three participants in this study manage this stigma will be discussed below.

Symbolic Redefinition

Through symbolic redefinition the funeral director can symbolically negate the stigmatised part of his or her work (Thompson, 1991). A technique that is employed to achieve this is through the selective use of language.

Verbal reference or descriptions of death seem to be undesirable and attempts are usually made to 'camouflage' it or to speak about death in an indirect way (Corr, 1979b). An effective way to refer to something that is perceived as distasteful or offensive is to substitute the term with a word that is less harsh

(Thompson, 1991). In general conversation people rarely 'die' – they tend rather to 'kick the bucket', 'pass on', 'pass away' or 'meet their Maker' (Corr, 1979b; McKay, 1990). Sympathy cards likewise avoid the use of the terms 'dead' or 'death' and replace them with words like 'time of sorrow' or 'hour of sadness' (Thompson, 1991).

All three the research participants emphasised the importance of using the 'appropriate terms' in referring to their work, especially in front of friends and relatives of the deceased. In most cases occupational argot was employed to reduce the stigma associated with their work. The reality of death is blunted through the use of euphemistic terms that sound less ominous and are not that closely associated with death. The respondents all felt that "corpse" sounded very crude and preferred the term "body". In most cases the "deceased" were referred to by name lending a personal and human quality to the corpse. Sarah often referred to the body as the "ontslapene" (Afrikaans), adding to an image of the deceased as being caught up in an "eternal slumber" (Thompson, 1991; Waugh, 1948). Respondents further distanced themselves from the potentially brutal reality of death by dehumanising the corpses and by referring to them as 'those at the back', 'it', or even describing a female body as a 'he'.

Death seems to be verbally redefined during every phase of the funeral process. The collection of the dead body, for instance, is referred to as a 'call'. The use of words such as 'hearse', 'coffin' or 'burial' were kept to the minimum and Thomson (1991) agrees that more socially 'acceptable' terms are replacing more blatant words in order to reduce the stigma associated with the death ritual. He explains:

Coffins are now "caskets", which are transported in "funeral coaches" (not hearses) to their "final resting place" rather than to the cemetery or worse yet, graveyard, for their "interment" rather than burial (p. 413).

The title of 'funeral director' appears to be a term to which less stigma is attached and has replaced titles like 'mortician', 'embalmer' and especially 'undertaker', which seem to conjure up negative images in the mind of the public (Cahill, 1995; Corr, 1979a). Anton takes a certain amount of pleasure in introducing himself as 'an undertaker', as he can then be certain that he will get a reaction from the other people. For both Jack and Sarah, on the other hand, it was important to emphasise their title as 'funeral director' as opposed to 'undertaker'. This confirms that the stigma experienced by undertakers can largely be attached to the idea of physically handling dead bodies (Thompson, 1991).

While describing the process of preparing the body for burial, respondents made use of language that communicated professional authority and a calm composure toward matters that most of the uninformed public find emotionally upsetting. Sarah and her husband, for instance, explained the procedure to counter rigor mortis in such a way that the corpse was not a dead person, but an interconnected system of biological material subjected to the natural processes of decomposition. Jack rather coldly explained the consequences of suffocation and intoxication on the body in an analytic and scientific way. This kind of 'analytic transformation' of the potentially unsettling contact with human bodies seems to be encouraged in order to reduce the impact of stigmatisation.

Another way in which the stigma associated with the work of the undertaker can be reduced, is to shift the focus of their work away from the care of the dead (especially handling the body), and redefining it primarily in terms of caring for the living (Thompson, 1991). It was repeatedly underscored by all three the participants that their focus is not on the body, but on the relatives that are left behind. The dead were de-emphasised and the work surrounding the body was downplayed as 'hardly' five to ten percent of their job. They considered their primary duties to be making funeral arrangements, directing the services and consoling the family in their time of need. The respondents redefined themselves as 'grief therapists' and explained that most of the funeral's rituals were orchestrated for the benefit of the friends and family of the deceased. As they do not only work with the dead, but also with their grieving survivors, participants felt that they have to be able to shift skilfully from the

affective neutrality of the preparation room to the sympathetic concern of the consultation office (Schell & Zinger, 1985).

Role Distance

According to Pavalko (1988) a person's sense of self is strongly linked to his or her occupation and it is therefore common practice for people in undesirable or stigmatised occupations to practice "role distance" (p. 414). The general function of role distancing is to allow individuals to violate some of the role expectations associated with the occupation and to express their individuality within the confines of the occupational role (Thomson, 1991). The funeral directors in this study made use of a variety of role distancing techniques, including emotional detachment, demystification of death, valuing life, humour and countering the stereotype.

Emotional Detachment

Kastenbaum (1992) describes emotional detachment as a way of coping with "death signals" in a highly focused and effective way, but excluding the event from one's overall view of the self and the world (p. 118). The individual does not deny what meets the eye, but rather makes close and attentive observations of the experience of the death of another person. Reality is not evaded, but rather framed in such a manner as to prepare the person to function effectively and with the minimum of wasted effort. In general, all the person's attention is focused on the job to be done, because of the emotional suffering that may be experienced if his or her thoughts are invaded by the broader implications of the situation. As Kastenbaum (1992) states: "Death is given its place but not allowed to dominate one's entire thoughts and values" (p. 118).

The research participants in this study seemed to overcome the stigma associated with handling the dead by detaching themselves from the bodies they are working on. All three of them tended to focus on the work that had to be done or emphasised the technical aspects of preparing the body, rather than thinking about the dead person that was lying in front of them. They all contended that preparing

the body was something that had to be done and, although they treat the body with respect, they avoid being touched emotionally by the deceased. Furthermore, they believe that the funeral director should not get too sympathetically attached to the bereaved, as this will detract from the quality of service that he or she will be able to deliver.

Sarah was inclined to transform the lifeless body into an object of technical concern through the meticulous care that she applied with each preparation. Even though she did not often dehumanise the body, she believes in distancing herself emotionally and accentuated the fact that a person should not get too involved. As she explained: "You must not allow it to touch your soul. It must not be allowed to go in deep, or else you will not be able to get over it quickly."

Jack focused mostly on the work that had to be done and explained: "Well, it is my job! I must do it...I mean, somebody has to do it." He further dehumanised the deceased's body by comparing the process of preparation to the manufacturing of a car. For him it simply involves a process that has to be followed in order to achieve the desired end result. The dead body is not a person anymore, but it is "just another guy that we have to prepare for burial". He also avoids emotional attachment and believes that a dead body should be looked at without wondering about the life of the person when he or she was still alive.

For Anton the dead body is not a person or "human" anymore, but rather an empty "shell". The corpse is regarded as so far removed from everyday reality that it cannot even be compared to a photograph of a person. He believes that it is crucial not to think back to when the person was alive or to allow disturbing sights to "go in deep". The unpleasant scenes must be dealt with on a superficial level and a person "must see, but also not see".

Anton finds the idea of suffering disturbing and therefore avoids thinking about what the person might have endured during the process of dying. He believes that if those thoughts are allowed to stay in his head, they will rule his thoughts and become too big for him to handle. He feels that he would not be able

to do the work of a doctor or a paramedic, as they have to see the suffering of the patient. A mortuary student in Cahill's (1999) study confirmed Anton's outlook and stated: "What we do is far less depressing than what nurses and doctors do. We only get the body after the death and do not have to watch all the suffering" (p. 109). Anton manages to distance himself emotionally from the corpse because he believes that once the person is dead, there is "nothing to worry about anymore". This idea presents an interesting paradox, as he appears to prefer death to suffering. He furthermore believes that doctors or paramedics are not always in a position to help their patient, while he, as a funeral director, is always able to make the process easier and to be of assistance to the bereaved.

The emotional detachment that is achieved by the dehumanisation of the body appears to serve a useful purpose, as the sometimes brutal reality of death does not seem to 'injure their souls'. It can, however, lead to feelings of guilt as was explained by a funeral director that participated in a study conducted by Thompson (1991). The funeral director had to prepare the body of a little girl who was the same age as his own daughter at the time. She was "really a mess" as she was flung through the windshield during a car accident. He describes his experience:

At first, I wasn't sure I could do that one...But when I got her in the prep room, my whole attitude changed. I know this probably sounds cold, and hard I guess, but suddenly I began to think of the challenge involved...I got so caught up in the job, that I totally forgot about working on a little girl (p. 415).

When his wife cried while dressing the girl she noted the fact that it must have been hard for him to prepare the body. He explained:

I felt sorta guilty, because I knew what she meant, and it should've been tough for me, real tough, emotionally, but it wasn't. The only 'tough' part had been the actual work, especially the reconstruction - I had totally cut off the emotional part. It sometimes makes you wonder. Am I really just good at this, or am I losing something? I

don't know. . It's just part of the job – you gotta just do what has to be done. If you think about it much, you'll never make it in this business (Thompson, 1991, p. 415).

This statement captures the conflict that can result from the constant and necessary emotional detachment that the undertakers have to apply. They are caught between distancing themselves from the emotional impact for the sake of 'self-preservation', and coming across as heartless and callous for not being emotionally touched like 'normal' people.

Emotional detachment is also achieved through the 'denial' of the unpleasant face of death. According to the participants they are able to remember the 'good instead of the bad' without having to make a concerted effort. Rather than remembering the gruesome sight of 200 corpses lying on top of each other, Anton recalled the hard work it took to bury all of them. Sarah does not remember the ruined face of a 12-year-old boy who had shot himself, but rather the photograph on the cover of his handbill. She went through the same process with a woman who committed suicide, remembering her long blond hair, beautifully stitched nightgown, and sweet smelling perfume. It is not the disagreeable picture that stays with them, but rather some detail that is more emotionally manageable.

Demystification of Death

The uninformed public's unfamiliarity with death and the way in which death is defined, leave most of us ill prepared for working with or around the dead (Cahill, 1999). Funeral directors, by contrast focus on the dead, and the bereaved families and friends. They deal with death on a continuous basis and become sensitised to it and the impact it has on those who remain behind (Keith, 1997). The normal scenes of the undertaker's everyday life are furnished with refrigerated compartments that hold corpses, shiny stainless steel preparation tables and caskets ready for occupation by the dead (Thompson, 1991). As one becomes acquainted with death there is a real change in one's attitudes towards death (Corr, 1979a) and the discomfort that accompanies working with the dead seems to be dispelled easily

through engrossment in the work (Cahill, 1999). It appears that an acceptance of both the positive and negative realities of death is prompted by daily interaction with clients about the psychological and financial contingencies of death (Keith, 1997). This interaction may be therapeutic for both client and funeral director as death anxiety may be diminished by this kind of regular exposure to the subject (Keith, 1997; Murray, 1974; Shell & Zinger, 1985).

The three research participants all described themselves as comfortable with the duties they have to perform daily and did not seem to experience significant levels of anxiety around working with the dead. They all recognised that they initially had problems working with and around the dead, but viewed it as something one has to get used to. Each of them stressed the importance of the training they were offered and the advantages of gradual immersion into the profession. The 'death education' and their daily work experiences removed some of the "mystery" surrounding death and allowed them to "get used to it".

All three the co-researchers stated that the profession equips them to deal better with death in general. Anton supposed that working with death on a daily basis made it more of a reality and that this seems to enhance the ability to deal with it more successfully than people who are never exposed to it. Jack stated that it enabled him to stay rational after the deaths of his relatives and he was capable of making all the arrangements, because he was familiar with the process. Furthermore, that being involved in the funeral industry one becomes more acquainted with death, which renders it less traumatic and easier to accept. Constantly seeing other people coping with the death of relatives familiarised Sarah with the demands of death and assured her that she would be capable of dealing with the consequences of death herself.

Death rarely intrudes upon the everyday thoughts, and even more infrequently into the everyday lives of the public. Even when death does make one of its rare appearances, specialised institutions for the dying and the specialised occupation of funeral direction minimises the public's exposure to death (Cahill, 1999). It can therefore be regarded as significant that none of the respondents

entered the profession without any previous exposure to death. Both Sarah and Jack were introduced to undertaking by friends practicing as funeral directors. It was possible for them to become familiar with the funeral environment and it allowed them to observe the undertaker as a 'normal' person before entering the vocation themselves. Jack was also exposed to death during his employment as a police officer and became familiar with corpses when a friend worked at the State Mortuary.

Anton has a family background in funeral directing, his father having been in the profession for more than 20 years. He was exposed to the work of an undertaker since the age of six and became well acquainted with death and its symbolic reminders before entering the vocation. He literally played, lived and grew up in and around funeral homes. Later on he was regularly exposed to death and working with the dead before deciding to follow in his father's footsteps. His family background socialised him into the profession, which made it possible for him to make an informed decision when he chose to enter undertaking. As Cahill (1999) confirms:

Funeral directors must master any fear of death and revulsion toward contact with the dead. Thus sons and daughters of funeral directors, who are familiar with death and with work with the dead, are more likely than our own sons and daughters to consider, and to be considered for, a career in funeral direction (p. 112).

All three of the participants were able to think about the work of an undertaker far more extensively than the rest of the public before entering the occupation. The progressive exposure apparently normalised death and working with the dead for all of them, helping them to acquire the emotional perceptions, judgements, and emotional management skills required for performing their chosen occupation. Although anxiety around death is considered grounded in the human condition and not in itself undesirable (Thorson & Powell, 1988), the undertaker seems to develop a unique 'death orientation' which alleviates anxiety and leaves them capable of rendering a high quality funeral service. This supports Keith's (1997) perception that

persons who have been in this occupation for a longer time experience less anxiety around death because they have learned better to manage their own conceptions of death.

Each research participant considered the death of a child, especially of the same age as his or her own, as very difficult to deal with. Academic literature confirms that this is a common experience amongst most funeral directors (Cahill, 1999; Corr, 1979a; Fulton, 1979; Thompson, 1991). The positive effect of medical technology on the mortality rate of children could explain why the death of a child seems to be so much more emotionally taxing. As the death of a child is uncommon in our present society, funeral directors are not confronted with it daily, which prevents this from becoming 'normalised' or something that they can 'get used to'. Anton's comment "It's not your thoughts that catch up with you, but your heart", shows that it is not always possible to eliminate the negative images of death through rationalisation.

Valuing Life

A certain amount of demystification of death appears to have created a healthy awareness and acceptance of death as a natural reality for the three research participants. The dangers of life become more prominent as they witness the consequences of death and they are constantly aware that they, or any person around them, could die at any time. Due to this heightened awareness they seem to be more conscious of the significance of life and of matters of real importance.

Jack and Anton stressed the significant influence that the profession of undertaking has had on their lives. They attribute a special value and meaning to the present, as they know that life can end at any time. They believe in spending money on the things they enjoy and doing what they desire while they still have the opportunity. As Jack commented: "If anybody knows that you can't take it (earthly possessions) with you, then it's us". This approach supports McKay's (1990) view that dealing with death can be regarded as an exaggerated form of living, which brings the future into the present. A person starts to consider his or her own

mortality more seriously and death becomes an anticipated possibility at every moment of life. The acceptance of death as an inevitable part of life could lead to a person making the best use of his or her life as it encourages the appreciation of the time they have available (Keith, 1997).

Anton believes that his relationships with other people have become stronger and more intense because of the heightened consciousness of the possibility of unexpected death. For Jack his family has become more important and he prefers spending quality time with his children, rather than away from home. Both Jack and Anton related that their relationships tend to become overly protective in an attempt to keep their loved ones safe. They experience an almost manic sense of urgency because they feel the pressure of time passing by.

Everyday contact with death has, according to Smith (1998), the potential to deepen our understanding of life. Kastenbaum (1992) agrees that a relatively high awareness of death will be associated with a keener appreciation of life, heightened creativity, and periods of individual and cultural transition and growth. Jack and Anton have come to perceive life in a different light. Jack commented that he had become a much calmer and more patient person as a result of his profession. Both of the respondents valued the preciousness of life and tended to focus on its positive aspects. Anton, for instance, cherishes the growth of the plants in his garden and makes deliberate attempts to remove negative things from his life. They both seem to experience a great sense of contentment with what they have in life and appreciate the opportunities they have been granted thus far. This is in line with Wong, Reker and Gesser (1994) who suggest that a person's attitude toward life and his or her conceptions of death will reciprocally affect the management of both. They explain:

How individuals view life affects their attitudes toward death. The converse is also true: How people view death affects how they conduct their lives (p. 128).

Humour

Edwin Rosenberg (1986) describes funeral directors as defensive regarding jokes about funeral directors or funerals:

Defensive and hypersensitive to criticism, the funeral director is adept at finding the injurious needle in any haystack of humour...Funeral directors do not joke, or do not admit to joking about death. Humour seems to be not merely not condoned but actively discouraged (p. 192).

This supports the point of view of Anton's father, a funeral director for over 20 years, who regards his son's humour as frivolous and discourages jokes while working with corpses. Thorson and Powell (2001) believe that funeral directors could be sensitive about the use of humour because they might find jokes about their means of livelihood personally threatening.

In a study performed by Thorson and Powell (2001) a group of 60 middle-aged morticians completed a multidimensional sense of humour scale. This group scored significantly lower than the control group of 136 men from other occupations, but showed no difference in the use of coping humour, or the appreciation of humour or of humorous people. Jack and Anton both regarded selective humour as an 'emotional alleviator' or buffer in their emotionally taxing profession. According to them funeral industry staff use humour on a regular basis to detach themselves from the morbid part of their work and to stay positive. Jokes are, however, restricted to the 'backstage' areas, carefully hidden from friends and relatives of the deceased. While Rosenberg (1986) considers funeral directors as opposed to humour, it might be that jokes and amusing stories about death and funerals are restricted to members of the profession.

Sarah came across as far too serious about her profession to consider making a joke about it. On the other hand Anton believes that the right humour, at the right time, can defuse any situation and turn it into something more positive.

Jack regarded it as functional to acknowledge the humorous side of situations within the professions to make the work lighter, while Anton believes that the funeral industry is an environment that lends itself to comical things happening. As in every profession, funeral directors also have their laughs when they can, for as Thompson (1991) quote from a song by Mary Poppins: "In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun" (p. 417).

Both Anton and Peter (Sarah's husband) regarded themselves as the "jokers" in their home environment and social groups. They bring humour into every situation they possibly can, as they believe it keeps them positive. While Jack did not specifically describe himself as someone who makes use of humour, his unofficial contact with the researcher was characterised by the sharing of sms-jokes via cell phone. The researcher's impression was that he almost considered it his 'duty' to 'prove' that he is not just "a morbid guy". In conversations Jack did not attempt to make use of humour, while Anton and Peter did not come across as extremely successful in portraying themselves as the 'light-hearted' ones they thought themselves to be. This corresponds with Thorson and Powell's (2001) findings that funeral directors scored significantly lower on the items of the humour scale dealing with humour generation and creativity.

Countering the Stereotype

The funeral directors interviewed during this study were all painfully aware of the common negative stereotyping of people in their profession. The importance of countering the negative stereotype was evident and they made every effort not to conform to it. Each of them believed that their funerals are unique, as they do not do things in a "traditional" way. They described their service as 'exceptional'. Sarah takes trouble to add a "personal atmosphere" to the process, while Jack believes that he comes across as visibly capable and efficient during proceedings. Jack refuses to wear black suits, preferring dark suits instead. Anton makes a point of coming across as anything but morbid. Sarah displayed the least concern about the stereotype, possibly because being female in a profession that has been largely male-dominated (Parsons, 1999; Thompson, 1991), in itself counters the stereotype.

Each respondent interviewed indicated that he or she violated the public stereotype and expressed a sense of being atypical. Each one of them commented during the interview that the researcher must “..surely have a different perspective of funeral directors now?” or “I’m not what you expected, am I?”. It seemed very important to them to be reassured that they did not fit the stereotype of a funeral director. It was therefore especially difficult for Anton when he was ‘labelled’ as the undertaker at first glance by a colleague of one of his clients and immediately asked the researcher whether he looks like a funeral director.

The respondents all take tremendous pride in their work and consider themselves as ‘special’. None of them believed that just anyone would be able to deal with the demands of their profession and see themselves as part of only a select few. Sarah considered it very satisfying to make a difference in an industry that “nobody wants to be in” and although Anton stated that he finds it hard to understand, he was aware that some people become anxious when just thinking about the funeral home. They share the view of a mortuary science student involved in a study of professional socialisation: “We’re at least unique in some way because not just anybody can do what we do” (Cahill, 1999, p. 109).

Although the respondents believed that they do not conform to the stereotype, they felt that many of their colleagues do. They so, however, feel compelled to conform to public expectations when handling funeral arrangements, because they regard it as a requirement of their occupational role. They believe that they should have respect for the family’s grief and act accordingly. Anton indicated that the tendency to lower his voice when talking with family and friends of the deceased has become such a habit that he finds himself speaking softly almost all the time.

In social situations Anton and Jack apply a certain amount of ‘information control’. They tend to conceal their occupation from people with whom they are not intimately acquainted and do not always disclose their true occupational identity immediately when meeting new people. They usually allow people to get to know

them better before they reveal their line of work as they have literally had people jerk their hands back when they were introduced as funeral directors. Both of them agreed that social contact without the people being aware of the fact that they are undertakers allow others to realise that they are 'normal'. The people then eventually become very curious, asking some 'stupid' questions.

Professionalism

The respondents showed a constant concern to present an appropriate and correct image to the general public. They regard it as crucial to deliver a professional and efficient service, and pay meticulous attention to detail. Jack and Anton throughout the interviews stressed the importance of a neat appearance. Because the public often thinks of them as 'dirty' they considered themselves almost obsessive about hygiene and cleanliness. Jack furthermore emphasised the extreme care he takes in making sure that all the equipment is in good working condition at all times to avoid potentially embarrassing situations.

Unlike their counterparts overseas, funeral directors in South Africa have no complete and recognised study course to attend. The respondents interviewed received between six and eight months of in-house training before taking over the responsibility of a funeral home. Of the three participants, Jack was the only one to have completed an embalming course. Apart from Anton, who completed his theological studies, none of them had any further tertiary education.

In America mortuary science students follow an accredited study programme that usually takes two academic years to complete. They also have to complete a 12-month apprenticeship in a licensed funeral home before being allowed to take a nationally standardised examination. The programme includes a variety of required courses in funeral service and grief counselling, management and accounting, human anatomy and pathology, and restorative art. They also have to complete a two-course sequence on embalming that involves lectures and practical 'laboratory' experience. This education programme fosters a subculture of confidence in their

abilities and assist in creating a collective identification among those whose career aspirations allow them to persevere despite the difficulty of the course (Cahill, 1999).

In an ethnographic study by Thompson (1991) of 19 morticians and funeral directors in four American states, the qualifications of all the licensed embalmers and funeral directors exceeded the minimum educational requirements. All but one of them had a college degree while three had advanced degrees. Most of the participants in Thompson's study stressed the importance of a college education for being a successful funeral director and thought that some basic courses in business, psychology, death and dying, and 'bereavement counselling' were valuable preparation for working in this field.

The professionalism fostered through these kinds of training programmes and the encouragement of further education helped in transforming the funeral business in America from a vocation that could be pursued by virtually anyone to a profession that could only be entered by those with the appropriate qualifications. Funeral directors in South Africa consequently face a tremendous challenge to 'prove' their professionalism and, as Anton confirmed, are still regarded by most people as being in a vocation pursued only by the uneducated. Despite the demands made in terms of business skills, management, grief counselling and preparation techniques, the funeral director in South Africa does not seem to be adequately prepared and educated for the challenges that he or she has to face. This lack of proper training detracts from the confidence and esteem that they could gain as a result of the professional services they deliver.

Yearly conventions and seminars provide funeral directors with a sense of solidarity and the opportunity to come into contact with people who "are just like us" (Thompson, 1991, p. 420). They also attempt to associate with other professionals by joining various organisations in order to become respected members of the community. Anton prefers to socialise with young professionals, including doctors and lawyers, to improve his social status. Jack involves himself in numerous sponsorships in the business community and at his children's school to achieve recognition as an esteemed member of society. Sarah seems to be countering

some of the negative views associated with the job of funeral directing by being active in the small-town community and their church congregation.

The Shroud of Service

The research participants emphasised their service role above all other aspects of their job and reported a large measure of satisfaction from actually helping bereaved families. They all considered their profession as a “calling”, which they ‘perform with the heart rather than the head’. They insisted that the bereaved need them desperately during their time of grief and believed that the presence of the funeral director contributes to the therapeutic value of the funeral process. By focusing on the professional task of ‘grief counselling’ that they provide during the funeral process they are able to move away from the two most stigmatising elements of funeral work: the handling and preparation of the body, and retail sales, widely associated with profiting from other people’s grief. Pine (1975) agrees that calling attention to the service part of the profession raises their status, answers criticism about the cost of funerals and contributes to overcoming the public’s aversion to them as individuals.

The respondents made a point of showing that the services they provide are more important than the merchandise they sell. The latter is more readily considered as making a living off the dead, or at least off the grief of the living (Thompson, 1999). The high cost of merchandise and funerals is therefore justified by emphasising that it is a small price to pay for the services that they render. The promotion of sales is often wrapped in a ‘shroud of service’ stressing the peace of mind that accompanies a ‘successful’ or ‘proper’ funeral that concludes ‘without incident’ (Hockey, 1996). High prices are further explained by referring to the amount of work involved in arranging and conducting a funeral service. Both Jack and Anton emphasised the hard work and long hours involved. All three of the participants agreed that their work was largely misunderstood and that their profession does not receive enough recognition and appreciation. They believe that people do not realise the extent of the services they provide and as Jack

commented: "People do not realise all you have to do to prepare the body for a funeral. I don't think they are aware of these things."

All three the participants emphasised the importance of "making it easier" for the family and seemed to feel obliged to decrease the morbidity associated with a funeral. Every action from the moment the family enters the funeral home, throughout the preparation of the body, and finally in conducting the funeral, is geared towards the alleviation of grief. Jack welcomed the fact that funeral directors do not wear the tailored suits with white gloves anymore and confirmed that his clients react positively to the fact that hearses are not exclusively black. Interestingly, Kastenbaum (1992) reports that the aspects of funerals that children tend to remember include the hearse, the shiny handles of the coffin, the flowers thrown into the grave, and a fear that the bottom of the coffin would drop out or that the strap would break. The use of colourful flowers and white funeral coaches, the inclusion of contemporary music, and the fact that grieving friends and relatives tend to dress in lighter colours, all assist in turning the funeral into a slightly more 'light-hearted' affair. The funeral industry has learned to emphasise life, rather than death, in support of society's preference for avoiding the latter reality (McKay, 1990). The funeral director has to sustain a difficult balance between aiming to please the bereaved and the logistics that accompany death (Pine, 1975).

All the participants found it necessary to keep the friends and family of the deceased away from the 'unpleasant' part of the funeral process. Jack does not allow people into the preparation room easily, while the refrigerator remains completely out of bounds. He believes that the family would find this too upsetting and that if they knew any better, they would prefer not to see what happens behind the scenes. Peter, Sarah's husband, prefers a glass covering over the face of the corpse as he believes that the bereaved could find it disturbing to feel the coldness of the body during viewing. Sarah and Anton often discourage relatives from viewing the body if it has been badly damaged and prefer to leave the family with a 'positive' mental image of the deceased. This is in line with a study done by Stanley Hall and Colin Scott in 1922 (in Kastenbaum, 1992) that reported that the realisation

of the reality of death is often brought about by the sensation of coldness in touching the corpse, and the complete immobility of the face.

Academic literature on the subject of the funeral process has identified its two most important psychological functions as separation and integration (Hayland & Morse, 1995; Hockey, 1996). The separation function refers to the need for the bereaved to acknowledge that death has occurred and that the deceased has been removed permanently from the living community. Funerals facilitate separation by punctuating the finality of the death as an initial step in the grieving process, by providing an opportunity for the ventilation of profound emotion, by gently affording closure to the living's relationship with the deceased, and in allowing religious rituals to be performed (Hocker, 1989). The integration function supports the social order and assures survivors that the world goes on. Funeral rituals provide a vehicle for mourners to act out feelings of grief and sometimes to affirm that life has worth even in the face of death (Gamino et al., 2000).

Despite the therapeutic value that the relatives of the deceased could derive from the grief facilitation that undertakers provide during the funeral process, the offering of emotional support has been identified as a source of considerable stress for the funeral director involved (Gamino et al., 2000). All three of the respondents in this study confirmed this, as they reported that the difficult part starts when the grieving family enters their office. It is not the mutilated body that disturbs them emotionally but rather the pain and the grief of the bereaved sitting in front of them. In a sense dealing with life (the family) seems more difficult than dealing with death (the corpse).

All three the respondents felt that they were not in the profession for the financial rewards, but rather because of the opportunities for exceptional personal growth that it provides. Contrary to the assertions made by a number of authors (Cahill, 1995; Fulton, 1979; Thompson, 1991), the present study showed that these funeral directors were more socially than monetarily motivated. All the participants indicated that they would choose the same occupation again if they had to do it all over. This gives credence to the notion that funeral directors might be

characteristically capable of performing a therapeutic function (Schell & Zinger, 1985).

Socio-economic Status versus Occupational Prestige

As a result of the stigmatisation of funeral directors the members of the profession seem to experience a kind of “occupational status insecurity” (Thompson, 1991, p. 424). Cahill (1999) supposes that what funeral directors lack in occupational prestige, they tend to make up for in socio-economic status. It did not appear as if Sarah and her husband achieved considerable financial success, as they had been allocated to a relatively small branch in a predominantly rural community. They seemed to derive their social status from their involvement in the community and due to the fact that Sarah’s husband maintained his status as a minister.

The financial rewards of the profession did, however, prove an important motivating factor for Jack and Anton. They both manage successful branches of a large funeral group and provide their services to a more affluent client base. Jack regarded his considerable income as enough to live on more than comfortably and admitted that it allows him to spend money on extravagant luxuries. Anton’s income provides him with a sense of security and he was able to purchase his first house comfortably. His financial position has also allowed him to buy an expensive sports car and to collect some costly works of art. While both believe that they could compete financially with doctors and lawyers, they are aware of not achieving the same social status. They added that they ‘deserve’ the financial rewards because they put in very long working hours and seldom have the opportunity to go on vacation because of the nature of their work. They, however, feel morally, socially and professionally obligated to hide their wealth as the community could look upon it negatively. They believe that flaunting their financial gains might strengthen the stigma of undertakers living comfortably off the misfortune of others.

Religion

For the three respondents religion and mysticism provides some framework in which to make sense of life and the power of death. Religion is central to both Anton and Sarah's lives and their way of interacting with the world.

Anton initially searched for religious answers to his questions about death through his theological studies. He regards his belief in God as the only thing that he can hold on to in his profession, as it is the primary factor that enables him to perform the difficult tasks of his vocation. His faith keeps him from being afraid of death and he considers his ability to see beyond death as the discriminating factor that enables him to console others. The promise of an afterlife for him means that death is not the end, but merely a transition to a better place. He often shares this belief with the bereaved family to comfort them, but it also serves to reassure him of his own meanings around death.

Sarah's entire conversation was framed in a religious manner and her active participation in religious activities was stressed throughout. She stated that her dependence on God was the primary factor that made it possible for her to do this difficult work. God "always" provides her with the strength to stay calm and be strong for others. When she is in need of support or realises that a negative thought is staying with her, she finds solace in prayer. Death is anticipated as the bible confirms that each person will die and provides extensive descriptions and explanations about the afterlife. Sarah places her life completely in the hands of God and trusts that He has also planned for her death.

Jack's firm belief in heaven renders death less final. His image of life after death is positive and he believes that the dead person is "better off" wherever he or she is now. This idea provides him with some comfort and he is convinced that God takes every person when the 'time is right' as God only plucks the flower when "it is at its most beautiful".

The way in which the three applicants use religion supports Kastenbaum's (1992) argument that Christians are expected to think of death with wonder and gratitude, as imperfect life is exchanged for everlasting bliss. Religion has also been described as a "buffer" against death anxiety (Kastenbaum, 1992, p. 158), providing the promise of salvation and eternal life. Christian beliefs can, however, also have the opposite effect, as death is associated with punishment, judgement and damnation. Religion could thereby not only intensify feelings of serenity, but also of anxiety.

The Cycle of Isolation

While the three research participants' descriptions of their experiences were uniquely articulated, they did present a number of similarities in the way each of them interacts with his or her world. The researcher identified a similar pattern in their style of relating, but the process described in the following section should be accepted as only a possible interpretation. It does not suggest that the sequence will be exactly the same for each of the three participants or that the same pattern will be followed in each case or in any other cases not related to this particular study.

All three the respondents displayed a **sensitivity** and **intenseness** that seems to render them emotionally rather vulnerable. They appear to be deeply sensitive to the finer emotional nuances of their immediate environment and are easily touched and troubled by things in the world around them. Their experiences seem to display a level of intensity beyond those of most other people. It would be unrealistic to attempt to provide possible explanations for the development of the participants' sensitivity, as this would require a more in-depth analysis of each of the co-researchers' lives. A number of complex factors could have contributed to them experiencing their worlds more intensely, and these cannot be fully explored in this limited study. It will therefore suffice to acknowledge this characteristic without elaborating on its development.

Anton believes that he experiences the world more intensely than most people do and regards himself as especially vulnerable in romantic relationships. A

romantic relationship that was ended two years before still had a visible emotional effect on him when it was discussed during the interviews. Jack made an effort to present a 'cool and calm' image, but revealed his sensitivity by relating incidents that deeply affected him and also in his statements regarding his concern for his family. He declared, for example, that, given the opportunity, he would choose not to have children because of his heightened awareness of the dangers of life. This gives an indication of the level of devastation he could experience if something had to happen to his children. He would be willing to give up the love and pleasure his children provide him rather than face the possibility of losing them. It is apparent from Sarah's husband that she is extremely sensitive to his actions and that she feels neglected easily.

Apart from the sensitivity and the intensity Jack and Anton also seem to display a particular **naivety** in their interaction with other people. They appear to leave themselves open to exploitation because of their belief in humanity's inherent 'good nature'. Although Jack regards himself as a good judge of character his behaviour does not confirm this, as he still seems relatively gullible in his relations with others. Anton's colleagues described him as someone who is unable to evaluate other people's intentions. This often resulted in others imposing on his impressionable nature. It appears that neither of them is able to read feedback from their daily interactions accurately and that they lack the insight to act accordingly.

All three of the participants displayed a remarkable need to be **accepted** by others. Jack and Anton both required continuous confirmation from the researcher and related incidents in an attempt to gain acknowledgement of their abilities. Each of the co-researchers stressed the success they had achieved in their careers and the special qualities they possess in pursuing their profession. Jack and Anton were, however, uncomfortable in relating the personal attributes that they thought made them remarkable individuals. Sarah's approach was more deliberate, as she overtly distinguished herself from the norm. She constantly made reference to her exceptional qualities and credited herself with outstanding achievements.

The participants' strong need for acceptance could be contributed to a desire for love and **nurturing**. Both Jack and Anton related that the love and attention they received as children were largely on a practical and distant level. The open display of affection was uncommon, and they rarely experienced a truly warm, accepting and caring environment. Although Sarah received intense warmth and care for the twelve years that she was the only child, she could have experienced an immense sense of loss and rejection after her sister was born. This intrusion into her loving environment could have contributed to an intensified need for nurturing and acceptance.

The respondents' sensitivity and vulnerability tend to make them susceptible to **disappointments**. Jack, specifically, related various incidents that left him hurt and disillusioned. Despite his naivety, he seemed to be aware of the exploitation of his good nature. Anton explained that he had been through his "fair share" of disappointments over the years and that it made him see people in a different light. Because of his naivety he has often been unaware of being taken advantage of and only realised that he had been let down after the fact. He therefore started to question other people's intentions and also his own judgement. Sarah seemed more inclined to express her disappointment through anger and aggression. She never admitted to feeling hurt when someone failed her, but rather conveyed her displeasure by emphasising the other person's incompetence or weakness.

Each of the co-researchers seemed to interpret the slightest **criticism** as an insult to their person. Jack finds criticism offensive, especially when he thinks it unfair and he feels the need to justify himself in those situations. Anton displayed his hurt more openly and seemed perplexed as to the reasons for the criticism he received. He displayed no understanding of the situations described and was therefore often left feeling helpless. Sarah reacted to criticism with aggression and commonly responded with counter-criticism.

The three respondents seemed to internalise disappointments and criticism as hurtful **rejection**, which appears to have negatively affected their self-esteem. Their sense of not being accepted has been strengthened by the setbacks they have

endured. Soon they started to question their self-worth, which left them feeling even more vulnerable and insecure. Every time they had the perception that another person had disappointed them they seemed to lose **trust** progressively in others. With each injurious encounter they lost confidence in the belief that other people would not hurt them. They came across as disillusioned and sceptical in their interactions with those around them because of the dangers contact seems to hold. This could explain the fact that both Anton and Jack continually emphasised the value they attribute to honesty, sincerity and fairness. This fear of rejection and of being hurt appears to bring about a measure of underlying **anxiety**.

In order to avoid the violation of their trust and to protect themselves against rejection they had to learn not to display their own **emotions** openly. All three the respondents experienced sharing their emotions with others as one of the hardest things to do. They all worked very hard at concealing their true emotions and related that they hardly ever shared them with anyone. During all of the interviews the researcher found it necessary to persist aggressively in her line of questioning as the respondents tended to avoid the 'emotional' questions by responding to them on a very practical level. They all came across as extremely uncomfortable with the emotional content of our conversations.

Jack recognised his discomfort with emotions and believes that he, therefore, has to suppress them as quickly as possible. He also makes deliberate attempts to hide his feelings and considered himself quite successful in doing so. Although he encourages his clients to display their emotions openly, he considered it a weakness for himself. Jack explained his inability to share his emotions as a way of solving his own problems. He considers it "unfair" to burden other people with his concerns. Despite Anton's sensitivity he seemed unable to show his feelings and finds it extremely difficult to talk about his emotions. He added that he could easily conceal his true emotions from the people around him, as they were generally not aware of his sensitivity. He did, however, seem comfortable with his clients' emotions and displayed an actual ability to contain it. Sarah considered a public display of emotions as a weakness and employed a number of strategies to conceal her feelings in the presence of others. Unlike the two other respondents, Sarah was not

comfortable with her clients' display of emotions and endeavoured to return them to calmness as quickly as possibly.

The respondents' inability to share their emotions with other people seemed to intensify their need for acceptance and validation. Their cropped-up emotions and the lack of **feedback** from others probably heighten their insecurity and anxiety. They question their own abilities and have little confidence in their **self-worth**. In order to guard themselves against being exposed, but still receiving the recognition and approval they need so desperately, they found it necessary to create some kind of '**image**' to hide behind.

Jack presented himself as the calm and composed person that is hardly ever perturbed. Even his face appeared expressionless and devoid of emotion. Anton came across as the 'happy-go-lucky guy' that takes life in his stride and does not take matters too seriously. His general demeanour was positive and light-hearted with an open, friendly face. Sarah framed herself as the 'go-getter' with a strong personality that manages to get things done. Her 'no nonsense' expression during the interview portrayed the seriousness with which she approaches life. All three of the co-researchers emphasised their **individuality** and displayed a strong need to distinguish themselves from others. Sarah and Anton, specifically, described themselves as obstinate and contended that they were adamant about doing things their own way. Jack on numerous occasions accentuated that he does not try to impress people but that "what you see is what you get". All of these facades could, however, be considered as attempts to mask their sensitivity and inherent vulnerability. Their desire to distinguish themselves deliberately from the 'norm' supports the idea of low self-esteem and the questioning of their self-worth.

Although they made an effort to convince the researcher that other people's opinions of them did not bother them, they came across as trying to 'please' others in order to get their approval. They all evidently displayed empathy towards other people, which could be an extension of their own sensitivity and need for compassion. Jack confirmed that he has always been aware of keeping the promises he makes, because he knows how painful it is to be let down. They

seemed willing to do whatever it takes to satisfy other people and it often happened that they would offer their assistance or support to their own detriment.

Their fear of rejection or disappointing others compelled them to do the '**right thing**'. While Anton's tendency to please was evident in his social interactions, Sarah and Jack appeared to seek recognition through more practical actions. All three of them set high standards for themselves and were meticulous in the tasks that they performed. Jack has always been overly conscious of his mistakes and, therefore, invests large amounts of energy to avoid embarrassing situations. They all displayed an exceptional sense of responsibility and described themselves as **perfectionists**. Meeting the expectations of the people around them makes it possible to avoid criticism, which at least provides them with some sense of acceptance and approval. The predominant image they presented to the world was therefore one of a caring concern for the needs of others and a willingness to afford the help requested.

Their neat and disciplined way of life could be considered as a way to bind and alleviate their underlying anxiety. The three participants all reported that they were 'black or white' people and that they find it necessary to be in **control**. They seemed to place life's events in suitable compartments to enhance their ability to manage the world. The structure they introduced into their daily routines seemed to render life more predictable and decrease their anxiety. Sarah demonstrated a forceful need to be in control of her life, which included directing the actions of those around her. The intensity of her efforts to remain in control of her life could be an indication of an underlying instability that might be threatening to overwhelm her.

As a result of the protective front the three co-researchers sustain, it seems to be almost impossible for anyone to get to know the 'real person' behind the mask. The '**authentic self**' was so well disguised that they could not receive 'valid' feedback from their interactions with other people. This appeared to foster even more feelings of rejection, as it could never provide them with the acceptance and validation they wanted. As others were hardly ever allowed to observe the respondents' true emotions, it was difficult for others to be aware of their sensitivity.

This resulted in others not treating the participants in accordance with the pain and hurt the latter experienced, but rather in line with the image they presented. Relationships tended to be **superficial** and unfulfilling, intensifying their need for love, intimacy, and nurturing. The three participants' needs were therefore not met, leaving them with an immense void.

Despite the fact that their needs are hardly ever gratified they persevere in their attempts to portray a kind and understanding image. Their altruistic characters resulted in attempts to continue to satisfy the needs of others with the desperate hope of receiving something in return. This seemingly unbalanced exchange could leave them more deprived, frustrated, and disillusioned in mankind. Their **dissatisfaction** could easily be transformed into irritation and anger, bringing about an aggressive and hostile stance towards the world.

This frustration and anger was clearly visible in Sarah's daily interactions. Her characteristic way of relating with the people around her seemed to be confrontational and aggressive. She came across as critical, and even punitive and patronising at times. Each interaction appeared to be a 'lashing out' at a world that was not recognising her needs and an attempt to cut away the hurtful ties with those around her. Her aggressive behaviour protects her from being hurt, and also provides a good 'excuse' to justify her rejection by others. Jack's withdrawal from interactions seemed less aggressive, but he did make deliberate attempts to distance himself from other people and to avoid human contact. He described himself as a private person who enjoyed being by himself. He reported that he could, with the minimum of effort, isolate himself for days without talking to anyone. As interpersonal relationships seemed too painful for him, he felt that he had to 'retreat'. Anton also described himself as a private person, but appeared to be caught between the pain of his past relationships and his need for satisfying interaction. Although he enjoys spending time alone, he often ventures into the arena of social interaction. He seemed to return 'wounded' often but his naivety seems to keep him 'coming back for more'. All three of the participants' relations seemed like attempts to reject others before they could be rejected themselves.

Jack and Anton seemed to experience no **sense of belonging** as they related that they had no close friends that they could share their problems with. Jack's social life comprises of drinking a couple of beers at a pub. He does not feel comfortable to share anything personal with his friends, as he felt extremely guilty after he once discussed something personal with one of the guys. Anton seemed to enjoy social contact, but his interactions appear to be superficial and devoid of any meaningful connection. Sarah seemed to be extremely involved in her church congregation, but invariably in the capacity of "the pillar of strength". This context never allows her to be the 'weak' one and to receive support. Her only support seemed to be the Pastoral Psychologist that she visited once or twice a year. Although she might experience a sense of belonging in the community, she does not seem to find any personal emotional support from the people around her.

Sarah's 'violent' interactions seemed to provide her with some form of release from her anger and frustration. Jack and Anton, however, had limited opportunities to find an outlet for their **aggression**. Anton's main way of venting his anger appeared to be his rare high-speed car chases. It did not look as if Jack had any way of channelling his aggression. This could account for the major signs of **depression** that Jack exhibited and for Anton's occasional depressive episodes. Instead of releasing their aggression externally, they might tend to turn the aggression inward, towards themselves. Jack's sense that he was losing control could be an indication of an inability to suppress his underlying hostility for much longer. It probably takes tremendous effort to contain these emotions without displaying them, which might increase his anxiety. His heightened anxiety could use up most of his resources and leave little energy to suppress his emotions. His fear that he would not be able to conceal his emotions anymore is likely to increase his anxiety and could result in making him feel overwhelmed by his emotions.

Despite the fact that relationships in general do not provide the three participants with the feedback they need, their close **relationships** also seem to be unfulfilling. Sarah experienced her husband as spending too much time at work and often felt neglected. Her frustrated need for acceptance and approval probably makes her more demanding, which her husband confirmed. Jack's marriage has

been unhappy for some time and he has not been able to derive much warmth or acceptance from it. Anton has remained single, but seems to be desperate to find a person to share his life with. This was evident from the fact that he tended to become almost manic about the person he is in a relationship with and to overindulge the person he is courting. Deprived of warmth, nurturing and acceptance in most spheres of their lives, they seem to become 'clingy' and insistent in their **neediness**. In line with Sarah's character she demands adoration and wants to be the centre of attention.

Anton's overindulgence in food and Jack's abuse of alcohol could be considered as '**oral substitutes**' for the nurturing relationships they are longing for. Through their excessive eating and drinking they may be trying to compensate for the emptiness they experience due to their unfulfilling interactions. Jack also related that he has the tendency to spend money extravagantly, which could be regarded as another way to fill the inner void.

The built-up pressure the co-researchers experienced as a result of their inability to share their emotions became apparent when both Anton and Jack repeatedly commented that the interviews only allowed for a fraction of the information to be explored. Anton considered himself to be the type of person who does not usually talk about personal issues, but implicitly showed his need to divulge more when he commented that the researcher in fact still has knowledge of only a small part of him. Jack admitted that it was not always pleasant to keep everything to himself and that he experienced a tremendous sense of relief after sharing even a limited amount of information during our interviews. Although all three of them probably experienced constant conflict between a **need to share** their emotions and a **fear of getting hurt**, Sarah came across as working the hardest to avoid emotional content during the interviews. The researcher experienced an ever present feeling of underlying emotional turbulence during the interviews with Sarah, but she managed to suppress it successfully throughout. Although she did not openly comment that her experience of the study was negative, it must have been quite strenuous, as it required tremendous amounts of emotional restraint. As a result she did not experience the same feeling of relief as the other two respondents.

The participants' sensitivity thus seemed to render them vulnerable to feelings of rejection and subsequent low self-esteem. Their distrust of people and their fear of getting hurt necessitated them to distance themselves from other people. They needed some form of feedback and acceptance, which forced them to create an elaborate front that would hide their true emotions. The distance they managed to create by physically avoiding relationships and by presenting an artificial image in their interactions, made it difficult for any meaningful relationships to be formed. The co-researchers' inability to make authentic emotional connections and their difficulty in showing other people their true emotions left them intensely **isolated** and **lonely**.

The Complementarity of the Profession

The work of an undertaker is obviously emotionally demanding for the individual. The three participants necessarily entered the profession each with his or her unique traits that influence the way they deal with the demands made on their person. Their personal characteristics and the nature of their work can be expected to have a reciprocal influence on one another. The respondents' attributes will contribute to the way they experience their duties, but will also be strengthened, weakened or transformed through their dealings with death. The profession of undertaking did, however, seem to compliment a number of the characteristics discussed above and provided the opportunity for fulfilling some of the respondents' emotional needs.

The research participants' strong identification with the role of the funeral director seems to protect them against displaying their own emotions. As it is part of this role to provide the bereaved family with support, they appear to focus a large part of their emotions on this task, without confronting their own inner struggles. Sarah confirmed that she had to be strong for the family of the deceased and that she would be of no value to them if she allowed her own emotions to interfere. The undertaker's exposure to grief seemed to provide Jack and Anton with a good 'excuse' for not being able to display their emotions. They both commented that

they worked with sad people each day and that they subsequently did not feel like sharing their own emotions often. Jack also considered it difficult to show emotions in front of clients as they might consider him to be insincere if he did not know the deceased. The demands of the profession thus seem to strengthen their tendency to suppress their emotions and to conceal these from the people around them.

The co-researchers' need for recognition and validation seemed to be fulfilled through the appreciation that their clients display. They literally become the family's 'saviour' during their time of need and is able to give direction to those who do not know where to turn. Sarah described it as "incredibly satisfying" to be of assistance to the family at an emotionally demanding time. She regarded herself as a "pillar of strength" that the bereaved could lean on and stated that they desperately need her to get through the ordeal of the funeral ritual. She considers it a great compliment that her clients share their most intimate emotions and place complete trust in her. Anton confirmed that the recognition he receives from his clients is extremely valuable. He feels it a great honour for his clients to feel safe enough to express their emotions freely and believes that he made it easier for the bereaved by just lending an ear. The trust his clients placed in him and the positive feedback they expressed provided him with recognition for his importance. For this reason he believes himself to have turned into an "emotional glutton" that longs for people to show their emotions openly to him. Jack described it as extremely fulfilling when clients recognise and appreciate the services he delivers. He regards his role as essential to the alleviation of the grief and suffering of the bereaved. He considers the profession to be noble as it provides sincere support to the families in need. The role of funeral director seems to make all three the respondents feel emotionally indispensable to other people. The fact that they have to 'lead the way' often makes them feel competent and valued. Although they are probably meeting the needs of their clients in the hope that anybody out there would notice and satisfy their needs, it does make them experience a limited sense of acceptance.

The emotional distance created in the participants' dealings with the dead and the bereaved seems often to leave them removed and out of touch with their own feelings. This offers some support for the idea in the results of the 16 PF that

indicated that both Anton and Sarah seem unafraid in conventional fear-evoking situations. Through the emotional distancing they could be so far removed from the 'real world' that they are not touched by its terrors. This could also make it easier for them to isolate themselves from relationships, removing them further from 'normal' human contact.

The role of the funeral director seems to compliment their style of relating to other people. As was described earlier, the participants either completely withdraw from interactions or tend to form superficial relationships without authentic emotional connections. The relationships they have, seem to resemble their relationships with the dead bodies they encounter daily. Their only responsibility toward the corpse is the physical preparation of the body for burial. They seem to take the same 'service' approach in relation with those around them by taking care of other people's needs. The corpse is not able to give feedback about their acceptability or worth, which they also do not seem to receive from the living people that they interact with. They cannot be criticised or rejected by the corpse, something they also strive to avoid at any cost in their relationships with other people.

Their work environment could in a sense be considered 'safe' in terms of human relations. Working with corpses pose no threat as the risks involved in forming relationships had been eliminated. The nature of contact with the family of the deceased excludes the possibility of meaningful or lasting connections. The services of a funeral director are not required often, as death in a particular family is usually a rare event. When the occasion of death does present itself, the undertaker has limited contact with the family. He or she might have contact with the relatives two or three times when the funeral is arranged and performed. Interactions are functional, professional and conducted on a practical level. The funeral director fulfils a duty without exposing him- or herself as a person. This lowers the risk of being hurt as their emotions are safely hidden.

The superficial nature of the connections made with clients was obvious in an incident that Jack described. He related that he had contact with a man when they made the arrangements and performed the funeral of the client's wife. The client

came in the following week to pay the funeral costs and Jack introduced himself. Only after the man pointed out that Jack had buried his wife the previous week, did he recognise the client. This seems to indicate a tendency to be emotionally involved with the bereaved while they are in the undertaker's office, but to forget them the moment they walk out of the door. Their emotional involvement seems short-lived, without any lasting emotional connection. The relationship also appears one-sided, as it is the client's needs that are being met.

Although relationships with clients are short-lived, they tend to be extremely intense and emotionally loaded. The context of grief seems to put the participants in a privileged position, as clients are usually vulnerable and tend to share feelings exclusive to this time of sorrow. The funeral director's ability to offer assistance in this sensitive time fulfils his or her need to give something back to humanity, but it also provides the opportunity to sustain the image of being a caring person with a sincere concern for the needs of others. The unusual circumstances surrounding death and the funeral ritual compel clients to employ the services of a funeral director. Because of the clients' emotional vulnerability in their inevitable contact with the undertaker, they seem to share their emotions with the funeral director almost by default. They do not deliberately choose the funeral director, but he or she happens to be there during a time when the bereaved need support. This again seems to detract from the authenticity of the relationship, as it is not entered into because of the person the funeral director is, but for the needs that he or she fulfils.

The participants' privileged access to people's emotions seems to be another instance that offer a sense of importance, but it is exactly this exceptionally emotional state that respondents use to protect themselves against being 'rejected' by their clients. If clients are satisfied with their service the respondents experience a sense of recognition of their worth, but if they express their dissatisfaction the clients' emotional instability and irrationality during the time of grief can be offered as an 'excuse' for their behaviour. This appears to protect them against the painful criticism that could injure their already lowered self-esteem.

The research participants seemed to be isolated from the 'warmth' of the rest of the world to such an extent that they can be considered as the 'living dead'. They appeared to be starved of the 'life forces' of love and nurturance. While they were not receiving the 'nourishment' they needed, their own resources were slowly tapped without being replenished from sources of support, like family or friends. They seemed almost to be in a process of slowly 'losing consciousness' until finally their hearts would stop beating forever. This could account for Anton's need to drive at speeds that frighten even himself. Tempting fate might make him feel alive again, even if just for a split second.

Contradictions

The stories of the three research participants were characterised by numerous contradictions. Jack and Anton deliberately down-played the influence that the stigma attached to being a funeral director had on them personally, but would then discuss at length an incident that illustrated the public's negative perception of them. Apart from relating the details of the situation, they would return to it at various stages of the conversation and appeared emotionally upset because of the criticism that they had to endure. Anton also stated that the public opinion of undertakers was changing slowly as this becomes informed of the important role he or she plays in the funeral ritual. Furthermore, that people are starting to realise that funeral directors are normal people just like everybody else. Later in the interview he, however, contradicted this statement by saying that others do not perceive them in a more positive light, but that some people are just better at hiding their true feelings.

The respondents' descriptions of the dead bodies that they worked with fluctuated between complete personalisation and absolute dehumanisation. Each respondent stressed the fact that the dead body was not "a human anymore" or that it was not the "real" person that was lying in front of them. Anton and Sarah both referred to the body as an "empty shell", while Anton and Jack consider the body as impersonal to the extent that it cannot even be compared to a photograph of a person. Jack at times displayed his irreverence by referring to the corpses as "those

at the back". By contrast, all three of the participants at different times during the death ritual refer to the dead person by name. Sarah even talks to the dead person while preparing the body for burial. She even stated that the only difference between the living and the dead is the fact that the one is warm, while the other is cold. She considers brushing the hair of a corpse the same as brushing "any human's hair". Despite the fact that the dead body is just "a shell" or is not considered human anymore, they place tremendous importance on treating the body with respect.

Despite making statements such as "death is never easy" or "death is not pleasant", the respondents insisted that they do not find dealing with the body a difficult part of their jobs. Sarah even stated that death was "not really ugly". For the research respondents the most difficult aspect of their profession is having to deal with the bereaved families. For Anton, seeing the really "broken" families was the most disturbing. Accepting the fact of death and facing the lifeless body no longer upsets them, but dealing with those that have to go on without their loved ones still presents an emotional challenge to the respondents. This appears to be a paradox as dealing with the living (life) becomes more difficult than dealing with the dead (death). The fact that the co-researchers' emotional relationships are generally painful and unfulfilling offers some explanation for why they would find contact with the living more difficult than simply working with the dead.

All three the participants constantly reminded the researcher that they do not share their emotions with anyone easily. Sarah, however, was the only one that was able to sustain the emotional distance throughout the interviews as she resisted sharing intimate feelings. Both Jack and Anton displayed a considerable need to find an outlet for their emotions, and did so during the interviews. They therefore did not come across as completely closed emotionally.

It seems ironic that Jack and Anton value honesty and sincerity, but in spite of that seldom allow others to see their true selves. Although they want to be sure of where they stand with people, they hardly ever interacted in an honest and truthful way with those around them.

The contradictions that were apparent in the three participants' conversations could signify the emotional conflict they are subjected to as a result of their profession and of the emotional demands that go with dealing with death on a daily basis. This could, however, also be an extension of each of the individual's traits and characteristics. In order to protect themselves against the negative impact of the reality of death they have to develop a number of strategies to distance themselves emotionally from it to a healthy degree. It seems, however, to be impossible to isolate themselves completely from the impact of death on their person and to sustain the rationalised denials of the consequences of death.

Conclusion

A number of common themes were identified from the reconstructed stories that the participants shared with the researcher. The shared themes do, however, not only illustrate the similarities, but also the subtle differences in each of the participants' ecology of ideas. Each story was grounded in a particular context and allowed the unique qualities of each of the respondents to emerge. Although the three respondents presented a number of shared feelings and emotions, or applied similar techniques to deal with certain situations, it remains impossible to generalise any of the conclusions about the people involved in this study to the population of undertakers.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This concluding chapter will provide an evaluation of the research project in terms of its strengths and limitations. The researcher's own experience of the research will be described and recommendations for future research will be proposed.

Evaluation of the Study

The purpose of this study, as explained in Chapter 1, was the unstructured exploration of a psychological interest in the world of the undertaker. The only result that was expected was an increased understanding through the rich description of the lived experiences of the undertaker in his or her context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The intention of the study was to discover information and to develop new ideas and information about undertakers, which, according to the researcher's perspective, has been achieved.

A qualitative, or naturalistic, research approach was applied in the hope of establishing a holistic understanding of the world of the undertaker (Sells et al., 1995). As the research was grounded in ecosystemic assumptions the focus was on ecology, patterns, relationships, interconnectedness, and context (Keeney, 1983a). The multiple realities of the funeral directors involved were defined in an attempt to make sense of the world of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research was entered into without any intention of verifying any preconceived hypothesis, but rather to create an understanding of this interesting social group, the undertaker (Babbie, 1992; Orford, 1992). The research inquiry was entered into with a 'not-knowing' stance to promote the researcher's curiosity and collaboration with the participants. The researcher believes that openness to being informed by the research participants and a desire to understand the co-researcher's experience was maintained throughout the study (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

The most important 'measuring instrument' in this study was the researcher herself. The way in which the researcher was able to interact with the undertakers determined the product of data that was created in the continuous co-construction and co-evolution of realities (Moon et al., 1990). The undertaker's individual experiences were explored by the researcher through observation of how each punctuated his or her context. By entering their natural contexts the researcher was able to gain insight into the meaning of the complex, naturally occurring events, actions and interactions surrounding the death ritual (Moon et. al., 1990; Rowan, 1981).

A constant awareness of the experience as a co-construction and recursive process was maintained. Ideas were legitimised through dialogue and consensus (Atkinson et. al., 1991). The researcher's own punctuation, and the meanings attached to this specific context, were made clear (Keeney, 1982). The impact of the researcher's selectivity in the collection and comprehension of the research data was acknowledged (Bateson, 1972). A thorough process of introspection and the researcher's awareness of her own thoughts and feelings contributed to a better understanding of what has been observed.

Data analysis involved an ongoing process, which resulted in thick descriptions from the information recorded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A new understanding about the world of the undertaker was constructed through the researcher's interaction with her data. The case study reporting mode was used to describe the multiple realities in the participants' specific contexts. Descriptions of the co-researchers' worlds were given without any claims to objectivity or the pursuit of any given 'truth'. The accounts of the three undertakers' experiences and relationships should give the reader a glimpse of three unique life ecologies, and of the consistent themes identified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation between the information collected during the interviews, the researcher's own observations and process notes, and the data from the 16 PF and MMPI, enabled the researcher to ensure higher validity (Maxwell, 1996). The results were then linked to existing literature (Orford, 1992).

The findings of this study should be treated as tentative conclusions, applicable only to this specific context (Babbie, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's epistemology, or the 'lens' used during the research, as well as a clear awareness of possible biases or non-objectivity were made explicit. This will hopefully enable the future reader to make reasonable judgements relating to the validity and the transferability of the findings (Moon et. al., 1990), and also provide a conceptual framework for further observations.

Strengths of the Study

The theoretical departure of the study was a holistic and unifying ecosystemic epistemology. The researcher invited the exploration of multiple realities that represent the individual person's experience of his or her world. The study was not reductionistic as the unique context of each research participant was taken into account. Discussions included the individual's attributions, expectations, belief systems, life circumstances and relationships. As no attempt was made to find a pre-established 'truth' behind each story, diversity and complexity was encouraged.

The researcher immersed herself fully into the various research contexts and remained consistent with the aims of the research. This was actualised through sincere interest in the participants' descriptions of their experiences and an honest desire to learn from them. The researcher formed respectful and trusting relationships with the participants, which allowed her to test her own interpretations with the respondents throughout the study. The continuous co-creation of meaning through dialogue allowed misunderstandings to be challenged immediately. The meanings that were attributed could be considered a reflection of the process of conversation that transpired between the researcher and her co-researchers.

It would be unrealistic to assume that the presence of the researcher did not modify the behaviour of the research participants to some extent. The researcher believes that the close relationships that were formed and the nature of the interactions prevented her observations from being seriously biased. The value and benefit that the participants were able to gain from the research was expressed by

two of the respondents when they offered their thoughts and feelings regarding the research project. Disclosing the researcher's orientation and the intentions of research further enhanced the trustworthiness of the research findings.

The study was conducted according to the proposed methodology, which allowed for the adaptability of certain procedures in order to accommodate the specific research environment. Exact methods did not emerge until the researcher was fully immersed in the context of the particular undertaker, and included multiple operations such as interviews, participant observation and field observations. The length of the interviews was, for example, completely reliant on the conversation that evolved between the researcher and the participant. The format of the conversations and the recording of data were also influenced by the research situation. More formal interviews were tape-recorded when the opportunity presented itself, but field notes supplemented the research data when the researcher accompanied the undertakers while performing their various tasks.

The study was conducted by examining the three case studies intensively, each within their own individual context. The research findings of the study should therefore be regarded as tentative conclusions about the particular case under study, instead of being generalised it to a 'representative population' of undertakers. Attention was given to the agreement of a variety of information sources that would increase confirmability or credibility. The process of triangulation increased the confirmability by comparing the qualitative data received from the interviews with the quantitative data from the 16 PF and the MMPI. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were confirmed by existing data and through discussions with friends and colleagues. The credibility and transferability of the results were enhanced at the expense of generalisability and validity.

Limitations of the Study

This study emphasised personal, and unique social and contextual factors of the undertaker's world and could therefore not be described as objective and neutral. The researcher approached and conducted each interview in a different

way as the relationship with the co-researcher evolved and punctuated events according to her own frame of reference. The reliability of the results could be considered as questionable according to a traditional, quantitative orientation as the findings cannot be verified or 'proved' by duplicating future research of the same nature in exactly the same manner. Efforts were made to make the research process as explicit as possible in order to allow the reader to make a reasonable judgement regarding the dependability nature of the finding.

The aim of the study was defined in a broad and all-encompassing way. The absence of a more clearly defined focus seemed to distract from the researcher's ability to provide rich descriptions of the experiences of the three co-researchers. The limited scope of the study made it difficult to evaluate and explain each process and system involved in the participants' contexts. The research findings were therefore focused largely on the undertaker's perspective of how he or she experienced his or her world of work without providing extensive information from other sources or commenting on all the factors involved in the system.

The study was limited in terms of the representation of its participants. The research was conducted with an exclusively white South African population belonging to a Westernised cultural sphere. Participants were selected according to accessibility and convenience with the involvement in the complete funeral process taken as the only criterion. Respondents at well-known, reputable and established funeral firms were consequently approached as they met the needs of the researcher. The participants were relatively heterogeneous in terms of age (30 - 47 years), gender (two men and one woman), and level of education (one participant with a tertiary education and two with matric only).

The issue of language posed a challenge for the researcher. Interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, which made the inclusion of extracts from the dialogues problematic. In an attempt to substantiate the researcher's reconstructions and to help the readers to make sense of the research findings, the researcher had to translate quotations into English. The essence and meaning of the statements often proved difficult to communicate as some words do not allow for direct translation.

The inability of the researcher to convey the intended message detracted somewhat from the intensity and the value of the original words.

The researcher was able to form close and meaningful relationships with the two male research participants. The sensitive nature of the topic made it essential to reflect on their emotions and experiences throughout our conversations. The trusting relationship that developed between the researcher and the co-researchers made them comfortable in sharing their stories and they were willing to volunteer valuable information that would otherwise have been lost. The researcher, however, found it difficult to maintain a balance between conducting research and doing therapy, as she continually found herself caught-up in a therapeutic role. The two male participants found the research therapeutic and endeavoured to use the interviews as 'release-sessions'. The researcher constantly had to bring them back to the central aim of the study, without coming across as insensitive to their feelings. One of the respondents continued to express a need for therapy long after the research was completed, which placed the researcher in a compromising position. While the establishment of a trusting relationship was necessary for the research, the researcher had to apply caution not to create the expectation of offering therapy during de-briefing conversations.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is clear that a person's occupation is an integral component of his or her personal and social identity (Thompson, 1991). Due to society's own discomfort with death undertakers are particularly stigmatised. As a result of this funeral directors often find themselves in a precarious social situation. They perform work that the majority of society regards as necessary (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 1972) and their services are socially in high demand. This places them in a paradoxical position of performing duties deemed 'necessary', but 'undesirable, by the society at large.

Working with the dead will probably never be considered glamorous, and this aspect of the funeral director's work will probably continue to be stigmatised. The emotional impact of these factors on the undertaker could, however, be explored

further to enable the development of appropriate 'support systems'. As funeral directors assume such an important societal responsibility, one that relatively few people are willing to do, they at least deserve every possible resource to protect them against the negative effects of the profession. The nature of the effects of the profession, especially on the family system of the funeral director, could provide valuable information regarding the nature of support programs.

The development of an accredited mortuary science programme could increase the undertaker's professionalism. A training programme could better prepare them for the challenges that he or she has to face, and encourage confidence in his or her abilities. Courses presented could concentrate on subjects such as business skills, management styles, grief counselling and cosmetic preparation of the body.

Research could be used to compile awareness programs for the general public, which could provide them with the necessary information regarding the role and importance of the undertaker. This should lead to the eradication of misconceptions and myths concerning the funeral director while engendering an appreciation for this demanding profession. Information regarding death could encourage people to contemplate life more seriously. This might create the awareness that life is limited and encourage them to spend their time on earth more meaningfully.

Research of a similar nature could be conducted amongst South African people of different cultures in order to investigate whether these groups are subjected to the same effects of the funeral directors profession. The different ways in which they deal with the influences of their vocation would be of interest.

A Personal Reflection

This has been a very personal study, shaped partly by the researcher's own intellectual and spiritual quest, and partly by countless discussions with colleagues and friends. The topic of death has great significance for the researcher, as she has

been fascinated by it since early childhood. At the age of five the researcher already expressed her wish to visit a mortuary, together with a desire to see the inside of a prison and an egg-farm. It is unclear how this fascination originated, but the majority of the researcher's wishes were granted during previous studies in Criminology. During this time she was privileged enough to visit both the State Mortuary and a number of State Prisons. Unfortunately the opportunity to visit an egg-farm has not presented itself.

The researcher was confronted with death in her personal life for the first time when her brother was killed in a motor vehicle accident at the end of 1994. Since then the researcher has been involved in her own personal struggle in an attempt to make sense of death, and to accept the incredible experience of loss. The search for answers has taken the researcher on an intense existential journey, resulting in the serious questioning of the meaning and value of life in general, but also for herself.

The quest to find the 'absolute truth' has evaded the researcher thus far and she has not 'arrived' at her final destination yet. This study has, however, been valuable in this journey as it encouraged the thoughtful contemplation of death and its consequences. The information that was gained was extremely helpful in evaluating the researcher's current way of interacting with her world. Morgan (1977) confirms that the exploration of death, and the knowledge gained from this, can have a meaningful influence on a person's life when he states:

Death education relates not only to death itself but to our feelings about ourselves and nature and the universe we live in. It has to do with our values and ideals, the way we relate to one another and the kind of world we are building. Thoughtfully pursued, it can deepen the quality of our lives and of our relationships (p. 3).

This study has forced the researcher to re-assess her experiences of loss through death and encouraged the confrontation of her own mortality. The contemplation of death in this manner has consequently influenced the researcher's

development of an orientation towards life, and death, that has been central to her attempts to re-shape the quality and the content of her daily conduct.

Conclusion

The unstructured exploration of the worlds of three undertakers in this study has hopefully contributed to the body of knowledge concerning the emotional demands the profession places on the individual. This information will hopefully raise some awareness of the importance of the role of the undertaker and encourage a shift in the general public's perceptions of this indispensable and fascinating vocation. Research from a qualitative, reflexive approach was taken to be the most effective way to investigate the context of the undertaker, and the researcher is hopeful that future research would be endeavoured in this largely neglected

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APPENDIX A

JACK

16 PF - Primary Scales

| LOW | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | HIGH |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-----------------|
| Aloof (A) | | | | | | | x | | | | Warmhearted |
| Concrete (B) | | | x | | | | | | | | Abstract |
| Unstable | | | x | | | | | | | | Stable |
| Humble (E) | | | | | | x | | | | | Assertive |
| Serious (F) | x | | | | | | | | | | Enthusiastic |
| Undependable (G) | | | | | | x | | | | | Conscientious |
| Shy (H) | | | x | | | | | | | | Adventurous |
| Tough Minded (I) | | | | | | x | | | | | Sensitive |
| Trusting (L) | | | | | | x | | | | | Suspicious |
| Practical (M) | | | | | | | x | | | | Imaginative |
| Unpretentious (N) | | | | | x | | | | | | Shrewd |
| Confident (O) | | | | | | | x | | | | Apprehensive |
| Conservative (Q1) | | | | | | | | x | | | Liberal |
| Group Dependent (Q2) | | | | | | x | | | | | Self-sufficient |
| Uncontrolled (Q3) | | | | | | | x | | | | Self-controlled |
| Relaxed (Q4) | | | x | | | | | | | | Tense |

| SCALE | RAW SCORE | STEN |
|-------|-----------|------|
| A | 11 | 7 |
| B | 6 | 3 |
| C | 14 | 4 |
| E | 15 | 6 |
| F | 6 | 2 |
| G | 14 | 6 |
| H | 6 | 3 |
| I | 9 | 6 |
| L | 12 | 6 |
| M | 16 | 7 |
| N | 11 | 5 |
| O | 14 | 7 |
| Q1 | 12 | 8 |
| Q2 | 13 | 6 |
| Q3 | 14 | 7 |
| Q4 | 5 | 3 |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Motivation Distortion | 7 |
| Self Depreciation | 6 |
| Random | 8 |

JACK

MMPI Normalised test scores

| SCALE NAME | RAW SCORE | T-SCORE |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| ? scale (Q) | 0 | 41 |
| Lie scale (L) | 5 | 53 |
| Faking (F) | 7 | 60 |
| Validity (K) | 15 | 55 |
| 1 Hypochondriases (Hs) | 10 | 67 |
| 2 Depression (D) | 34 | 92 |
| 3 Hysteria (Hy) | 21 | 58 |
| 4 Psychopathy (Pd) | 25 | 69 |
| 5 Masc-Fem (MF) | 28 | 65 |
| 6 Paranoia (Pa) | 10 | 56 |
| 7 Psychastenia (Pt) | 19 | 69 |
| 8 Schizophrenia (Sc) | 19 | 69 |
| 9 Hypomania (Ma) | 16 | 55 |
| 0 Social Withdrawal (Si) | 38 | 65 |

MMPI Psychogram

| SCALE NAME | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| ? scale (Q) | | | | x | | | | | | |
| Lie scale (L) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| Faking (F) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| Validity (K) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 1 Hypochondriases (Hs) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 2 Depression (D) | | | | | | | | | x | |
| 3 Hysteria (Hy) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 4 Psychopathy (Pd) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 5 Masc-Fem (MF) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 6 Paranoia (Pa) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 7 Psychastenia (Pt) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 8 Schizophrenia (Sc) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 9 Hypomania (Ma) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 0 Social Withdrawal (Si) | | | | | | | x | | | |

SARAH

16 PF - Primary Scales

| LOW | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | HIGH |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-----------------|
| Aloof (A) | | | | | | | | x | | | Warmhearted |
| Concrete (B) | | | | | x | | | | | | Abstract |
| Unstable | | | | | x | | | | | | Stable |
| Humble (E) | | | | | | | | | x | | Assertive |
| Serious (F) | | | | | | | x | | | | Enthusiastic |
| Undependable (G) | | | | | | x | | | | | Conscientious |
| Shy (H) | | | | | | | | x | | | Adventurous |
| Tough Minded (I) | | | | | | x | | | | | Sensitive |
| Trusting (L) | | | | | | | x | | | | Suspicious |
| Practical (M) | | | | | x | | | | | | Imaginative |
| Unpretentious (N) | | | | | x | | | | | | Shrewd |
| Confident (O) | | | x | | | | | | | | Apprehensive |
| Conservative (Q1) | | | | | | | | | | x | Liberal |
| Group Dependent (Q2) | | | | x | | | | | | | Self-sufficient |
| Uncontrolled (Q3) | | | | | | x | | | | | Self-controlled |
| Relaxed (Q4) | | | | x | | | | | | | Tense |

| SCALE | RAW SCORE | STEN |
|-------|-----------|------|
| A | 16 | 8 |
| B | 8 | 5 |
| C | 14 | 5 |
| E | 21 | 9 |
| F | 19 | 7 |
| G | 14 | 6 |
| H | 18 | 8 |
| I | 13 | 6 |
| L | 12 | 7 |
| M | 14 | 5 |
| N | 10 | 5 |
| O | 7 | 3 |
| Q1 | 16 | 10 |
| Q2 | 8 | 4 |
| Q3 | 11 | 6 |
| Q4 | 8 | 4 |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Motivation Distortion | 5 |
| Self Depreciation | 6 |
| Random | 5 |

16 PF - Secondary Scales

| LOW | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | HIGH |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---------------------------|
| Withdrawn Introvert | | | | | | | | x | | | Sociable Extravert |
| Calm and Relaxed | | | | x | | | | | | | Anxiety Prone |
| Intuitive and Emotional | | | | | | | x | | | | Rational and Unemotional |
| Subdued and Dependent | | | | | | | | | x | | Compulsive and Controlled |
| Impulsive and Unconstrained | | | | | | x | | | | | Insecure and Worried |
| Confident and Realistic | | | x | | | | | | | | Takes the lead |
| Prefers to be led | | | | | | | | x | | | Adventurous |

SARAH

MMPI Normalised test scores

| SCALE NAME | RAW SCORE | T-SCORE |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| ? scale (Q) | 0 | 41 |
| Lie scale (L) | 7 | 60 |
| Faking (F) | 9 | 64 |
| Validity (K) | 16 | 57 |
| 1 Hypochondriases (Hs) | 4 | 48 |
| 2 Depression (D) | 20 | 51 |
| 3 Hysteria (Hy) | 24 | 59 |
| 4 Psychopathy (Pd) | 16 | 57 |
| 5 Masc-Fem (MF) | 38 | 47 |
| 6 Paranoia (Pa) | 10 | 56 |
| 7 Psychastenia (Pt) | 6 | 45 |
| 8 Schizophrenia (Sc) | 7 | 51 |
| 9 Hypomania (Ma) | 22 | 70 |
| 0 Social Withdrawal (Si) | 16 | 41 |

MMPI Psychogram

| SCALE NAME | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| ? scale (Q) | | | | x | | | | | | |
| Lie scale (L) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| Faking (F) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| Validity (K) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 1 Hypochondriases (Hs) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 2 Depression (D) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 3 Hysteria (Hy) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 4 Psychopathy (Pd) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 5 Masc-Fem (MF) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 6 Paranoia (Pa) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 7 Psychastenia (Pt) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 8 Schizophrenia (Sc) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 9 Hypomania (Ma) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 0 Social Withdrawal (Si) | | | | x | | | | | | |

ANTON

16 PF - Primary Scales

| LOW | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | HIGH |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-----------------|
| Aloof (A) | | | x | | | | | | | | Warmhearted |
| Concrete (B) | | | | | | x | | | | | Abstract |
| Unstable | | | | | | x | | | | | Stable |
| Humble (E) | | | | | | | | x | | | Assertive |
| Serious (F) | | | | | | x | | | | | Enthusiastic |
| Undependable (G) | | | | | x | | | | | | Conscientious |
| Shy (H) | | | | | | | x | | | | Adventurous |
| Tough Minded (I) | | | | | | x | | | | | Sensitive |
| Trusting (L) | | | x | | | | | | | | Suspicious |
| Practical (M) | | | | | | x | | | | | Imaginative |
| Unpretentious (N) | x | | | | | | | | | | Shrewd |
| Confident (O) | | | x | | | | | | | | Apprehensive |
| Conservative (Q1) | | | x | | | | | | | | Liberal |
| Group Dependent (Q2) | | | | | | | | x | | | Self-sufficient |
| Uncontrolled (Q3) | | | | | x | | | | | | Self-controlled |
| Relaxed (Q4) | | | | | x | | | | | | Tense |

| SCALE | RAW SCORE | STEN |
|-------|-----------|------|
| A | 6 | 3 |
| B | 8 | 6 |
| C | 19 | 7 |
| E | 18 | 8 |
| F | 16 | 6 |
| G | 12 | 5 |
| H | 16 | 7 |
| I | 9 | 6 |
| L | 6 | 2 |
| M | 13 | 6 |
| N | 5 | 1 |
| O | 7 | 3 |
| Q1 | 6 | 3 |
| Q2 | 16 | 8 |
| Q3 | 10 | 5 |
| Q4 | 7 | 4 |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Motivation Distortion | 7 |
| Self Depreciation | 6 |
| Random | 4 |

16 PF - Secondary Scales

| LOW | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | HIGH |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---------------------------|
| Withdrawn Introvert | | | | | x | | | | | | Sociable Extravert |
| Calm and Relaxed | | | | x | | | | | | | Anxiety Prone |
| Intuitive and Emotional | | | | | | x | | | | | Rational and Unemotional |
| Subdued and Dependent | | | | | | | x | | | | Compulsive and Controlled |
| Impulsive and Unconstrained | | | | | x | | | | | | Insecure and Worried |
| Confident and Realistic | | | | x | | | | | | | Takes the lead |
| Prefers to be led | | | | | | | x | | | | Adventurous |

ANTON

MMPI Normalised test scores

| SCALE NAME | RAW SCORE | T-SCORE |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| ? scale (Q) | 0 | 41 |
| Lie scale (L) | 6 | 56 |
| Faking (F) | 6 | 58 |
| Validity (K) | 15 | 55 |
| 1 Hypochondriases (Hs) | 3 | 49 |
| 2 Depression (D) | 11 | 36 |
| 3 Hysteria (Hy) | 25 | 65 |
| 4 Psychopathy (Pd) | 14 | 53 |
| 5 Masc-Fem (MF) | 26 | 61 |
| 6 Paranoia (Pa) | 12 | 62 |
| 7 Psychastenia (Pt) | 8 | 50 |
| 8 Schizophrenia (Sc) | 10 | 55 |
| 9 Hypomania (Ma) | 18 | 60 |
| 0 Social Withdrawal (Si) | 23 | 48 |

MMPI Psychogram

| SCALE NAME | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| ? scale (Q) | | | | x | | | | | | |
| Lie scale (L) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| Faking (F) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| Validity (K) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 1 Hypochondriases (Hs) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 2 Depression (D) | | | | x | | | | | | |
| 3 Hysteria (Hy) | | | | | | | x | | | |
| 4 Psychopathy (Pd) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 5 Masc-Fem (MF) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 6 Paranoia (Pa) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 7 Psychastenia (Pt) | | | | | x | | | | | |
| 8 Schizophrenia (Sc) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 9 Hypomania (Ma) | | | | | | x | | | | |
| 0 Social Withdrawal (Si) | | | | | x | | | | | |