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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

COMFORTING ROLE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

BY

WILLIAM (LIAM) HYLAND 

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1990

ISBN 0-315-65119-9

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: WILLIAM (LIAM) HYLAND

TITLE OF THESIS: COMFORTING ROLE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

DEGREE: MASTER OF SCIENCE

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: FALL 1990

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Date: Sept 12th, 1990

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THE COMFORTING ROLE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

SUBMITTED BY WILLIAM (LIAM) HYLAND

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE IN FAMILY STUDIES.

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Date: September 12, 1990

Dedication

To my family for providing me with an environment that allowed me to experience my own early losses in life.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to develop an understanding of the elements that constitute the comforting role of funeral directors, with the ethnographic method used to identify these elements. Data were collected by observing funeral directors at work in two funeral homes, at churches, cemeteries, and in a nursing home over a period of four months. Unstructured interviews were conducted with five funeral directors and seven bereaving family members. The observational notes and transcribed tape-recorded interviews were content analyzed for recurring patterns of comfort that were provided by funeral directors and experienced by bereaving family members. The elements that constitute the comforting role of funeral directors were divided into three categories: mechanistic comfort, personal comfort, and comfort associated with helping the bereaving family separate from the deceased. Elements of mechanistic comfort include the ritual and ceremony, the decor of the funeral home setting, and the refreshments provided following the viewing or prayer service. Some of the elements of the funeral directors' comforting role are associated with their personal qualities, while others are associated with their skills. Comforting elements associated with funeral directors qualities include caring (shown by "doing it their [the family's] way"), sense of timing and movement during the ceremony, being well-organized, using language appropriately, and "allowing for input" from families. The skills that family members experienced as comforting were the funeral director's ability to direct the many events, to connect the bereaving family with other agencies, to keep the bereaving family together during the funeral, and to buffer the bereaving family from an event that could intensify their sorrow. A final category of comforting is associated with helping the bereaving family detach from the deceased. This is accomplished by embalming and restoring the appearance of the deceased and by presenting the bereaving family with momentos of the funeral event. The "frontstage" decor, manners, appearances, and behaviors of funeral directors were experienced as comforting by bereaving family members.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Morse, chairperson of my committee, for her supervision throughout this research. It was her interest in exploring the concept of comfort in the field of nursing that steered me toward exploring the comforting role of funeral directors.

Other members of the committee that I wish to acknowledge for their support and assistance are Dr. Brenda Munro and Dr. Darlene Forrest.

I am grateful to the Funeral Director's Association of Alberta for the grant they provided to financially support this research.

To all the funeral directors that made it all so much easier, I thank you, and I single out Med for having "time for me". Your patience, (even when I parked my car unknowingly in your parking stall), is admirable. To the bereaving family members who shared their experience, I thank you.

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Jason Montgomery for his interest in me and to Mary Applegate, a fellow traveller on the "graduate way of life," Caroline for transcribing tapes, Sybil Cleary for keeping me nutritionally alive and Sylvia Reneau for keeping me mentally connected to the world beyond graduate school.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within thantology, research on the normal course of bereavement is sparse, and there appears to be a reluctance to explore this area. This reluctance could be the result of the challenge death presents to the scientific paradigm (the outcome of the scientific method is the establishment of an ordered universe, while death produces disorder), or it could be that the culturally developed rites of passage already in place are expected to meet the needs of the bereaved. The funeral home is slowly replacing the church as the "gathering-point" for mourners, and along with this change, funeral directors are assuming many of the tasks previously performed by the clergy (Bradfield & Myers, 1980). One such task assumed by the funeral director, the comforting of the bereaving family, is the focus of this study. This study will identify the elements that characterize the comforting role of funeral directors.

The Problem

Why study the funeral directors provision of comfort? In most situations where comforting occurs (i.e., nursing, medicine, or counselling), the first thing that must happen is the development of a comforting relationship. This relationship develops over time. When the professional gives the client *time* to adjust to the relationship, then there is an increase in trust and respect between them. It is within this environment of trust, comfort, and security that healing can take place. Therefore, for healing to occur the professional must spend *time* with the patient or client. The *time* a professional spends with the client or patient is just as much a part of the recovery process as is the imparting of information, medication, or intervention. It is common for clients and patients to evaluate professionals, such as physicians and therapists by the amount of *time* the professional has for them: "I didn't like him. He had no time for me." "She is very good because she gave me her time."

In the past, the clergy and extended family were very much involved in the funeral rite: they were the ones who spent *time* with the bereaved. They were the main providers of comfort to the bereaved during and for many days following the funeral service. Both the decline in church attendance and and the emergence of the nuclear family in North America since WW II has meant that bereaving family members are more likely to discuss intimate details about family matters with funeral directors during funeral arrangements than with clergy or extended family members. Keith (1976) notes that the general public "is looking to the funeral director...as a source of emotional comfort and support during their grief crises" (p. 50). But in this relationship between the funeral director and the family, the element of *time*, so essential in forming a comforting interpersonal relationship between a therapist and client, is limited because of the nature of funeralization. Usually, funeral rituals are completed within three days (i.e., from time of death to final internment), and usually, there are no further contacts between families and funeral directors. During this emotionally intense three-day period, the interaction between the bereaved and funeral directors principally involves the business of selling services and arranging the funeral service. Because of the time constraint and the preoccupation with the business, little time is available for directors to develop rapport with the bereaved. Yet, despite this limited time-frame and their preoccupation with the business of funeral directing, there continues to be a demand for directors to comfort the bereaved.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this present study is to identify the construct of comfort given by funeral directors and the bereaved's experience of this comfort. It is within this unique context that a rich understanding of the comforting concept can be more fully explored. It is unique because of the fact that the service of funeral directors is purchased, and there is the expectation that they will, for a fee, fulfill a function. It is their skills at managing funeralization that is generally recognized by the general public; however, for the family,

the focus is a little different. The family demands comfort from the funeral director. Attempting to meet both demands makes the funeral director's role unique in our society.

The provision of comfort is made more complex, and unique, by the nature of funeralization. The normal person's experience with death in North America is limited and his/her attendance at funerals is quite infrequent. Consequently, the funeral director is a "stranger" to the bereaved, and the norms attached to the funeral are also "strange" or unfamiliar.

This study is important as a greater understanding of this dimension of funeral directing will lead to a greater understanding of the ways comfort is provided in a setting where discomfort is intense, where the service is purchased, the provider is a stranger, and the time-frame for building rapport with the bereaved is limited. Identifying the uniqueness of the provision of comfort in this setting may be theoretically generalizable to settings of a similar nature, for example, emergency situations involving accidents and brief "one-shot" counselling sessions.

Research Question

What are the elements that constitute the comforting role of funeral directors?

Significance of this study for Funeral Directors and Bereaving Families

Families continue to be emotionally challenged during rites of passage such as birth, marriage, or death. A greater understanding of the emotional interaction during the initial phase in the bereavement process will lead to the development of a better response by professionals to families undergoing bereavement. It is believed that this study will lead to a better understanding of the comforting needs of the family during the loss of a family member due to death. It is expected that this study it will supply insights into the role of

funeral directors and their intervention with the bereaved. To summarize, this study will provide funeral directors with information that may be used to develop their professional skills, and it will provide bereaving families with a greater understanding of grief during the funeral process.

Definitions for terms used in this study

Comfort. To comfort means "to strengthen considerably" (Partridge, 1966, p. 227), and so, to experience comfort means to experience any emotional, social, or physical support that enables an individual or a family to fulfil assigned roles and to engage in healthy interpersonal relationships. To be comforted means to be supported in carrying an emotional burden. In this case, the burden is the loss of a family member due to death.

Funeral Director. The term "funeral director" is frequently applied by the general public to any person wearing the dress code of the funeral home and is involved in making funeral arrangements and in doing the funeral service. Not all funeral home staff dressed in such attire and engaged in "doing" the funeral are funeral directors. The staff at the funeral homes where this study was conducted applied the term "funeral director" only to persons licensed to embalm. These are the people assigned to complete funeral arrangements, and when one is "doing" a funeral, one is referred to as the "lead man." This descriptive term refers to the fact that they are appointed to drive the car (called the "lead car") that leads the funeral cortege. Any communication between family members and funeral home staff made during funeralization are channelled through the "lead man."

In one of the funeral homes where this research was conducted, approximately half of the current number of funeral directors were licensed embalmers. Consequently, only these people could properly be called funeral directors.

For the sake of simplicity, the term "funeral director" in this thesis will refer to anyone wearing the dress code of the funeral home and is actively involved in working with the public in completing a funeral. This would include those not licensed to embalm, for example, junior and assistant "funeral directors."

Viewing/Visitation and Prayer Service. Viewing/visitations or prayer services are modifications of the old fashioned "wake." The wake, held on the night prior to burial, is a period during which the embalmed body lies in the casket to be looked at by family and friends. When viewing of the body of such a notable person as a king, a president, or a pope, the term "lying in state" is used rather than the term "wake." The modern equivalent of the "wake" is the viewing or visiting. It is the period of time (from one to two hours) when, on the evening prior to internment, the family and close friends come to the funeral home's "viewing room" to view the deceased and for friends and relatives to offer condolences to the bereaving family. If the service being conducted is the Catholic rite, then the "wake" is referred to as a prayer service, a thirty to sixty minute service held in the chapel of the funeral home or in a church, presided over by a priest, and consisting of prayers, scripture readings, and music. In these cases, the body of the deceased is usually viewed before or after the service. Following this modified wake, the family, friends, and relatives come together either at the funeral home or at the home of the bereaving family or friends to comfort the family while enjoying a beverage.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

"Collective bustle" is what Lofland (1978) has called the "massive and often confusing literature" on death, dying, bereavement, grief, and mourning (Riley, 1983, p. 192). Despite this confusion, the emerging field of thantology is indebted to the groundbreaking works of Glasser & Strauss (1964, 1965, 1968) on the effect of death on nurses, the social meaning of death, and the concept of "dying trajectories", to Kübler-Ross (1969) for recognizing the stages of death and the importance of loss in general, and to Feifel (1971), Fulton (1967), and Lopa (1972) for their work on the sociological impact of death.

Despite this volume of literature on death, little is written on the funeral and funeral director, and no research was found that had explored the role of the funeral director in comforting the bereaved. More than thirty years have elapsed since Robert Habenstein and William Lamers (1955) completed *The History of American Funeral Directing*, and since Leroy Bowman (1959/1973) first published his work that was critical of the role of contemporary American funeral practices. Bowman (1959/1973) points out that some of the modern trends in the funeral industry fail to meet the emotional needs of the bereaving.

Other critical reflections on the funeral industry were written over twenty years ago by Jessica Mitford (1963) and by Ruth Harmer (1963). Mitford's (1963) popular exposé criticized the transforming of a sacred ritual into a commercial transaction by the funeral director. A number of more recent authors in the field of thantology, such as, Kavanaugh (1972), Pine (1975), and Kastenbaum (1981) suggest that the earlier critical works on the funeral director were, in part, a reflection of society's attempt to distance itself from issues surrounding death.

In this chapter, the literature on the role and value of the North American funeral and the occupational conflicts of the funeral director, will be reviewed. The final sections

of this chapter will review the literature on the emotional and physical state of the bereaving at the time of death and on two aspects of funeral directors' role that could be regarded as providing comfort to bereaving families.

North American Funeral

While Habenstein and Lamers (1955) and Irion (1966), have given us an historical account of the funeral and funeral director, Bowman (1973) and Pine (1975) have given us an examination of the North American funeral industry. The funeral rite historically was a community event having strong religious overtones. The growth of industralization, health standards, and specialization has meant that funeralization has become more secular and the performers of the funeral rites have become specialists. The practice of funeral directing has changed during the past few centuries. As a specific occupation it emerged from the sideline work of grave digging by local tradesmen. In the mid-ninteenth century this sideline activity evolved; the practitioners became known as undertakers as the role became more established . The contemporary practice of embalming and restoring the features of the deceased, and of mourners gathering in the funeral home for the funeral service reflects the entrepreneurial spirit and the "aesthetic drift" (that is, the "increased stress on beauty-in-externality") of the twentieth century (Habenstein,1962, p. 232).

A number of authors have described and analyzed the funeral rite (Bowman,1973; Crouch, 1975; Turner & Edgley, 1975; Unruh, 1976, 1979; Barley 1983a, 1983b; Kollar, 1983). The funeral ritual, like rituals in general, is a patterned response by the community to a universal human need. Rituals have the power to invoke the past, to direct emotional energy, and to bind the community during times of change. The funeral ritual comforts by providing the social context for the bereaved to express their emotions as well as giving them permission to seek comfort from the community. It is a formalized occasion where the family and community can acknowledge the loss of a family member, where the family

can bid farewell to the deceased, and where the community is provided with the opportunity to support the bereaving family in the restructuring of their lives.

The goals of funeral rituals are to remove the dead from among the living, to provide an opportunity for ritualizing the loss, and to support the living by enabling closer bonds to be formed. The funeral ritual has typically four types of gatherings, namely, the viewing/prayer service (or wake), the funeral service or quasi-religious memorial ceremony, the internment (lowering of casket in the grave), and the gathering at the home after the formal and public sessions are over (Bowman, 1973).

The viewing/prayer service is usually held on the afternoon or night before the actual funeral in the funeral home. During this period, the deceased lies in an open casket and friends who knew the deceased come to offer condolences to the bereaving family and, if Catholic, to offer prayers for the soul of the deceased (Bowman, 1973).

The next gathering, the funeral service, is held in a church or funeral chapel during the mid-morning. Emphasis is placed on the order of seating arrangements, with the casket placed in front of the chief mourners, behind whom sit the relatives. The front pew, the one on the left of the chief mourners, is occupied with the pall-bearers, behind whom sit the congregation. A cleric presides over most of the liturgical action, gives an eulogy, or may request a close friend of the deceased to summarize the accomplishments of the deceased. At the funeral service funeral directors manage the movements of the casket and the behavior of mourners inside and outside the church.

Following this rite, the casket is formally processed to the hearse by the pall bearers under the direction of the funeral director. The hearse leads the procession to the cemetery, followed by the immediate family, relatives, and other mourners. Internment takes place in the presence of the bereaving family and friends. This rite is brief, but the emotions are intense. Emotional intensity is due to the fact that this ceremony is a confirmation that the bereaved is no longer among the living and that a relationship has formally ended. It is comforting for some to "know" that a new relationship has begun between the deceased

and God. Once the internment rite is over, the family is invited to relax and share a meal in the company of close friends and supportive neighbors. This meal provides a context for bonding, supporting, and comforting the bereaved.

The temporal aspects of these four social gatherings, have to be understood within a "temporal model of social time" (Unruh , 1976). The transition between the "arrangement," viewing, funeral service, and internment helps the bereaving by signifying the ending of a relationship and the transitory nature of human existence.

Value of The Funeral

Grief and the importance of funerals is explored by Fulton (1967), Doka (1984), Parkes (1972), Bolton & Camp (1987), Kalkofen (1989), and Saunders (1989). These authors believe the funeral offers both positive and negative outcomes to the bereaved. According to Parkes (1972) the overall attitude of widows in London and Boston toward funerals was positive. While the funeral is a brutal acknowledgment of the reality of death for some, for others the funeral is a source of satisfaction and help. The general impression of those mourners who had a positive view of the funeral felt the funeral drew their family closer together (Parkes, 1972). Saunders (1989) notes that most of the respondents in her study felt that the funeral and the funeral home "had done a good job and had met their needs during a time of immense confusion" (p. 55), but she also added that many had not noticed what was taking place. Fulton (1976) reports that in his study of 565 widows and widowers those who had participated in a "traditional funeral" (viewed the body and were involved with their friends in the ceremony) had identified fewer adjustment problems, and they reported positive memories of the deceased and closer relationships with their relatives: "The funeral for these respondents seemed to have brought the surviving family members close together" (p. 29). Those who requested a non-traditional funeral, that is, no viewing of the body and no arranging for the immediate disposition of the remains, reported an increase in the number of socio-emotional

difficulties. For instance, they "reported greater hostility following the death, [an] increase in the consumption of alcohol, tranquilizers and sedatives, [an] increase in tension and anxiety, the lowest positive recall of the deceased, [and] greater problems in adjustment to the death" (p. 29).

Funeral Director

The uniqueness and importance of the funeral director's occupation within society has been recognized by Barley (1983a, 1983b), Bowman (1973), Pine and Phillips (1970), Habenstein (1962), Turner and Edgley (1975), Unruh (1979).

In the past, the role of the "death specialist" has been assumed by different persons of different status. Within Judaism, this "specialist" was given great honor because of the belief that danger was involved in handling the dead. Embalmers in ancient Egypt were feared because they mutilated a taboo, and a native tribe on the British Columbia Coast, the Thlinget, refused to handle the corpse and asked a local tribe to dispose of the remains.

The role of the embalmer in North America is ambiguous because of its historical roots (Habenstein, 1962). Unlike France, where the embalmer was a physician, the embalmer in North America entered the scene with little or no qualifications during the Civil War. The enhancement of the role of the modern funeral director cum embalmer, is the result of a number of twentieth century developments including inovations in technology, division of labour, concerns about health care, and the rise professionalism. The resultant urbanization, secularization, social mobility and emerging nuclear family have further contributed to the development of the modern funeral home and a greater definition of the funeral director's role. Concurrent with this steady rise in the importance of the role of embalming is the public's negative, or at best, ambiguous attitude toward funeral directors (Habenstein, 1962).

The funeral director's role commences once he/she is contacted by a family member. The deceased is removed from a hospital to the funeral home where embalming

takes place. An appointment is made with the family to discuss funeral arrangements at the funeral home the following day. Issues resolved during "the arrangement" include determining the type of casket, the times for the visiting/prayer service and funeral service, and the number of cars that will be needed for the cortege. The setting for the funeral (church or funeral home), the pall bearers, the music, details for the "death notice" in newspapers, and the information for an obituary are selected.

Duties of the funeral director can be classified into several categories. Some responsibilities are required by the government (e.g., fulfilling sanitary regulations, completing the death certificate, and filing in a burial permit). Other actions are more technical (e.g. embalming), while there are other duties that are non-technical and could be done by family members, (e.g., floral arrangements, setting up chairs, and contacting a cleric and the pall bearers). Funeral directors have noted that the greatest services rendered are "to relieve them of responsibilities, restore the appearance of the deceased and "to give solace...to the bereaved" (Bowman, 1973, p. 41). However, Bowman (1973) notes that in his contacts with the bereaved they did not, except in a few instances, regard gaining solace as a service they had received from the funeral director.

Using Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, Turner and Edgley (1975) describe the funeral director as an actor whose job is to "stage a performance." This "staged impression" has to be in such a way that the bereaved family and friends will attribute funeral directors with competence, sincerity, dignity, respect, and care. In order to accomplish this act, the funeral director performs a sequence of activities that are later seen by the bereaved as an appropriate tribute to the life and memory of the deceased. This sequence of activity is one of the funeral director's fundamental roles (Turner & Edgley, 1975). In this way the emotional pain of the bereaved is channelled by the funeral director, that is, he/she creates the impression of warm and familiar surroundings (makes the funeral parlor decor "home-like") and that the deceased is "sleeping." "Impression management" is facilitated by secluding the "backstage" area (and behaviors not shown to

the public) from "frontstage" area, (activities performed in the presence of the bereaved family and their friends), by using less suggestive language (for example, "passed-on" for "died" "casket" for "coffin" and "coach" for "hearse"), by manifesting a demeanor established by the funeral home (for example, no slouching, yawning, loud talk, and using chewing gum), and by setting a mood of quite reflection in the funeral parlour through the use of music (Turner & Edgley, 1975).

Studies on attitudes held by the clergy and community toward funeral directors have been undertaken by Bradfield and Myers (1980, 1982), French (1985) and Kalish and Goldberg (1978, 1980). French (1985) notes that the overall animosity between clergy and funeral directors has been reduced since the clergy has seen the professional status of funeral directors grow, and since a greater number of people are using the funeral home. French's (1985) study shows that professionalism within funeral directing has led to the emergence of a more cooperative spirit between clergy and funeral directors, and the clergy, in general, are satisfied with funeral home practices. Roman Catholics were more favorable to current funeral practices, Methodists were more critical, and Episcopalians were supportive of alternative practices, for example, the practice of cremation (French, 1985). Although, the view of the funeral director is generally positive, many people feel the funeral director's work conflicts with their values (French, 1985). The clergy have complained about the overemphasis on the body as opposed to the spirit, while the funeral directors challenge the role of the clerics' involvements in the mechanics of the funeral (Bradfield & Myers, 1982). The clergy complain that the funeral is held for its own sake, with little respect for the bereaved, and pricing arrangements continue to be a contentious issue for the clergy.

Modern funeral homes and funeral directors are shaped by the prevailing American culture, that is, the work is "clean", and the business is carried out efficiently by professionals. The specialization in a highly urbanized society along with the prevailing "fear of death" have allowed the funeral director to take on both sacramental (when he lays

out the dead) and businesslike (when he charges a fee to do this work) qualities. Despite the complaints by clergy and general public, the funeral director remains an important caregiver in the community because at death the funeral director is the most visible, most accessible, and the one most comfortable dealing with dead bodies.

Affective/Instrumental Occupational Conflicts

The behavior of funeral directors in their everyday activities and the ambivalence toward their occupation has been investigated by Habenstein (1962), Foreman (1974), Kalish and Goldberg (1980), and Pine (1975). Pine (1975) reasons that since the organization orientates funeral directors, their behavior reflects the setting, and consequently, personal service dimension may be absent from the relationship with segments of the general public.

According to Pine (1975), in order to understand the basis for occupational conflicts, one must understand the operational model of modern funeral homes. The gradual decline in a religious framework and clerical involvement in funerals has meant that funeral directors have adopted a more businesslike response to fulfilling their occupation role. Most modern funeral homes are corporately owned, and they apply the bureaucratic model in their dealings with clients. Webber (in Vollmer & Mills, 1966) says this model is characterized by its clear cut division of labor, technical competence, entrance to the organization through an examination, roles that are hierarchically arranged, and employees that are paid to fulfill their roles in contrast to ones chosen by a special "calling". Since the personnel in a funeral home handle many aspects of funeralization, they can be seen as having the characteristic behaviors of bureaucrats. Robert Merton (in Pine, 1975) says the bureaucrat is one that is chiefly a "passive compulsive conformist" who in role enactment tends to "play it safe." Consequently, funeral directors tend to structure the funeral within a very defined sequential pattern. The outcome of this model of behavior is that funeral directors have difficulty meeting the specific needs of the bereaving.

Besides the conflict that may arise from the organizational model, a further source of difficulty is the emergence of the professional funeral director (Foreman, 1974). Modern funeral directors have many characteristics that reflect the professional class. For instance, they possess a systematic body of knowledge, have professional authority (that is, they decide for clients what is appropriate), are licensed by a governing body, possess a code of ethics, and have a distinct set of norms associated with their work: "Ideally, the professional remains detached from other social relationships with the served, work exclusively within their area of technical competence with objectivity and impersonality, and have the server's best interest in mind" (Pine, 1975, p. 28). It is this "objectivity" and "impersonality" with the bereaving that can further intensify the family's painful feelings. Funeral directors have to walk the tight rope between being efficient and "in-the-know", and at the same time being fully present and receptive to the chief mourners needs.

When funeral directors operate within the framework of professional service, together with a business modeled after a bureaucracy, funeral directors can seem impersonal to family members. This type of response will inevitably give rise to a conflict with the chief mourners. The conflict is between the families expectations for personalized consideration and the funeral directors impersonal treatment of families. Working within the ambiguity of this occupational role, how does the funeral director give comfort to the bereaved? Before answering this question, it is important to understand the emotional and physical condition of the bereaving family during funeralization.

Initial Response to Death

Researchers have described the funeral process as a period of "numbing" for bereaving families (Averill, 1968; Engel, 1972; Gorer, 1965; Lifton, 1979; Rando, 1984; Saunders, 1989). Experiencing numbness is one of a number of attributes associated with the immediate experiences of loss. These attributes also include, disbelief, confusion, restlessness, feelings of unreality, regression and helplessness. The physical expressions

of the initial phase of grief include crying, insomnia, sighing, and loss of appetite. The psychological responses include a preoccupation with the self and a general lack of awareness of other's needs. Furthermore, the bereaved focus on the deceased (Parkes, 1972). This shock phase is the first of three such phases according to Gorer (1965), and it lasts from the time of death until the disposal of the body. It is a period of "intense mourning accompanied by the withdrawal of much attention and comfort from the external world and by such physiological changes as disturbed and restless sleep, often with vivid dreams, failure of appetite and loss of weight" (p. 112). According to Gorer (1965), it is during this period that social recognition is given to the fact that death has occurred by the gathering of mourners, religious ceremonies, and ritual meals. Saunders (1989) notes that this phase is an adaptive one, and it protects the bereaved from the pain of loss by separating oneself from one's feelings. It is when the funeral is over and some return to normalcy has occurred that the significance of the loss is felt. The funeral ritual begins the process of supporting the bereaving following death by integrating the numb and detached "self" with the feeling "self." This is done by bereaving family members having the courage to allow painful feelings to enter their consciousness. It is only then that these feelings can be shared with others. Evidence exists that suggests that the sharing of feelings by the bereaved is desirable and helpful (Lehman, et al, 1986).

Funeral Director and Comfort

While no literature was found on funeral directors' comforting the bereaved, two aspects of their occupational role can be seen as an attempt to meet the comforting role: the managing of a "staged impressions" and the creating of an "experience." Emotional support in general is provided by symbolically creating an ordered world (Barley, 1983a). During a period of loss and disorganization, the funeral director is the "transition technician" that directs and manages this "rite of passage". A series of events are fulfilled that begin with "taking the call, removing the body, making arrangements with the family,

embalming and preparing the body, holding the viewing/prayer service, the funeral and, finally, interment" (Barley, 1983a). Whenever the bereaving family or the general public is involved with the funeral, the decor of the funeral home and the appearances and manners of funeral directors are "frontstage," that is, all the signs, symbols, activities, and behaviors are intended to ease the burden for the bereaving family and the mourners. Any discomforting aspects of the funeral, such as, the handling of the body and the setting up of the "stage," are kept out of view of the mourners.

Unfortunately, for funeral directors, the aesthetics of this "stage impression" can be disrupted by the mourner's grief-induced behaviors. For example, excessive and noisy demonstrations of grief can disrupt the tempo of the funeral process (e.g., remaining too long at the open coffin in the funeral parlour or at the grave site when the director wishes to have the grave filled-in). When it would appear that the bereaving will upset the "dignity" of the scene, and interrupt the pacing of funeral events, funeral directors make every attempt to divert such disruptions by influencing the participant's perceptions (Unruh, 1979). Therefore, the "staged impression" is the medium through which funeral directors render the emotional tone of the funeral scenes more manageable for the bereaving.

Funeral directors attempt to create experiences for the bereaved that are intended to help them cope with the loss, and they are judged for their comforting role on the strength of their ability to create these experiences. Unruh (1979) claims they are "judged primarily by the experiences created and not by any material product" (p. 247). These experiences are created by taking control of the funeral and by the management of risk. There is always the fear that something may go wrong (poor timing, emotional outbursts, indiscreet comments), so the role of funeral directors is to minimize these fears. Therefore, they focus their energies around the "management of...organizational ideology (or ways of doing funerals within the organization and within cultural norms)...personal appearance, and...professional interaction" (Unruh, 1979, p. 249). The creation of these emotionally supporting experiences are a by-product of the whole "staged impression." Funeral

directors believe that the recovery from grief is facilitated by the "pleasant experiences which they themselves create" (Unruh, 1979, p. 253).

Summary

The literature presented has documented the present understanding of the North American funeral and its value, the funeral director and occupational conflicts, the initial reaction of the chief mourners to death, and the "comforting" role of the funeral director through "managing impressions." In the review of the literature of funerals and of funeral directing, explicit mention was not made of the comforting role of funeral directors. While some comfort is experienced in general by the actual rite fulfilling the expectations of the bereaved, (that is, it's power to direct grief and organize support from the local community), more specific comfort comes from funeral directors' work at staging an "impression."

To fully understand the comfort role of the funeral director, documentation of their practices must be made, and then this documentation must be compared with the experiences of bereaving families. In addition, observations of the participant's actions must be compared with participants' accounts (Schieffelin, 1985).

The study was designed to investigate the funeral directors' comforting responses to bereaving families from the perspective of the funeral directors and from bereaving families. This approach was necessary to minimize biasing the results through a priori assumptions about the experience. This foundational study of funeral directors' comforting role will lay the groundwork for further explorations into the personal relationships between the bereaving and funeral directors.

III. METHODS

The ethnographic method was used to collect information on the comforting role of funeral directors. In this chapter, a description and discussion of the ethnographic method and of the problems of reliability and validity will be presented.

The method used in conducting research is determined by the research question, the purpose of the study, and the present understanding of the topic (Field & Morse, 1985; Leininger, 1985; Reichardt & Cook, 1979). From a review of the literature on funerals, funeral directors, and on the initial reaction to death, no study was found that has been undertaken with the specific intention of focusing on the comforting role of the funeral director. However, we do know from this literature that the "impression management" role of the funeral director is intended to emotionally support the bereaving family. The most appropriate research method for this study is the qualitative method, a method that allows the documentation and analysis of the data within the subject's frame of reference (Field & Morse, 1985; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Leininger, 1985; Reichardt & Cook, 1979). Later, knowledge uncovered through this research can be tested through quantitative research techniques.

Ethnography

A specific qualitative method, ethnography, was used to develop knowledge of the elements that constitute the comforting of the bereaving family by funeral directors. The goal of the ethnographer is to understand cultural phenomena from the perspective of the participant (Field & Morse, 1985; Leininger, 1985). The ethnographic approach employs participant observation and unstructured interviewing (Field & Morse, 1985). It is a method of systematic collecting, describing, and analyzing data to develop concepts for

understanding human behavior (Aamodt, 1982; Davis, 1986). This descriptive mode of research has been identified as the first step in measurement (Diers, 1979). It is by means of this approach that names are given to parts of a situation and concepts identified. This basic level of inquiry was used for this study because of the dearth of knowledge on the comforting role of funeral directors.

A focussed ethnography (that which describes some selected aspects of a culture) was developed by interviewing informants (Spradley, 1979) and describing the setting. From the description given by informants, and from observations made by the researcher, the elements that constitute the funeral directors' comforting role were discovered. The open-ended ethnographic interview and the practice of note taking while observing the participants at work were the primary tools used to obtain the data in this study. In using the interview approach, both questions and answers were derived from data given by the informant.

Data Collecting

Funeral directors were selected on their willingness to participate and on their ability to share their experience with the researcher. The bereaving family members who were selected helped to complement the composite picture of the comforting role of funeral directors. With respect to the latter group, a decision was made to collect data from those "recently" bereaved (informants who had gone through an experience of bereavement during the past twelve months but no earlier that the past month) and who were able to give a rich description of their experience of the ways they were emotionally, physically, or spiritually comforted by funeral directors. The researcher deemed it appropriate that no interviews be conducted with family members grieving from a loss that had occurred less than one month prior to data collecting. It was felt that any intrusion made during this critical period of recovery might exacerbate their normal grieving process.

Observations were recorded in a notebook, and later, these observations were coded and used to supplement the information on the comforting elements derived from the unstructured interviews. In addition to unstructured interviews, observational data were collected during the researcher's four months of observations at one busy downtown funeral home (staff of approximately fifteen), and some initial observations were conducted at a less busy funeral home (staff of four) located outside the city. Observations were also made at a number of cemeteries, churches, and at a nursing home.

A small-town atmosphere prevailed at the smaller home, that is, the manager tended to have greater familiarity with the people who called on him for service, tended to arrange most of the funerals, and was present during the services. Since all the staff could attend most coffee breaks, some scheduling work was completed during that time. The same could not be said for the busy downtown funeral home. The director that arranged a funeral did not necessarily participate in that funeral. It was common for more than one funeral to be in progress at any one time. Mourners would be arriving for a funeral service while arrangements were been conducted with one or two different families, and as many as four viewings/visitings were observed to be in progress at the same time. Consequently, much of the work of management at the larger home was devoted to scheduling staff. The mid afternoon coffee break was one of the few times when most of the staff could be together. The researcher had initially hoped to visit a number of funeral homes, but due to the length of time necessary to develop trust with the staff, it was decided to remain at the one busy funeral home.

Sample

Statistical sampling techniques were not appropriate since the goal of this research was the initial description of a little known phenomenon (comfort provided by funeral directors). A non probability sample is necessary to facilitate understanding of factor-searching studies (Diers, 1979). To obtain the most insightful data possible, informants in

this study were selected according to their ability to provide rich enough data to allow the researcher to write a focussed ethnography.

As already noted with regards to qualitative research, it was important to select key informants who have knowledge of more relevant information and are willing to participate (Field & Morse, 1985, p. 4). To locate these key funeral directors, contact was made with the owner of a busy and well-established funeral home. Through a nominating process, other possible key informants were located, informed about the project, and requested to sign a consent form (see Appendix A).

Three funeral directors were selected for this study following the researcher's telephone call to five funeral homes. One director at each of the two funeral homes where data were collected consented to be interviewed. Of the five who consented to be interviewed, four were middle-aged and worked full time, while one elderly funeral director worked part-time. All of the directors had been in the funeral business for more that ten years. One director was the overall manager of a funeral business, and three were employees who also held management positions. Four were interviewed at their place of business, while the semi-retired director was interviewed at his home. The funeral directors were eager to tell their stories of doing funeral work. They detailed what had to be done during the arrangement and funeral service, how they handled and/or avoided conflicts between bereaving family members, described problems encountered with embalming and restoring the deceased so that the body "appeared natural," and how they attended to the emotional needs of bereaving families.

While funeral directors were pleased to share their experiences, one difficulty encountered was fulfilling scheduled interviews. Many planned interviews had to be aborted because of the intrusion of a "call" to attend to funeral business. Six one-hour interviews with the five funeral directors were tape-recorded (one funeral director was interviewed a second time).

Informal contacts with friends located three bereaving family members, and six others were located by two clergymen, one of whom organized a bereavement support group. Following the granting of permission (see Appendix B), eight forty-five minute telephone interviews and one face-to-face interview were tape-recorded and later transcribed. One of the informants requested a face-to-face interview at her home.

Of the nine bereaving family members who were interviewed, two had to be dropped from the study as they were unable to provide data on the role of the funeral director during the funeral. In one case, there was little to report about the funeral director's role with the family since the ill spouse had pre-arranged with the funeral home what was to occur when he died, and in another case, the participant had the support of her family and so was not attentive to the role of the funeral director except to say that "they did a good job."

Of the remaining seven bereaving family members, four participants were retired women who had "lost" their husbands during the previous year, two of the participants were working middle-aged women who had "lost" their mothers, and a male participant, in his early thirties, shared his experience of the funeral of his father. While most deaths occurred in hospitals after a lengthy illness, one participant's spouse died suddenly from cardiac arrest at home. Three bereaving spouses had attended a bereavement support group.

The adequacy of sample size and of the number of interviews conducted was assessed by the adequacy of the information obtained from the sample. It has been suggested that adequacy is attained and sampling and data collecting completed when no new information is forthcoming (Field & Morse 1985).

In the process of requesting permission to spend time at the funeral home, the researcher encountered two conflicting attitudes from management. On the one hand, the researcher was welcomed by management and assured that every effort would be made to help him in the collecting of data; and at the same time, management expressed two

concerns: how would the presence of the researcher effect the work of funeral directors, and how would the presence of an "outsider" effect the emotional climate of a funeral. Furthermore, management was afraid the staff would think the researcher was a spy for management and that observations made during a funeral arrangement might be difficult for family members to bear. Because of these concerns, four visits had to be made before permission to observe funeral home staff at work was granted; and for permission to observe a funeral arrangement, the researcher was directed to approach individual funeral directors.

Once permission was granted, data were collected through participant observation in funeral homes, churches, cemeteries, and at a nursing home. The level of participant observation was observer-as-non-participant, that is, the majority of the researcher's time was spent observing, with no participation in the work role. The purpose of observer as non-participant is to make observations of typical situations and to obtain accurate detailed descriptions of the setting (Field & Morse, 1985). There were some instances where the observer had some participation, for example, when responding to a request from a funeral director to hold doors open, carrying flowers to the church or coach, or helping to position a casket in a church and in a viewing room. The field notes describing the setting and funeral directors' behaviors were used to supplement the tape-recorded interviews.

The interviews began with superficial, broad questions and increased in depth as categories and/or relationships were identified (Field & Morse, 1985). The primary informants were first requested to share their understanding of doing funeral work: "Tell me about doing funeral work?" During the interviews, the researcher probed for additional information, made associations, and verified assumptions so as to gain an understanding from the informant's perspective (Field & Morse, 1985). Examples of questions posed to funeral directors included

1 Tell me about doing funeral work?

2. Tell me about a particularly distressed client?

3. How do you manage families when the family is distressed?

4. Tell me about your understanding of the emotional states of the bereaved?

5. Tell me how you respond to these states?

6. Tell me more about _____?

Examples of questions posed to the bereaved include the following:

1. Tell me about your experience of the funeral?

2. Share with me how you went about contacting the funeral director?

3. Tell me about the most distressing period during the funeral?

4. Describe for me the role the funeral director played in the funeral of your_____ (mother/father)?

5. During the funeral, when did you experience the greatest support? Where did it come from, and how was it given?

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to code data so that categories can be recognized and analyzed, behavior noted, and a data filing system developed that provides a flexible storage system with procedures for retrieving the data (Field & Morse, 1985, p. 97). The ethnographic approach stipulates sequential data collection in order to characterize a situation and provide an in-depth descriptive analysis of a cultural phenomena (Spradley, 1979). The unstructured interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions were then analyzed by the researcher for the persistence of words, phrases, themes, or concepts. As these data became more familiar, broad categories were sorted into smaller categories.

The field notes which were mainly used to describe the setting were reviewed for potential sources of support, biases, or inconsistencies found in the transcribed data.

The elements that constitute comfort began to emerge once the first few interviews were completed. With this information, further data collection became more focused, with questions determined by the data already obtained. The outcome was a rich description of the comforting role funeral directors play when interacting with the bereaved.

To establish the data filing system, the researcher employed a manual method. After copying the transcripts, the persistent words, phrases, and themes were first identified, and then they were coded in the right margin of the transcripts. On the left hand margin, two colored stripes were drawn: one stripe was used to identify the informant, while a second colored stripe distinguished between the type of informant, that is, between a funeral director and a family member. Significant passages were cut out and taped onto an 8" x 11" sheet of paper and filed into a folder that represented each category. According to Field and Morse (1985, p. 105), the use of color coding is a fast method for identifying the data that enables the researcher to trace coded pieces back to their original source. Data analysis continued with each subsequent interview until no new information, categories, or negative informants (informants who present data atypical of the larger group) could be found. Ethnographic data collecting terminates when no new categories or patterns emerge from new data (Glaser, 1978; Field & Morse, 1985).

Reliability and Validity

Kirk and Miller (1986) note that reliability,"is the degree to which findings are independent of accidental circumstances of the research" (p. 20). For this study, the subjective selection of informants as well as the collection and analysis of data made reliability more problematic; however, clearly describing the physical, social, and interpersonal contexts where this data were collected did enhance the reliability. The writing of detailed field notes depicting objective descriptions of the subjects, setting, and

behaviors, and subjective impressions, ideas, and hunches throughout the study minimized accidental findings.

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), "validity is the degree to which findings are interpreted in a correct way" (p. 20). Internal validity involves the degree to which researchers are actually observing what they believe they are observing (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 40). Internal validity is considered to be a major strength of qualitative research (Aamodt, 1982, p. 209) because of its "grounding" in reality through the use of the inductive approach (Field & Morse, 1985). The unstructured interview permitted the researcher to explore the subject's perspective of the situation.

External validity refers to theoretical generalizability (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 40) and is not the goal of qualitative research (Field & Morse, 1985). Qualitative studies cannot be replicated exactly; consequently, the researcher is challenged to demonstrate the typicality of the phenomena observed at a given period in time (Field & Morse, 1985). External validity is demonstrated by the identification of themes, ideas, and concepts from detailed observations, the use of field notes and transcripts, the rechecking of observations, the clarification of the informant's statements, and the sharing of interpreted data with the informants in order to determine that their views are not misrepresented.

Issues of reliability and validity are essential criteria of research design (Field & Morse, 1985; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Several methods (detailed field notes, rechecking observations, and responses) were used in this project to strengthen both reliability and validity. Careful use of the ethnographic technique ensured that developing ideas and concepts would emerge from the data. Ongoing consultation with the chairperson of the thesis committee ensured that there was a logical progression of ideas.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Department of Family Studies, Ethics Review Committee, University of Alberta. Following an explanation of the study, informed consent was obtained from funeral directors (see Appendix A), and tape-recorded verbal consent was obtained from recently bereaved family members (see Appendix B). Informants were given an explanation of the project, and they were told what was expected of them. Informants were told that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time, and they were informed that they could refuse to answer any question during interviews. Following the granting of permission to observe funeral directors at work in the funeral setting, the director informed the bereaved about the nature of this study and requested permission to allow the researcher to observe the funeral arrangement (Appendix C). However, as already noted, the granting of permission to observe an arrangement was given in only one instance. Arrangements were made for the availability of a bereavement therapist in order to provide counselling to any secondary informant who may have needed it. All informants were assured that the interviews and observations would be kept confidential. Tape recordings were kept in a locked file, and in all transcriptions, the identity of the informants was coded to protect anonymity.

IV FINDINGS

Among the major findings of this study of funeral directors was the identification of the elements that constitute their comforting role. Some of the elements of this comfort role were of a mechanistic nature, that is, they pertained to the ritual, the food, and the setting. Other aspects of comfort were associated with the personal qualities possessed by the funeral directors, and these included a sense of timing and movement, an openness to receiving input from the family, an ability to organize the family and mourners, and the ability to care for and elicit trust from bereaving families. Finally, comfort was evident in the specific work funeral directors did in facilitating the severance of the family from the deceased.

This chapter begins with a general description of the setting, that is, the funeral home. Staff duties, day-to-day activities, and the general process of carrying out a funeral are described. This is followed by a section that describes the funeral directors' objectives toward the family and a section that describes family members observations and experiences of the role of funeral directors. The specific elements that constitute the comforting role of the funeral director are described in the closing section.

Setting - Funeral Home

One of the ways funeral homes differ from most establishments is in the clear distinction between "frontstage" and "backstage." This metaphor, borrowed from the world of the theater and extensively used by the sociologist, Goffman (1959), best captures the distinction made between funeral home activities that are intended to comfort mourners from those focused on embalming and preparing bodies. While "frontstage" is mainly

involved with managing the bereaved, "backstage" is preoccupied with the work of preparing the deceased for viewing.

The Champion Funeral Home, representative of more than one hundred funeral homes in the Canadian prairie provinces, has a "frontstage" (or "front region") that caters to bereaving families and a "backstage" or ("back region") that functions to prepare the deceased for embalming and restoration. The distinction made is between areas and decorum where "impressions are fostered" and areas and decorum that "knowingly contradict these impressions" (Goffman, 1959, pp. 106-112).

The "frontstage" on the ground floor encompasses such areas as the foyer and the chapel, while the"backstage" includes all the rooms in the basement. The "family room" and the arrangement and viewing rooms on the ground floor are backstage to mourners except when the bereaving family is making an arrangement, attending a viewing, or attending the funeral service. Limited access to two "backstage" areas, namely, the garage and the business office, may be gained when official business has to be transacted by the florists delivering flowers to the home via the garage area and by clients settling their accounts in the business office on the second floor. Even though some access is permitted, the following two control mechanisms are in place to remind visitors that these areas are to be regarded as "backstage" regions. Near the garage door is a large sign posted above a large bell ringer that clearly warns visitors to press the button prior to entering, and in the foyer, close to the main office is a stairway that has to be negotiated if one wishes to gain access to the business offices. Despite being located in areas approximating "frontstage" parts of the building, access is limited by a number of barriers: for example, a counter inside the door of the main office physically limits one's view and movement, and mourners arriving for a funeral have their view of the office obscured when curtains are drawn across a large window.

When a person walks into the funeral home he/she is met at the door by a funeral director. The funeral director is alerted by a bell that sounds in the main office and coffee

room whenever the door is opened. Mourners are not given the opportunity to enter the office since they are attended to by the funeral director in the foyer. People who do enter the funeral home are either mourners attending a funeral, families coming in to arrange a funeral, or florists delivering flowers at the rear of the building. The only other people seen at the funeral home during the period of participant observation were two ladies seeking employment and a boy requesting the use of the washroom.

While most people attending funerals have an attitude of reverence and respect for the premises and are not inclined to wander into the "backstage," funeral directors ensure that those who do not have a similar attitude do not wander outside the "frontstage" boundaries. When mourners come to attend a viewing/visitation or a funeral service, they are directed to the chapel or viewing rooms. Pall-bearers and the minister or priest are directed to arrangement rooms prior to the commencement of a service. At least two funeral directors maintain guard in the foyer an hour prior to a service, and when people enter, they are directed to the condolence book and chapel or viewing room. This "guard" duty is maintained while the service proceeds. Should anyone escape the attention of funeral directors, would-be wanderers are impeded by physical barriers such as stairways and heavy, tight fitting doors that are boldly marked "Private – Staff Only."

A number of features of the home are intended to lighten the burden of those arriving in a state of shock. These include the general location of the building, the ease at accessing it, and the design and interior decor of the "frontstage." For example, a large free-standing commercial sign visible for some distance, helps with locating the "home", access to the premises is facilitated by five off-street driveways despite it being located on a corner where two busy streets intersect, and ample parking space is provided by two large parking lots.

Though the funeral home has many doors, only one, which opens up into a large soft-carpeted foyer, is distinctly marked "Entrance." From this foyer, access is gained to arrangement rooms and to the chapel. A long corridor, which divides many "frontstage"

rooms from "backstage" rooms, allows access to the main office and five viewing rooms. This corridor area becomes a "backstage" area when funeral directors who do not wish to be seen moving a casket from the basement to a viewing room by people in the foyer secure the area by closing a folding door.

The decor of the foyer is designed to help mourners feel comfortable and relaxed while attending a funeral or waiting to make an arrangement. The busy and noisy streets are contrasted with the peaceful silence inside the building. Any mourners distress is modified by the sounds of soft, semi-classical background music emanating from speakers recessed in the ceiling. The soft, plush chairs and couches arranged around the foyer are inviting, and interspersed between chairs and couches are green plants and small tables on which stand brass lamps. Landscaped paintings depicting scenes of trees standing beside streams and old farm houses hang on oak panelled walls. In spite of a rack containing memorial envelopes and stands holding memorial books located near a set of double doors leading to a chapel, most of the fittings found in the foyer reflect the general decor of a sitting room.

The chapel, accessed from the foyer, is designed to provide for the psychological needs of mourners as well as for their religious needs. Psychological needs are provided by the low ceiling, the soft carpeting, warm furnishings, and a "family room" on the far wing. If family members are unable to bear the strain of the funeral service, they have the choice of retiring to that room. While the decor in the chapel is representative of most churches, some fixtures associated with mainline churches, such as icons, altar, and crucifix, are missing. The chapel is separated from viewing rooms and "family room" by curtained large glass windows and sliding glass doors. The viewing rooms and "family room" are characterized by neat, bright, and expensively simple furnishings. The furnishings are uncluttered, giving the mourners space to move about.

Two different nuances, one reflecting business and the other reflecting a social gathering, are created by the decor of the arrangement rooms. The business nuance is

created by the presence of regular office paraphernalia, high-backed black office chair, a large office desk with pens and paper on it, and a side table with a telephone on it. The social gathering nuance is created principally by the presence of seven cushioned armchairs arranged in a semi-circle around the room. Artifacts that reflect the true business of these rooms include the presence of a rack holding pamphlets on grief, mourning, and bereavement that stands on a cabinet to the right of the desk, a plaque containing a poem on grief, and funeral manuals that lie on the table near the telephone.

Although located in the "frontstage" region of the building, the main office should be considered "backstage" because of the nature of the work performed there. It is separated from the foyer by a large window, and it is staffed by two women who are preoccupied with receiving, relaying, discussing, and updating information with funeral directors, families, clergy, medical personnel, government agencies, and cemetery staff. Underneath this window are rows of pigeon-hole boxes containing papers associated with upcoming or partially completed funerals. The week's scheduled funerals are listed on a sheet of paper attached to a piece of cardboard, and further details of these funerals are contained on a blue hardbound notebook. The office, affectionately known as the "control room," enables ongoing monitoring of activity in the "frontstage regions." For example, a peep-hole in the wall and speakers in the office ceiling provide staff with both a visual and aural recording of events happening in the chapel, while the large window separating the office from the foyer enables the staff to have a full view of the foyer. Despite its "frontstage" location, the "backstage" region of the office is maintained by barriers, such as, the doorway of the office being positioned in the corridor and away from the foyer, a counter placed just inside the office that restricts the movement of those entering, and by a curtain that obscures the mourners view of the office when drawn by office staff. If these barriers were not in place, then mourners "frontstage" impressions would be weakened by the observing or overhearing the staff's "behind the scenes" behaviors and conversations.

The basement, which contains the embalming, preparation, and receiving room, is the most distinctive "backstage" region of the building. It is here that "pick-ups" are received, washed, embalmed, made-up, boxed, and delivered to the viewing rooms on the ground floor. The nature of the work (the familiarity of directors' handling of corpses) makes this region the most distinctive "backstage" region of the building. This distinction is established and maintained by cutting it off from the "frontstage" by large, heavy, tight-fitting doors labelled "Private – Staff Only" and by locating it in a region of the building where a narrow stairway and a long corridor have to be negotiated if one wishes to enter. Other "backstage" areas are the garage containing car bays for three coaches, a "family car," a "lead car," a crematorium on the ground floor, and managerial and business offices on the second floor of the building.

The presenting manners and appearances of staff differ significantly between "frontstage" and "backstage" regions. When funeral directors are in the "frontstage," they are alert and attentive to the presence of clients. Attired in the dress code of the funeral home (dark suite and tie, with white shirt), they are ever vigilant and respond immediately once the office telephone rings or the door bell is set off. When anyone enters, they confidently but demurely approach them and offer assistance, speaking in a tone that is both polite and caring. In general, they dignify the occasion by their dress and erect posture; they comfort by their friendly demeanor; and they provide assurance by behaviors that are focused on carrying out the mourners intentions. When in the company of the mourners, they refrain from touching the casket except when they have to move, open, or close it.

"Backstage" manners and appearances are less dignified than "frontstage" ones. Behaviors there are less guarded and are focused on carrying out a "job," that is, they are directed toward embalming and restorative work. Conversation between staff members is more informal, blunt, and sometimes coarse. White shirts, ties, suits, and shoes are replaced with work clothes, rubber boots, and aprons. This type of dress is never allowed

in the "frontstage." Even if a funeral director, who is attired in work clothes should go and complete a simple task, such as, make a personal telephone call in the "frontstage" region, he/she makes a speedy exit to the "backstage" region when anyone enters the premises.

The movement of staff within the premises is controlled by "frontstage" – "backstage" demarcation. Office staff do not go to the embalming or preparation rooms and any messages are communicated through an intercom. Maintenance staff generally remain in the "backstage" region, and any vacuuming, dusting, or watering of plants that has to be done in the "frontstage" region is completed early in the morning or when no funeral service is being held. The coffee room in the basement is not only the common meeting place for all staff members but also a place where the "frontstage" formalities can be temporarily suspended and replaced by light-hearted banter. These casual and spontaneous behaviors are instantly discontinued once the telephone, or the doorbell rings.

The "frontstage" aura of peacefulness and comfort is distinguished from the "backstage" aura of busyness by the decor, manners and appearances. This difference between "frontstage" and "backstage" of the funeral home may be best summed up by the sacred-profane paradigm used by sociologists (Berger, 1967; Turner & Edgley, 1975) in their sociological analysis of behaviors.

Since "frontstage" activities always demand a plentiful supply of employees for the provision of personal service, the funeral home has a full-time complement of approximately twelve funeral directors. In addition to the support of two maintenance workers and two bookkeepers, this home relies on the services of an organist, hairstylist, and a retired Protestant minister. Funeral directors are categorized as assistants, and junior and senior funeral directors according to qualifications and length of funeral service. Work assignments reflect categorization, and while an assistant or a junior is usually responsible for making a "pick-up," driving the coach, or the "family car," a senior funeral director is assigned the work of embalming, making arrangements with families, and driving the "lead

car" to the cemetery. The "backstage" work of cosmetizing, cremating, and washing coaches and cars, is the domain of specific funeral directors.

The funeral home is open daily throughout the year from eight o'clock in the morning until nine in the evening. When most of the staff go home from work at five o'clock in the evening, a senior funeral director and assistants remain behind. Since many families take advantage of Saturdays to hold funerals, this day of the week is frequently the busiest day of the week for funeral directors.

Doing the Funeral

A number of factors modify the ways of doing the funeral. These include the ethnic and religious origins of the family, the age of the deceased and of the bereaving family, and the cause of death. Funerals for infants have fewer people in attendance and contain little ritual and drama, while the opposite is true for Roman and Ukrainian Catholic funerals. Roman and Ukrainian funerals usually have a prayer service the night before the funeral and often have the actual funeral service in the local parish church. Most Protestant services are conducted in the funeral home, and a viewing (also referred to as a "visitation") replaces the prayer service. However, in order to have a viewing, the casket has to remain opened, and it may not be possible to have a viewing service because of the condition of the body.

In the following section, attention will be paid to some of these religious differences that modify funeralization. After describing the funeral arrangement, attention will be directed to the viewing, followed by a description of the prayer service. This will be followed by a description of a funeral service held in a funeral home and of one held in a church. A concluding section will describe internment.

Arranging

Immediately on receiving a call from a hospital, nursing home, or from a family member, the funeral director makes arrangements to "pick-up" and bring the body to the funeral home and for the family to come in and discuss funeral arrangements. The director requests that the family bring a recent photograph and some clothing of the deceased. (The photograph is used by the funeral director to reconstruct the facial appearance of the deceased.)

"May I help you?" is the address family members receive from the funeral director upon arrival at the funeral home. Upon being ushered into one of three small arrangement

rooms, the funeral director returns to the main office, collects papers, and informs the secretary that he is going to be busy "doing an arrangement" for the next few hours.

The funeral director begins the session by informing the family that since statistical data on the deceased is necessary for the Government's Vital Statistics Department he will commence by asking questions so that forms can be completed. For the next thirty minutes, the relationship with the family is somewhat impersonal because of the nature of the questions being posed by the director. Such questions include the name and address of the deceased, place and date of birth and death, marital status and occupation, religious affiliation, cause of death, and place of internment. Once these questions are answered, the funeral director discusses the funeral arrangements, making notes on a piece of paper. If the family is having difficulties making a decision, the director offers suggestions and an explanation of the implication of each suggestion. At the end of the session, both parties will have decided the time and type of service (memorial, cremation, or traditional burial), whether the casket is to be opened or closed during the service, the number of limousines required, and the officiator at the funeral service. Contact will be made by the funeral director with cemetery officials, the florist, and with newspapers for the inclusion of a death-notice and maybe an obituary.

During the final stage of the arrangement, the funeral director makes a call to the clergyman requesting his/her services for a funeral. Then the family is ushered to the casket room to choose a casket, and they are asked to return to the arrangement room when they have made their decision. While they are in the casket room, the director returns to the office and requests the secretary to type an obituary notice. Having noted the choice of casket and after discussing financial matters, the director concludes the arrangement by presenting the family with an invoice. Before they leave the arrangement room, the director checks the contents of the obituary notice with the family, ensuring that names are spelled correctly and that the family is reminded of the dates and times of the services.

Viewing

Prior to the arrival of the family to the funeral home for the viewing, the funeral director will have embalmed, "cosmeticized," dressed, and laid the deceased in the casket and will have placed the casket in the viewing room. Funeral directors assigned to this task will have familiarized themselves with the specifics of this viewing by reading from the notes taken during the arrangement. Particular attention is paid to specific directives regarding the viewing, for example, whether the casket is to remain opened or closed and whether viewing is only for the family or open to friends. Flowers are placed beside the casket, a spray is placed on the casket, and the lid is lifted back. The condolence book and memorial cards are place on a stand in the foyer close by the corridor. The bell that sounds when the entrance door is opened is switched off. An hour prior to the commencement of the service, one or two funeral directors (depending on the number of mourners and of viewings) place themselves, behind the condolence book stands facing the door. Once the family arrives, the funeral director accompanies them to the entrance of the viewing room and directs them inside. He does not enter the viewing room. "Are you here to see Mr. _____?" is a question that is posed to people coming into the funeral home. They are invited to sign the book of condolences, are handed a memorial card, and are shown to the viewing room.

Anticipating late arrivals, a director remains near the book stand for a period after the start of the viewing; during the viewing, most directors maintain an appropriate distance from the viewing room. When someone exits the viewing room and leaves the funeral home, the funeral director stands in the corridor in order to be ready to respond to them should they have a question. In general, there is little conversation between funeral directors and the family before, during, or after the viewing. The usual practice is that after spending an hour of viewing the deceased and sharing among themselves, the family and friends leave the funeral home. When they have left, the funeral director closes the casket.

Prayer Service at the Funeral Home

Two to three funeral directors are usually assigned for the prayer service at the funeral home chapel. An hour prior to the service, wreaths of flowers are hung from stands that have been placed near the lectern. Once people begin to arrive at the funeral home, they are asked, "Are you here for Mr. _____ ?" The reason for asking this question is to ensure that when there is more than one service that evening mourners are directed to the appropriate viewing room. They are requested to sign the book of condolence, are handed a memorial card, and requested to either remain in the foyer or proceed to the chapel. If they are relatives of the family, then they are requested to sit on the right hand side in the chapel. When the family arrives, they are taken to the viewing room and allowed to view the deceased before the commencement of the prayer service. When the minister arrives, he/she is first ushered to the viewing room to meet the family, and then he/she is ushered to the arrangement room where he/she remains until it is time to begin the service. Some minutes before the service is to begin, the organist takes up his/her position and begins to play some solemn music. Before the service begins, it is common, for a mourner to hand a memorial envelope to a funeral director. This is placed in one of the office's pigeon hole boxes. At the time for the commencement of the service, the funeral director goes to the viewing room and closes the casket. The minister is ushered to the viewing room, and while the family is shown into the chapel and taken to the front pews and when the minister enters the chapel, the congregation stands as the organist plays music. The casket is wheeled down the aisle behind the minister and is positioned in front of the chief mourners. While music continues to play and members of the congregation sing, the funeral directors bow to the minister and march side by side back down the aisle. As the directors exit the chapel, one closes the doors to the viewing room and chapel, and one goes directly to the sound system and adjusts the amplification of the minister's microphone. While the service is being conducted, a director continues to monitor the service through the "peephole" and/or directs people to the chapel, while

another funeral director attends to incoming phone calls and/or completes unfinished business from that day. At the end of the service, one funeral director positions himself near the main door of the chapel, while another director stands at the entrance to the corridor. Family and friends greet each other in the foyer, and after a brief conversation, they leave the funeral home. When everyone has retired for the evening, the funeral director closes the casket, checks for items left on the pews, switches off lights, and locks the premises.

Funeral Service at the Funeral Home

The day following the viewing or the prayer service is devoted to the funeral proper. The funeral directors open the casket, and if it is a Catholic service, a crucifix is placed on the lid of the open casket. While the main lights of the chapel are dimmed, the casket is spotlighted. A "family car" departs to pick up the family, and the coach is parked close to an exit door of the chapel and behind the "lead car." After the funeral directors have set up the condolence book, the memorial cards, and pieces of paper with information on where the reception is to be held, they position themselves near the chapel and corridor entrances and await the arrival of the mourners. On entering the foyer, the mourners are asked, "Are you here for the funeral of Mr. _____?" They are requested to sign the book of condolence and are given a memorial card and the invitation for the reception. They are presented with the option of waiting in the foyer or going to the chapel. When the family arrives, they are first requested to identify the pall-bearers, and they are offered the options of going to the "family room," the chapel, or remaining in the foyer. Many family members choose to go to the "family room." The pall-bearers are brought together and taken to one of the arrangement rooms where they are given a brief description of their assignment.

Upon arriving, the minister is taken to an arrangement room by the funeral director and then is given a list of the music that is to be used during the service. At the appointed

time, the funeral directors take the pall-bearers to their front pew seats; and after they have closed the casket in the viewing room, they direct the minister to line up in front of the casket with the family behind it. When they enter the chapel, the minister leads the way, and the funeral directors wheel in the casket, followed by the family. On positioning the casket near the podium and directing the family to their seats, the doors to the funeral home are closed and the sound system is adjusted.

During the playing of the final hymn, the funeral directors open the main doors of the chapel; and when it is finished, they go down the aisle. Pall-bearers are directed to process by the casket and line up close to the exit doors. The congregation files by the casket and exits from the chapel. Family and relatives are ushered by the casket and back to the seats on the left hand side of the aisle. On completion, a funeral director approaches the chief mourners and offers them flowers from the spray on the casket. The casket is then closed and wheeled toward the pall-bearers who lift it off the stand and, following a funeral director, take it to the coach. The family is directed to the waiting "family car." After the flowers and the "pouch" (plastic billfold containing memorial cards [cards containing a photograph of the deceased and noting the date of birth and death], condolence book, pens, thank-you cards, death certificate, and any articles of jewelry removed from the deceased), are placed in the coach, a flashing warning light is placed on the hood of the "lead car," and the pastor is ushered to it. On a nod of the head from the "lead" man, the other funeral directors, presently standing by their car doors, get into them and move out into the traffic.

Funeral Service at the Church

On the morning of the service, the casket is moved from the viewing room and loaded onto the coach. A "family car" leaves to pick up the family, usually forty-five minutes prior to the commencement of the service. The "lead car" and the coach leave for the church. Since no cars are usually parked at church, the drivers are able to park the coach and "lead car" in front. The main director glances around the front of the altar

surveying the location for the casket. Flowers are set up on the steps leading to the altar, and the folded casket stand is placed in the vestibule of the church. Arriving mourners, who have little contact with funeral directors, either mill around the vestibule of the church or move into pews. The arriving family is met at the church by the funeral director and they are instructed to remain together in the vestibule. The "lead man" calls the pall-bearers together and instructs them on the appropriate way to handle the casket, and where they will process once they take the casket inside the church and place it on a stand.

When the priest enters the church, the pall-bearers go out to the coach for the casket. With three pall-bearers on each side, it is carried to the church with the funeral director leading the way. Inside the church, the director unfolds the stand, and the pall-bearers lay the casket on it. Once they step aside, the priest intones some prayers, sprinkles holy water on the casket, and then marches down the aisle, while the pall-bearers follow. The casket is wheeled down the aisle by two directors, and they are followed by the chief mourners. Pall-bearers are ushered to their seats, the casket is moved into place in front of the altar, and when family members have taken their seats, the directors move back down the aisle. As the service proceeds, the directors may continue to usher people into the church, they may sit in the back pews and listen to the service, or they may go to the church basement and engage in conversation.

As the service draws to a conclusion, the three directors come together at the back of the church; and on a cue from the order of service (when the priest is closing the service with a prayer), they march down the aisle coming to a stop close by the casket. After the priest has said prayers over it, he moves down the aisle with the pall-bearers following. While two directors guide the casket down the aisle, another director directs the family to follow. At the vestibule of the church, the pall-bearers take the casket from the stand and carry it to the coach. While the family, the pall-bearers, and the priest are being ushered to their respective cars, the flowers are taken from the church and placed in the coach. Once

the "lead man" is certain most of the people have gotten to their cars, a nod of the head is given to the other directors that the cortege is about to leave for the cemetery.

Internment

With a warning light flashing, the "lead man" moves out into the traffic followed by the pall-bearer's car, the coach, and the "family car." Cars pull out quickly behind the "lead car" and keep tight formation in order to avoid city traffic mixing with the procession. The pace of the "lead car" is determined by the distance from the church to the cemetery and by traffic density. When approaching traffic lights, the director adjusts his speed so that he has the green light. Despite the traffic lights changing to red, the cortege continues through the intersection.

Once at the cemetery, the "lead car" proceeds to the appropriate "block" and parks. The "lead man," after examining the grave, takes flowers from the coach to the grave site. When the mourners congregate near the coach and when the priest has positioned himself between the coach and the grave, the family is ushered from the "family car" and requested to stand by the coach. With the priest leading the way, the casket is born to the grave by the pall-bearers, followed by the family and friends. Instructions are given to the pall-bearers to lay the casket on the lowering device, and once done, they are invited to move to the right hand side of the priest. Once the family members have been directed to the left hand side of the priest, the mourners are requested to move up and close-in around the grave. After the priest has intoned prayers and sprinkled holy water on the casket, the funeral director bends down to the lowering device and flicks a switch. Immediately, the two arms of the lowering device rotate allowing the casket to sink into the grave; and when the top of the casket is level with the ground, the switch is turned off. Following a short prayer, the cleric turns to the family, and after offering them condolences, he/she walks back to the "lead car." The director turns to the family and offers (if not already done so) flowers from the spray on the casket. As the mourners depart, some of them come forward

to the family and offer condolences, some with a handshake, others with a hug. When the family is ready to depart, the driver ushers them to the "family car" and takes them to their pre-arranged reception. In the meantime, the "lead car" and the coach are driven back to the funeral home; and once the family has been delivered to the reception area, the director returns to the funeral home.

Funeral Directors' Objectives And Family Member's Experiences

Having described the funeral home setting and the process of doing the funeral, we now turn to funeral directors and bereaving family members. Before proceeding with the findings, the elements that were understood by funeral directors to be helpful in relieving the grief of bereaving families during the funeral and the actions of funeral directors that bereaving family members experience as comforting are described (See Table 1).

Table I: Funeral Director's Objectives - Bereaving Family Members' Experiences

Main Objectives of Funeral Directors	**Experiences that "eased the burden" for bereaving family members**
"Help the family get on with life."	Took on responsibility for the funeral. Directed everything so family could attend to their mourning.
"Help the family to heal."	In assuming responsibility for the funeral the family are allowed to mourn.
"Help the people [family] to relax."	The setting and the initial meeting with the funeral director were relaxing.
"Care [give personal service] and still do your job" [conduct the funeral rite.]	Opened the casket during the procession from church so family member could see the deceased.
Immediate objectives of Funeral Directors	
Encourage the family to participate in the funeral arrangement. "Draw them [the family] out," that is, help them to communicate.	The family allowed to personalize the funeral ritual when drawn into the arrangement.
Develop a relationship with the family, "bridge the gap." (The director shares important information and some personal history).	Family member felt as if part of the funeral director's "family." Broke down the "stranger" relationship.
"Get the family involved in the funeral arrangements." Allowed them to give input into the funeral.	Allowed to make needs know to the director.
"Work with the family's agenda " "Do what is right for them."	Family were included in the funeral arrangements.
"Make sure everything goes right" (timing, movement, and scheduling).	The funeral director's sense of timing and organizing the events compared to a "slow-motion movie."
Avoid conflicts between family members (for example, conflicts between in-laws). Buffer the family from "signs of violence."	Buffered the family from the "backstage" region, from the noise of the casket going into the grave, and from impersonal language (the deceased is personalized "Mr. Smith").
"Take away all signs of violence."	"Making the body look beautiful and peaceful."
Remove responsibility from family.	Ritual and Ceremony Funeral home setting Food (Beverages provided after the viewing/visiting).

From the moment of death until internment, funeral directors direct the flow of events, making sure to satisfy religious, cultural, and family norms. While a number of overall objectives guide their work, some specific tasks have to be met if they wish to be effective in meeting their goal. The following were some of the general and specific objectives identified by funeral directors that helped ease the burden placed on bereaving families by death.

"Help the family get on with life" The death of a family member causes the surviving family members to recoil and draw into themselves. Sometimes the impact can be so great that family members are unable to attend to the welfare of one another. This type of reaction is more acute when death is sudden or premature. The death disrupts the family system, changing the surviving members' emotional, social, and psychological roles. The intensity of the emotional reaction to the loss plus the demands to adapt to the change results in some members going into a state of shock. The funeral director operates a social mechanism, the funeral, that helps the family recover from shock. Once they begin to come out of this state of shock, they can begin to assume new roles in the family constellation. Besides separating the dead from the living, this ritualized mechanism, the funeral, also allows relatives and friends of the bereaving to come together and help family members recover from grief. The funeral director's work of directing the funeral is, therefore, an important process that helps families begin their recovery. A funeral director described his role as

> helping somebody at a time when they don't necessarily know where to turn or how to help themselves. But basically, you're helping them to get through that period of having to arrange the funeral and conduct the funeral...so that they get on with their life.

The funeral is a signal to the community that a death has occurred, and it is a "call" to support the family. A funeral director's objective is to carry out the funeral in such a

way that the family is freed from the anxiety of having to deal with its details. If this occurs the family is available to receive emotional and social support from the community. Were the family members to preoccupy themselves with funeral details, then they would be unable to experience fully the support of their relatives and friends. In psychological terms, the funeral director helps the family begin the process of working through their "unfinished business."

"Help the family to heal." According to the funeral director, the bereaving family is "wounded" by a "very serious injury that has to go through the different stages of healing." In order for healing to begin, the bereaving family has to come face to face with their loss. The funeral director's objective then is to present the family with the "face of death" in a way that does not disrupt their memory of the deceased. This helps them to heal:

> Accepting the reality and the finality of the death [allows us] to draw a line and say, "Now we must go on from here. Now we accept the fact that the person is gone, will never be back. We will never see him or her again.

In achieving that acceptance, the viewing of the body is extremely important, and it is prepared to make it appear as life-like as possible. Directors will endeavor to restore even those bodies that have been seriously injured or changed due to an illness:

> The body may not look [like the person), the expression is gone, the features may not look exactly as they were, but what we're doing is stopping the fantasizing, the dreams, the nightmares. They have seen. They know the person is in that casket. Now they can accept because they can see, even though it doesn't look alike, they accept the hair, the hands, the fingernails, maybe a little scar on the hand or something, but they can see. And then they can go on, but until that point, the dreams and the nightmares haunt them in a lot of cases.

"Help people [family] to relax." Even at the best of times, talking about death is uncomfortable, and attendance at a funeral home intensifies the discomfort. A family member's anxiety is most acute during a funeral arrangement. If funeral directors can help families relax, then they will listen better and be more open to their directives.

An initial task for directors is to obtain information so they can attend to the tasks demanded by funeralization. To get this information, they have to break down the walls that exists between directors and the bereaving families. Directors are aware that when families feel relaxed and comfortable after giving this information, they are more likely to forgive directors for any error that may happen during the course of doing a funeral.

An endeavor is made to "get the information but do it in a relaxed manner" so that family members do not feel hostile. One way of helping the family relax, while at the same time getting the information needed, is to spend time talking to them:

> It could be done in twenty minutes, but normally, it takes me an hour to get through making funeral arrangements simply because I spend a lot of time talking to them. I find that maybe I shouldn't be saying things or adding something, but they may be——like this family the other day. He was born in M..... M.....'s where my wife's family is all from. And I said, "Oh, do you know So-and-So?" And they said, "Oh! yeah, I know who that is." Even though I don't know many people down there, it just helped. Now they feel a little more at ease because they--we have someone in common that we know and talk about, "Oh I was just down there a few weeks ago and saw So-and-So" and that kind of thing. And then they talk about that for a minute or a few minutes. It takes their mind off of whatever they're having to deal with, and then gradually, I bring them back again. Then [you] get information, some more information. And then the information for the paper [obituary notice] is also important.

"Care and still do your job." When people are engaged in a business transaction they assume that the parties make logical decisions in an atmosphere of mutual exchange. Money is the normal medium that is exchanged for a service. In the case of death, money is paid to the funeral director in exchange for "doing the funeral". Unfortunately, for the family's perspective, there is little that is mutual in this exchange. For them, this is a service that they had not planned, and one they would prefer to avoid. In addition to the

pain suffered by the loss of a member, they have the added burden of paying for the funeral. They have to enter into some form of a business relationship with the funeral director at a time of great emotional tension. Within this milieu, the funeral director is challenged to balance his professional role (doing his job) with personal service (comforting the family), a challenge that is more difficult to maintain when the family is known to the funeral director:

> When I [funeral director] know the people, they lean on you more, and that's when you can't get emotionally involved with the family. That type of situation is tough when you know someone, and you have to be able to divorce yourself from wanting to care so much for them and still do your job as a professional.

Although the funeral director process is culturally proscribed and routine for the funeral director he/she is challenged to provide a service that is both personal and unique to the family. A funeral is a very personal matter for family members, experienced only once or twice in their lives. It may, however, be the third funeral service that day for the funeral director. Should the director became emotionally involved with a family, then the timely fulfilling of other assigned tasks for that day may be disrupted. A way of avoiding this type of situation is to become more professional:

> We [funeral directors] have to be able to deal with it [the funeral] in a professional manner. Getting involved to a degree, but only to a degree. We cannot get too involved personally or emotionally with the people that we deal with because our purpose would be defeated. We are professionals, and we have to accept that and act as such.

Immediate objectives

"Get them to open up." The family's response to the funeral director during the arrangement is dictated by the stage of their grief. If they are unable to take an active part in discussing funeral arrangements because of their denial of death, then the director must "get them to open up," that is, to "get them talking." They are more likely to be responsive if

the funeral director is an older person and is graced with the art of using "small talk" appropriately.

The initial awkwardness of the family with the funeral director is partially overcome by the family's participation in filling out government and funeral home forms. These forms, made up of pointed and closed-ended questions designed to collect demographic information (for example, "Name of deceased?" "Date of birth?" and so forth), are less threatening than the questions posed during the actual arrangements. This staid form asks for clear-cut and objective information rather than the subjective and thought provoking information of the planning phase of the arrangement. Families are less stressed because these objective questions demand little decision-making skills. In addition, often these types of questions reduce the need for the grief-stricken to make face-to-face contact with a funeral director. (When people are sad and depressed, they feel uncomfortable making face-to-face contact with anyone.) Having obtained this information, the funeral director is able to become more relaxed and have an open conversation with the family. Under these conditions, the family is more likely to open up and engage in a comfortable conversation with a funeral director.

"Draw them out." The emotional impact resulting from death affects the family's communication system. They tend to remain silent, and if they do speak, they have difficulty carrying on a conversation. If the funeral director is to fulfil his role of doing the funeral and of obtaining input from the family, he has to "draw them out." For families who come to the funeral director "in a denial state," the director has to "look ahead for them...make a lot of decisions for them." Efforts are made to involve the family in all the decisions. In order to draw them out, suggestions are made that challenges them to respond:

> They give us a denomination, and we will suggest a church, and [they will say,] "No ! This is what we want." Now, we've gotten our answer. So it's a little bit going [the] round about way.

"Bridge the gap." There is a natural gap between the world of the living and the dead, and this chasm becomes obvious when people discuss death with a funeral director. The director and the work of funeralization is alien to the general public, and this public attitude toward funeral directors is reflected by the family's fear and mistrust. To reduce this fear and mistrust, the funeral director tries to "bridge the gap":

> [When] they're a little more familiar with who I am...I also learn about them and...start to get some of the background of that person. And then I start getting information about the date of birth, where they were born, and sometimes you can add something that you know...and try and bridge the [gap]...."Yes, I remember we had a funeral for his brother back in so-and-so." And so instead of just making it cold facts you can add a bit of story and so on. So you're not always just writing down or they're just regurgitating facts to you. You can also give something back to them and try and settle them down, try and ease them a little bit. That's the hard part, just making them as comfortable as possible but still getting the information and still coming back and getting that information all the time.

When family members are poor at expressing their needs because of the impact of the death, the director is not adverse to having a family friend present during funeral arrangements:

> I like hopefully to have someone else that's close to them because as a stranger [funeral director] they're not always going to relate to you or what you're trying to tell them. Someone else who's close can mediate, can definitely be the kind of person that can help get through the gap...bridge the gap between the two of them.

"Allow them to give input into the funeral." The family is subjected to a number of feelings and thoughts that hinder them from full participation in the funeral arrangements. It is important, however, for the funeral director to make sure that the family participates in the funeral. The more they participate, the "better they feel afterwards because they have done something." By providing input into the arrangements, the family is able to

personalize the service, thereby penetrating the impersonal and automatic quality that is a general characteristic of rituals:

> They [the family] know that they've made the right decisions and that we've let them make those decisions. We haven't made them for them. Okay! People like to know that they're in control. And, you know, sometimes they come in here, and they think that we're going to sit here and tell them what to do. Sometimes it might sound that way, but we always make sure that they have some input. And that's the way it should be. I mean they should make the decisions. It's whatever they want to have happen.

When families make known to funeral directors such personal needs as the placing of some specific clothing or artifact that was characteristic of the deceased in the casket or playing a specific song during the service, every attempt is made to meet them. At the family's request, funeral directors have placed a deceased's favorite baseball cap on his head, a poem, a prayer, and a pack of cigarettes in caskets. Other needs such as the opening of the casket in the church are met provided the funeral director is not over-ridden by the officiating clergyman or prevented by a health department by-law or the condition of the body.

"Work with the family's agenda." During the arrangement, there are a number of issues that must be discussed and agreed upon before the funeral director can carry out the funeral. Family's issues may be very different from those of the funeral director. Funeral directors must drop their agenda, and an attempt must be made to identify and satisfy the family's concerns:

> You can't say you've got a set way of doing things because every family that comes in has a different concern. Some of them, the minute they come in, they're concerned about the casket. Well, you better take them in and select a casket because that's what they're concerned with. Well, let's do it 'cause if you tell them anything else, all they're thinking is [about the] casket. If they want to write the obituary, they've got that obituary sitting there in front of them, and they want to do that. You can't say, "Well, we'll get to that." No, because that's all they'll think about. When you're talking

about pall-bearers, they're thinking obituary. Get the obituary out of the way. Do it! It doesn't matter to you when you do it.

"Do what is right for them." The funeral director is hired to do a service for the family, and his/her role is to guide them along "in a dignified manner," that is, to help the family "make proper decisions" and to "make that grief a little softer, a little easier." There is an emphasis on "doing what's right for them." According to a funeral director, this means that the family has "good feelings" when they return home following the internment. An important way for achieving these feelings is by leaving the family with "a beautiful memory picture" of the deceased embalmed in the casket, and by providing them with a clergyman "that helped them." Above all, it means allowing the family's participation in the funeral despite the pain they had to go through: "They can now say, Hey, we're going to get better because everything was done properly."

"Make sure everything goes right." Anger and blaming others for the cause of the loss are often a family member's initial reaction to death. Family members project this anger onto physicians, medical staff, and one another. They exaggerate these peoples' suspected failure to keep the deceased alive.

Often, the family's anger and blame is subtly vented at a funeral director during the making of a funeral arrangement. The kind of response made by the funeral director to this subtle attack during the arrangement is very important because it determines the on-going relationship between the family and the funeral director during the rest of the funeral: "The hardest part [of the funeral] is basically the first contact, making sure that everything goes right." If there is a failure to respond in a way that meets the expectation of the family, they may believe that the director is uncaring. The resulting anger may upset the funeral tempo.

"Take away all signs of violence." Embalming and restoration are performed in order to preserve the dead for the funeral and to "take away all signs of violence."

Embalming and restoring the deceased buffers the family from the pain of having to see a deceased family member "suffer." The family is being "saved from the hurt of looking at their loved one [following] an accident." Seeing the deceased in the embalmed state helps the family members "get on with life." It is through observing the deceased that "the fantasizing, the dream, and the nightmare" can be stopped, and as a result, the family members can then accept more easily the changed family system.

"Avoid conflicts." The relationship between divorced couples, former and present spouses, parents and a daughter-in-law, sons and daughters, adult children with conflicting religious convictions, and family members' differing beliefs regarding death, funerals, and funeral directors can pose special problems for funeral directors during funeral arrangements. The covert and smouldering disagreements which have existed for many years among these present or past family members often becomes accentuated when arranging funeral services. A funeral director tries to avoid being drawn into such conflicts: "It is a no-win situation." A director in this situation takes direction only from one person (e.g., the executor of the will or the one paying for the service). Disagreements can erupt during the funeral arrangements over question of time and type of service, opened or closed casket, a church or a memorial service, or whether there is to be a reception following internment. Seating arrangements at the funeral home or at the chapel can cause problems when conflicting parties demand "front seat" recognition but refuse to sit together. One way a funeral director handles a situation when two parties are in open conflict is to suggest that one group do something "this way," without telling them "this way" is the other party's idea.

The funeral director's main objective is to help the family return to "normal living." This is partially accomplished by relaxing the family and by opening them up so they can participate in funeralization. Once the funeral director has "bridged the gap" between

him/her-self and the family, they are open to his direction and more forgiving if he/she should make a mistake. Another important aspect of the family's recovery from grief is the viewing of the deceased. This involves preparing the deceased so that the family leaves with a "good memory picture."

Families' Experiences of Funeral Directors

How does the bereaving family experience the funeral and the funeral director? What is it that was important for them when they went through the funeral? These are two questions that will be answered in the following section. This section will begin with an account of the family's emotional condition when they met with funeral directors, and then, it will describe the many ways they were helped by funeral directors.

Bereaving Family's Condition.

In general, bereaving families meet with funeral directors while in a state of "bewilderment" and "worry." Their world is disrupted, and the regular ordering of events has come to an end. Things that seemed normal and routine become abnormal and fragmented. It was no longer just a matter of walking into a funeral home because now it had become "big" and "different:" "I have been there before, but this time it was all different." The bereaved feel alone in the world, and the absence of friends intensifies their discomfort:

> Mary_____[friend] had to go away to a wedding, and [her absence] seemed to put a little more weight on my decision."

> Had we forgotten anything, or is everything [right]. How is everything going to go? I would have liked her to be there. I was lying on my bed, and I was worrying about the next day. What did we forget? Did we forget anything?

Another family member became preoccupied with the mechanics of the funeral:

> Who's going to take care of digging the gravesite? Do we have to think of that? Who's going to take care of all these little things? They bop in and out of your head just non-stop, wondering, worrying about every little thing.

The death affects the family members' ability to recall many aspects of the funeral. They are "in a smoke-screen" and have to be "led through" the whole event. One lady began to describe how she felt in control at the funeral home: "I felt that when I walked into the home I was very strong. I did not break down." Now she begins to doubt that statement: "I don't think I broke down. I don't remember."

When family members adjust to the inevitable death of a member, they enter into a business-like relationship with the funeral director, that is, they are more interested in the mechanics of the arrangement and cost of the funeral.

Experiences that Helped the Family deal with the Funeral

Setting. The setting and the introductory greeting were the first two powerful elements that helped ease "the burden." The funeral home's "beautiful surroundings, comfortable couches, and coffee service", were instrumental in "making you feel at home." The interior decor, with its wall paintings depicting "fall" scenes, its rich carpeting, and neatly organized arrangement rooms, made the family feel welcome: "It didn't make you feel like you were walking into a morgue or a dreary place."

Initial Contact With Funeral Director

One of the first strangers the family frequently meets following a death is the funeral director. While there is a general tendency to be formal when meeting a stranger, this is not the case with funeral directors. Family members are met as soon as they walk into the funeral home, and they are "warmly greeted and made to feel right at home." The funeral director was a stranger who was, "giving [them] sympathies and letting [them] know that the funeral director understood [their] pain and that kind of thing. They were

very much up on how to relieve someone from their stress, to make them feel comfortable in that situation."

The setting and funeral director's special and prompt attention at the door of the funeral home helped relax the family. The funeral home setting and the funeral director's sympathetic attitude set the tone for the arrangements, prayer service, and funeral:

> In order I think for him to do his job properly, he would have to be good at it all. If he didn't make us feel comfortable at the funeral home or make us feel comfortable in our dealings with death, it would be difficult to do the rest of it.

Supportive Aspects of Funeral Directors Role

Directing. Established family roles are disrupted by the death of a member. The missing role played by the deceased relative or friend affects the roles of the other members of the group. The funeral director's role in this confused situation is to assume responsibility for the funeral arrangements and to direct the family through funeralization:

> There's set ways of doing things of course, and we don't know them, and he basically took us by the hand and led us through them all. He explained a rehearsal to us; how we would go through this, and where we would be in the line-up, where the coffin would be. So that when it came to the time of the funeral, everything was automatic almost. It was like we were being robots.

A number of problems, such as, the lack of experience with the funeral ritual, worries, and memory problems, necessitate that the funeral director become involved in leading the family through the funeral:

> He shows us and tells us where to sit at the service. Tells the pall-bearers how to position themselves. It all goes smoothly, but I guess that's their business.

> Okay, we came into the church, and he did usher us to the front. I think they were directing people. I think it more or less happened automatically. We just followed the casket in, I guess.

"Taking on responsibility." With a number of rites of transition, such as, birthdays, weddings, parenthood, retirement, and so forth, there is an anticipation period prior to the actual event. For example, with respect to weddings, much of the preparation work can be done months in advance of the actual ceremony. However, this is not the case with a funeral. Planning ahead for one's funeral is usually not done in North American society. The bereaving family's struggles with the enormous task of dealing with four public events in three days plus the public's denial of death syndrome places great strains on family members. When death occurs, there are a number of details that have to be attended to within a short period of time. For example, government forms have to be completed, cemetery staff and the appropriate local religious leader have to be consulted, news of the death has to be communicated to friends and other community members, an obituary has to be written, and the choice of who will be pall-bearers has to be made. Funeral directors assume many of these responsibilities, and the following remarks reflect its importance for family members:

> Taking all matters out of our hands, you know. He had forms that we had to worry about. There were like these pension forms. The costs of everything. Everything that we had to deal with costwise was all dealt through him. You know the cards. Making up the prayer cards, funeral cards, those kind of things. All those things he took care of. He had forms that we'd fill out. He'd ask the questions, we'd answer them. He'd do all the filling out. We didn't have to do anything. We just sat there, had coffee, and answered his questions.

> They took over the responsibility of the funeral. I felt that way. They give me that feeling. I didn't worry about a thing. I depended on them. I don't know how many are like that, but I depended on them, and they didn't let me down. They are very supportive. They are good.

Embalming or Making the deceased "look beautiful." Viewing the "face of death" is very disturbing and when this is the face of a family member, the emotional pain runs deeper. The funeral director's work of embalming and restoring the face of the deceased

from that of death-like to one of "natural repose" enables the family to accept more readily the death of a family member. The funeral director's art of making the face of death "look beautiful" is an important skill in that it enables the family to look at the face of death. The consequences for the bereaving family of looking at the deceased and of retaining a "good memory picture" is that they can now "get on with their lives." They had entrusted their "loved one" to the care and attention of the funeral director, and he/she has been returned "looking peaceful" and "at rest":

> We had the viewing. I said, "Mom looks so peaceful that I was glad to see her like that, and that I'd like the casket left opened so other people who had seen her in the last five months could see that she was peaceful."

> We didn't know whether we were going to have an opened or closed casket. And because Mom had wasted so much when they picked her up, and they said they really didn't know what they could do for her because she was ...really quite debilitated, and they weren't sure whether they could. He [the funeral director] said, "I'm not sure, [your] mother's not in very good shape, and I'm not sure what I can do for her." Anyway, we had a small picture blown up so that we'd have one on the casket. We didn't go back until Thursday...[and when] we came in the door he said, "The casket's opened. Do you want it left opened?" I said I wanted to see Mom, and so he said, "Oh fine, she does, she looks fine, you know we were able to fix her up." She looked so much better that she did when she was ill. She was dead, but she was peaceful looking at that . He encourages you to see if the body looks ok. So we went in, and we had the casket opened, and it remained opened for my brother although my brother would have preferred it closed. They left it opened because Mom looked so much better. I wanted to see her that way.

Funeral Directors' Qualities

There were a number of qualities possessed by the funeral director that the bereaving family members said helped them ease their burden. These qualities included being open to input from the bereaved, having a good sense of timing, and being organized, efficient, perceptive, knowledgeable, and honest.

Open to input from the bereaved. Despite the funeral director's commanding role during funeralization, the family is invited to "put a personal touch" on the funeral. Input from the family is not only allowed, but it is actively encouraged. The best interests of the funeral director are served when the family is involved in the arrangement process. Families who identify with the funeral support the director's decisions more readily and are more likely to forgive an error:

> He asked us how we felt about that [the music] 'cause he could make the funeral music arrangements. And mom said no – that was something she would take care of. It gave the funeral a more personal touch, our personal touch. We could do it if we wanted to.
>
> And he allowed us to do that [give input). If we needed suggestions, he gave us suggestions. If we needed contact people, he gave us the names of contact people. It was just that simple, you know.

Sense of Timing. The concept of time becomes an important element in the work of funeralization because of the impact of death on the family. Death has disorientated their sense of time, and events like sleeping and eating are seriously disrupted. When these regular events are disturbed, time become disordered for the family. Into this disordered world steps the funeral director. Funeral directors regulate time for the family, and they create a sense of order in family members' lives:

> I really do think that their behavior is comforting because it is organized. I think that their attitude is one of support.

In addition to the funeral rite being grounded in time, there are other time-regulated events that are important to the family. Families expect punctuality, but not to the point where they feel rushed during the arrangement, the viewing, or when proceeding to the cemetery. The following two comments indicate the importance of time for families:

> They [funeral directors] don't live that far from us, and so we phoned [them] after the doctor had come. We phoned him, and he was there within

> five minutes, and they came in the house first, and spoke, and offered condolences.
>
> And he doesn't rush anything. I may say they kept to schedule, [but] he didn't rush, and we had a fair number of family.

Maintain a Balancing between Being Present and Being Absent. The funeral director has to maintain a delicate balance between being present to and being absent from the family. There is a time when the family expects the funeral director to be present, and there are also times when the family wishes to be alone. In order to meet this objective, the funeral director has to be sensitive to the moods of bereaving families. During services, funeral directors have to direct bereaving families into the limelight while maintaining a low profile. There is an expectation by families that funeral directors maintain a presence during services so that they can call on their support should anything go wrong, yet families also expect to be alone since this is a time for "their show." Funeral directors maintain this balance between presence and absence by hovering in the background when there is a viewing, prayer service, or funeral in progress, and by coming to the foreground when they assist families in and out of a church or chapel, when they direct mourners around a casket, and when they escort families to the grave upon arrival at the cemetery:

> He stood there when he had to be there. He stood at our side when he sensed that he was no longer needed or that we didn't, we were more in a private time. You could see him step aside, and then eventually...worked his way right out of the room for a moment. But at the same time, when it was time for us to leave, or when he looked back, he knew when to be there. He was at the right place at the right time.
>
> You can't see them, you know. They're unobtrusive. They get everything done without being in the way.

Being Organized and Efficient. When a death occurs in a family, the members can become so shocked that they are unable to participate in planning the funeral. Those who may be able to reflect on the event may become preoccupied with the past and have a

diminished sense of what is going on around them. This emotional condition is very much different from the world that they observe in the funeral home. In the funeral home, the directors' world is organized and run with efficiency. It is organized by the color co-ordinated dress code of the staff, their apparent composed and methodological thinking, and their ease and comfort at dealing with death:

> Well, I think just that he kept it all organized, that he knew exactly what decisions had to be made, and that we were able to make them all at one time, that without feeling rushed. Now, granted that we were his funeral for the day, as far as arrangements. There was another funeral there. The night we made arrangements, he had a visitation going on, but we didn't feel rushed.

Funeral directors are efficient in carrying out the funeral because they are organized; consequently, the flow of events proceeds as efficiently as possible. Funeral directors draw the family into their efficient and smooth running of the funeral events. This efficiency is seen when moving the casket from the coach to the church, when assisting people in and out of the chapel, when people file by the casket, and when handling people at the cemetery. All these movements are done as efficiently as possible, thereby providing the families with an experience of order and structure to their disordered and unstructured life:

> They direct you, and because they know what decisions have to be made, they're done as efficiently as possible.

> It's [the funeral director's movements around the casket] done with such poise and grace. It's almost slow motion. I got the feeling of slow motion when he was doing it.

Honesty. The general cloak of secrecy that appears to surround the workings of the funeral home industry rests in part on the general taboo about discussing the topic of death in North America. Since the general public is not privy to many of the activities

involved with the burial of the dead, the public tends to fear funeral directors because they believe that they are going to take advantage of them by trying to sell them an expensive service or casket. The families in this study never reported feeling exploited (except in a case that involved the cost of flowers). When such pressure-to-purchase behaviors did not materialize, the families were relieved:

> There didn't seem to be any pressure about buying the highest priced casket or anything, and they left you in the room alone to look around, like looking at a house where the real estate dealers allow you to look around without them interfering with your observations.

> Oh boy, are they honest! There is no pushing. I am not sure what goes on in other funeral homes, but at least I am quite sure probably [what] goes on in many funeral homes, that they kind of push you to buy the most expensive casket. The one we bought was very mediocre in price, but we were not pushed in any way.

"Knowledgeable in all areas." It is usually after the death of a family member that a request is made for key pieces of information about funeralization. For the most part, it is not easy to comprehend this information when going through a bereavement. However, during the funeral arrangements, some families participate more than others; and they are eager to know the rules and regulations concerning burials, the process of cremations, or other available options.

When the bereaved in this study talked about the funeral directors storehouse of knowledge, they said they had "reference power" (that is, giving them positive power based on the fact that they have a storehouse of knowledge that is needed by families). Knowing that the funeral director had an answer should a problem arise helped the family through funeralization:

> They know exactly who to contact, who not to contact, all aspects [of the] funeral arrangements. They are knowledgeable. Even aspects you don't think of they know. They will tell you. They make you knowledgeable in everything.

> He made us aware of the regulations of it all. We gave input into everything. Any questions he asked or anything that had to be done, we were allowed to express concerns or allowed to ask questions if we didn't understand or if we wanted something clarified.

Read Attitudes. At the time of a death, family members find it difficult to express their needs. When funeral directors are able to meet the family's needs without members having to express these needs verbally, the family feels a certain kinship with the funeral director:

> It was like he had a sixth sense of how each person was reacting and who he could kid with and who he had to be very sincere with. So he knew, he knew exactly what he was doing with everybody.

> He just introduced himself, asked what he could do for us, and he somehow picked up our attitude of this-is-a-business-arrangement. He seemed to be able to do that but...still be concerned.

The qualities and skills that constitute part of the role of funeral directing helped ease the "burden" for the family. The outcome of providing this role is that family members felt that a family-like relationship existed between themselves and the funeral director:

> It was like they brought us into their family, and yet they were coming into our family almost. And they made us feel very much at home and very comfortable, and they were at ease with us....I was quite amazed at how easily they fit in and how comfortable they made us feel. So it was like we were one big close-knit family.

Bereaving Family Member's Experiences that were Uncomfortable

In the process of identifying the elements that constituted the comforting role of the director, there were some activities of directors that elicited some negative responses from family members, for example, the cost of flowers: "They [funeral directors] asked about

flowers on the casket, and I said, Yeah, I want one of those, but when the bill came in, I thought to myself, 'Why didn't I ask the price.' I was shocked at the price."

Another concern involved trying to meet people who had come to the funeral.

> The only thing I felt under pressure because they were driving to the cemetery too slowly. Barely moving because I was anxious to get back to the church because I knew people were waiting there. I was very much under pressure, and they seemed to take their time, and I didn't like that. I am pretty hyper. I was anxious about the people in the church that were waiting for us. I mentioned it too, but they didn't do much about it. I guess a funeral is supposed to go slow.

One family member had his father buried in his home town, and the inability of the funeral home to supply a limousine meant that he had to drive his family to the cemetery at a time when he was under much stress: "We could have asked that there be a limousine, and not necessarily that we wanted to be chauffeured around but to drive under stress could be hazardous [to us]."

A more serious example where the conduct of a funeral director exacerbated the bereaving family's condition had to do with the failure, as perceived by the family, of the funeral director to listen to the family:

> I was very turned off by the whole experience with this particular funeral director. He was overly solicitous. He seemed to have no concept of where I was coming from. That in fact this was not a thirty-eight year old who had dropped dead all of a sudden....It was a person who had come to the end of their years, and we were thankful for her life and sad to see her go, but she had not yet died and we were coming to discuss funeral arrangements. And yet there was 'this-soupy-soapy-touch-hand-on-the-arm, oh-I'm-so-sorry' that kind of whole crap. There wasn't any kind of sincerity in it. I wasn't looking from comfort from this person. This was a business...that had to be transacted.

Summary

In conclusion, bereaving families identified the ritual, the features of the funeral home, and a number of qualities and skills possessed by funeral directors that helped in

easing their burden. Features of the home that comforted the bereaving families included its "frontstage" decor, "beautiful surroundings", "couches," and "coffee service." Skills of the director that comforted the bereaving families included directing the process, making the bereaved "look beautiful," being organized, and being efficient, and qualities that comforted bereaving families included openness and honesty, having a storehouse of knowledge, being perceptive to families needs, having a sense of timing and of presence, and being able to "take on responsibilities." Despite a few negative experiences, the general consensus of the bereaving families was that the features of the funeral home and the skills and qualities of the funeral directors helped them cope with their loss.

Comfort and Funeral Directors

This section list the elements that were intended to "ease the burden" for bereaving family members or were experienced as supportive to family members. They are divided into three categories: *mechanistic comfort*, those elements associated with the setting, ritual and food; *personal comfort*, those elements associated with the person of the funeral director; and elements such as *embalming* and *restoration work* that comforted the family when they had to detach from the deceased.

Mechanistic Comforts

Ritual and ceremony. Family members expressed satisfaction with the way the ritual and ceremony carried them through the funeral.

Funeral home setting. Designed to help people relax.

Food. Beverages provided after the viewing/visiting. An occasion for mourners to meet the family.

Personal Comfort

The following is a list of funeral director's qualities and skills that were intended to "ease the burden" for family members. These qualities were experienced as helping the family cope with the "loss":

Directing the funeral. The family were relieved that the funeral director assumed many details of the funeral.

Developing Trust ("Bridging the gap"). Funeral directors made efforts to get to know families and allowed them to give their input during the funeral arrangements.

Caring ("Doing it their way"). Shown by respecting the needs of the family.

Timing. The funeral events are timed so that there is no disruption. Must be seen in the light of the bereaving family's experience of disorder and a loss of their sense of time.

Movement ("Slow-motion movie"). Reflected in the movement of mourners, the casket in and out of the church/chapel, and the cortege to the cemetery.

Organized. An aspect of the work of directing.

Connecting. The funeral director connects the family with other agencies, for example, the clergy, cemetery staff, medical officer, newspapers, and so forth.

Keep the family together. The family are brought together for the arrangement.

Buffering. Protect the family from "backstage" regions of the funeral home and ensure that the casket silently descends into the grave.

Allowing for input. Encourages the family to "personalize" the service.

Language. Appropriate use of language, for example, refer to the deceased as a person when in the company of the family.

Comfort by Facilitating Severance and Remembrance

Embalming and *restoration work* ("Take away all signs of violence"). Making the body "look peaceful."

In order to comfort the family, the funeral director has to have an understanding of their emotional discomforts. Two physical health terms, sickness and injury, were used by funeral directors as metaphors to describe the family's emotional state following their loss. The family was described as being "sick" and "wounded," and in both cases, an operation was needed if the patient was to fully recover. The funeral rite and funeral directors are important in carrying out this operation:

> It's like you've cut off an arm, and it's going to take awhile [for] that arm to heal. You're going to have to look through all the stages of the operation and the adjustments and so forth. This is psychologically the same thing. It's a wound. It's a very serious injury that has to heal, and it has to go through the different stages of healing

> We're working, we're living, and all of a sudden we start feeling bad, we get sick. So we go to the doctor. The doctor examines us, and he says, "Yes, you've got this and this problem, and we're going to have to operate."

Anger is one of the more frequent emotional reactions directed at funeral directors by the bereaved. This emotional is aroused because the funeral director is a stranger who asks the family personal questions about something they do not wish to talk about:

> They're at a loss because immediately the death occurs and they go through this [guilt] stage, the various stages of grieving, the denial first of all, and the other stages that lead to the final acceptance and of looking at reality. They may be in a stage of denial, which is difficult to deal with. They may be in a stage of guilt, which is also a difficult situation, but first and foremost, I think it is the anger. And of course, we start discussing funerals [but we are strangers and], they're not really sure that they want to discuss the things that we have to discuss with them.

The funeral director tries to make them aware of their condition and uses a metaphor to describe their reaction to death:

> There's guilt, there's anger. It's all bottled up, and I say to them, "Now, alright, I look at you right now like a kettle of water. And you've just been sat on a red hot burner, and you're boiling inside. Now if we do that with a kettle and we plug that spout, something's going to burst someplace. That pressure is going to stay there. Please, someplace, open that spout. Let the pressure out."

Working from these metaphors, the funeral director attempts to comfort the bereaved. The funeral director begins by encouraging them to participate in the funeral. By having to deal with the funeral service, family members are challenged to "let the steam out." This is one process that is used to heal the wounded.

In this study, three types of comfort were identified. One type of comfort, *mechanistic comfort,* was provided by the setting and the services. A second type of comfort, *personal comfort,* was provided by the skills and qualities of the funeral director. A third type of comfort, one that helped separate the family from the deceased, was provided by the funeral director's specific attention to preparing the deceased for viewing and by the mementos (flowers and pouch) given to the family.

Mechanistic Comforts

The Ritual. Rituals are the patterned words and actions that people use to give structure and coherence to their world. This stabilizing force becomes most important during rites of passage. During rites of passage, individuals and families have to be comforted as they pass from one stage to another. The ritualistic behaviors demanded by the rite normalize their seemingly abnormal feelings. In observing others participate in similar behaviors, they realize that others are going through a similar experience, thereby making something extraordinary somewhat ordinary.

During this period of grief, the bereaved suffer from depression, sadness, and loneliness, and the basic rituals associated with eating, sleeping, and relating to others are disrupted. It is during such periods that people need the comforting support of others. But since family members are in a state of discomfort, caught up in their woundedness, it is difficult for them to express their need for comfort to the community. The funeral ritual, made up of socially patterned behaviors, involves the bereaving family in a community

activity. At the same time, it provides an arena where the community can offer physical and emotional comfort to the family. In participating in this drama, the family is engaging in two mutually complementing processes. They are given the support to disengage from the deceased as well as challenged to accept support from their extended family and friends.

This drama begins in a very private and localized setting (the arrangement room), moves to a less private setting (the viewing or prayer service), and concludes with the more publicly accessible funeral rite of internment and reception. Through the ceremonies of this rite, the bereaving family is drawn from a private to a public act:

> There's set ways of doing things of course, and we don't know them, and he basically took us by the hand and led us through them all. He explained...how we would go through this and where we would be in the line-up, where the coffin would be. So that when it came to the time of the funeral, everything was automatic almost. It was like we were being robots.

These rites allow the family to say their goodbyes to the deceased as well as invite friends to approach the family and offer them condolences in the form of handshakes, hugs, and donations, for example, flowers are given for the service or money for the family's favorite charity. It is also an occasion for the neighbors or some fraternal organization to support the family by preparing a meal. This gathering together and sharing a meal in the company of relatives and friends distracts the bereaved from their sorrow. While the family feel emotionally "lost" because of the death, they are "found" amongst their friends. They are "found" in the sense that they become the center of attention, and they receive emotional support and comfort from their community. This rite of transition provides the family with the comfort and strength to deal with the member's death:

> It's [the funeral] hard to deal with in terms of this is the last. It puts an ending to it all, but at the same time, it's final, puts it to rest. I mean, this sounds cold, but...this is the end, you know. And you breath a sigh of relief because the actual fact of the whole funeral process is done with. There's no more feeling of pressure, I guess. Throughout it all, there was always a sense of pressure.

Setting. The funeral home is the setting for most funerals in North America. While there continues to be a demand for the local parish church to carry out some aspects of the prayer and funeral services, there is a growing reliance on the funeral home to conduct the funeral rite. This change in setting is due in part to the decline in religious belief and church attendance and the rise of professionalism.

"Funeral homes" are designed to provide a "homey" atmosphere for the bereaving family. When family members walk into this "home," they are surrounded by such obvious physical comforts as soft carpets, couches, and soft music playing in the background. Aesthetically comforting furniture, such as, armchairs and coffee tables, are symmetrically placed in the foyer and in the arrangement and viewing rooms. Finally, a comforting visual effect is created by the wall-paintings, by flowers adorning coffee tables, by the rich, wood-panelled walls, and by the solid oak doors. Anything that would take away from the "homey" effect is banished to the "backstage" region. For instance, the business office, which reflects the commercial characteristics of the "home," is not visible to mourners since it is located on the second floor.

Food. More and more funeral homes are equipped to serve beverages to mourners after a viewing or prayer service, and some have a large room where a reception can be held following the funeral. The funeral director helps the family visit with relatives and friends after a viewing or prayer service by offering them a beverage. It helps the family members share their grief with their relatives and friends, and it provides the occasion for relatives and friends to offer condolences. Since this service is in the evening, and since it is more informal in tone than the funeral service, it becomes an important element in helping families adjust to the stressful funeral events that lay ahead:

> So when I asked them [funeral directors] if we could have coffee, "Oh sure!" So somebody went up there and made coffee, and of course, most

> of the people went up there. That was really nice. That was so important I will never forget it. You have a chance to talk, and you don't have to go home. I would find it very hard to have a lot of relatives come back to my house and make coffee, serve cake, and whatever. Some relatives, a lot of relatives come from out of town, so that was really the place to have it, the best feature about their home. It was great. Then the funeral home is there to serve you. I mean, I'd never go anywhere else.

Not all funeral homes are equipped to offer this service, and its absence was noticed by a family member:

> The casket was closed, so the body was not visible, but we did have an evening in which people came to the funeral home, and we were there to talk to them, and we didn't have food....When you think of wakes, I always think of food. Sure there was no food; in fact, I doubt if there was tea. That's interesting. I think that would be a good addition to a funeral home. I don't know if there was any tea for people, and I never thought of that.

Personal Comfor

Funeral directors believe that they are the surgeons who "are going to have to operate" on those experiencing grief if they wish to alleviate their discomfort:

> Now we know that this cutting, that operation is going to hurt, but we have to go through this hurt, this pain of this operation to try and get well and get back to a normal living.

Beginning with "directing," a number of examples attest to the many ways the funeral director attempts to operate on this "wound" and help restore the family system to a healthy state.

Directing. The funeral director is charged with taking responsibility for directing the many events of funeralization. When the funeral director assumes responsibility for funeralization, the family can forget about the details of the funeral and feel free to mourn:

> Like it's [doing the funeral] really good 'cause when you leave [the arrangement room] you know the next time you go back you can go through and you can be a mourner, and I think that's important.

> They took over the responsibility of the funeral. I felt that way. They give me that feeling. I didn't worry about a thing. I depended on them. I don't know how many are like that, but I depended on them, and they didn't let me down. They are very supportive. They are good.

Being Patient in Order to Develop Trust – "Bridging the gap." Usually funeral directors and family members are unknown to each other. If the funeral director is to be effective in carrying out the funeral rite task in a "dignified manner" and in a way that is comforting to the bereaving, then a level of trust must be developed between them. A way of facilitating this trust is by allowing and encouraging the family to help plan the funeral. With the development of this trust, family members feel more at "home" with the funeral director.

The funeral director needs patience in order to acquire the family's help in making the funeral arrangements. The family members are in shock and preoccupied with the past; therefore, they have to be given time to collect their thoughts, and they cannot be rushed through funeralization:

> Whatever happens in that interview room is important to this family; how you act at that particular time is important to them. And so we have to understand that, and we have to be patient. We have to wait for the right time and be able to say, "Now, okay, it's all very well," and understand and share with them a little bit, maybe your past experiences or maybe something that's happened to you. And for them to be able to say, "Well, I think now it's okay that we can go ahead with this because, well, we can trust you. We think that you can understand what we're saying."

> I usually ask questions about what happened and find out what the person did and so on and background, maybe a little bit on some of the family. I introduce myself, and if they know my family, they want to know which son I am...and so we try and bridge that gap a little bit so that they're a little more familiar with who I am and also I a learn a little more about them and then start to get some of the background of that person. And then I start getting information where the date of birth, where they were born, and sometimes you can add things to try and bridge, "Yes, I remember we had a funeral for his brother back in so-and-so," and so you can, instead of just making it cold facts, you can add a bit of story and so on. You're not always just writing down, or they're [not] regurgitating facts to you. You can also give something back to them to try and settle them down, try and

> ease them a little bit. The hard part is just [to] make them as comfortable as possible but still getting the information, still coming back and getting that information all the time. Now they can feel a little more at ease because they have someone in common that maybe we know and talk about. And then they talk about that for a minute or a few minutes. It takes their mind off of whatever they're having to deal with, and then gradually I bring them back again.

With the development of trust between the parties and the fact that the funeral director has already taken on the responsibility for directing the funeral, the family can now feel relieved about completing the arrangements:

> They [the family] are appreciative of the fact that suddenly this is all over. It's all done and the burden has all been lifted from them. So this is what we're [funeral directors] here for.

Caring - "Doing it their way." Taking care of the family's needs is another way the funeral director comforts the bereaved. This is accomplished by listening to what they say and responding accordingly. Again, responding to the family's needs allows them to have input into the service. A funeral director describes comforting as

> making it [the funeral] as easy as possible for them. [It means making them] feel comfortable in getting through the arrangements and making it as friendly as possible. And most situations [in making people comfortable] a lot of ways are similar to what you want to do, but every situation is maybe a little bit unique in how they are done. And I guess the approach is, how do you approach people? How do you make them comfortable? How do you relate to a person rather than how does somebody else?....How effective am I going to be to those people? Do they feel that I've given them what they wanted? And hopefully I have. And that's the understanding and the caring part. And listen, I know it's not easy for you. I know it's tough. You're going through a tough time. I'll make it as easy as I can on you, and as comfortable as I can on you, and we'll just get through it.

The funeral director exhibits a caring attitude by regularly checking on the family members' feelings as they progress through funeralization. This "checking," which frequently occurs before the public viewing and at the end of the service is important for the family because they recognize that they are important to the director:

> Usually what I'll do is I'll talk to them [the family] prior to the service time and make sure that the viewing was okay, that there wasn't any adjustments that they wanted to make, and then I'll confirm with them when they'll be here.

Timing. The whole event of the funeral rite is regulated by time. Fulfilling this demand requires the full attention of the funeral director. Any slips will inevitable affect the mood of the bereaving. The funeral director guards against any slip by standing at the door of the funeral home at least one hour before the ceremonies begin to receive the family and, again, by departing early enough from the funeral home to transport the family to the church.

> [To have a good funeral] ideally everything would go smoothly. Your pall-bearers would all be on time, the family would all be on time, the clergymen would also be on time, and the appearance of the deceased would be pleasing. And most of the time, that happens. If you've done your job right and get everything coordinated right, everything will go fine.

The funeral cortege's steady movement through city traffic is made possible by warning lights on the "lead" car, magnetic name plates placed on the hood of each car in the procession, and, if the funeral is large, the assistance of the police. The funeral director's greatest fears are that some events may be delayed by factors such as weather, traffic, poor communication between funeral directors and cemetery staff, or the uncontrolled behaviors of grieving family members.

Movement: The Presence and Absence of the Funeral Director. "Movement" and "presence" are closely associated with "timing." Movement is associated with bringing the casket in and out of the church or chapel, with opening and closing it during the service, and with directing the family and friends around the casket, in and out of the church, and at the cemetery. All the movements must be precise and purposeful. For example, when the casket has to be moved into the church, it has to be done in one sweeping movement and

end up centrally located in front of the altar. Also, when it is closed, the funeral director has to ensure that the casket lining is not exposed and that the cover is silently latched. The funeral director tries to maintain this ease of movement in the drive to the cemetery and at the cemetery:

> It's [movements during the funeral] done with such poise and grace. It's almost slow motion. I got the feeling of slow motion when he was doing it.
>
> And there was the service, and he sort of tells the pall-bearers how to position themselves 'cause it all goes so smoothly, but I guess that's their business.

There are time when the funeral director's presence is comforting, and there are times when his absence is comforting. In general, the family is comforted by his presence when there is a need for direction, that is, when they have to move in and out of the church or chapel and at the cemetery. It is a subtle kind of presence because the funeral director must be as unobstructive as possible, gliding in and and out of the scene like an actor on the stage. The funeral director cannot distract from the central players, that is, the family. However, there are also times when the funeral director's presence is seen as an intrusion into the family's personal affairs, for example, when the family is trying to come to a decision among themselves concerning the arrangements, or when they are at the viewing or prayer service. Even when the funeral director is absent from the scene, he/she must always make him-/herself accessible for any emergency needs of the family; and when he/she has to be present, it must be in such a way that the spotlight is not taken off the family.

Organized. Closely allied with a sense of timing is organization. The funeral director's ability to organize the funeral, referred by one family member as "being up on detail," compensates for the bereaving family's disorganized mental state. The family

members' thoughts are controlled by emotions that prevent them from scheduling all the elements surrounding a funeral. The funeral director, however, is able to organize the family's world with respect to the deceased. The funeral director takes most of the responsibility for arranging the funeral out of the family's hands, for example, telephoning the clergy, contacting cemetery staff regarding opening a grave, making arrangements for the delivery of flowers, printing of memorial cards, the issuing of the necessary documents for families to claim airline travel deductions, and so forth. Funeral directors organize the movement of people at the funeral home, church, and cemetery, and they anticipate events and are ready to move in and keep the ritual on schedule. They also organize family members and pall-bearers with respect to moving the casket in and out of the church:

> I really do think that their behavior is comforting because it is organized. I think that their attitude is one of support. Well, I just think that they do appreciate that you're grieving and that they respect that, and therefore, their behavior supports grieving, and that's the best I can say.

Connecting. Mourning families feel separated from the world and from each other because of the death. The ongoing interaction that normally takes place between people is in sharp contrast to the interaction taking place between bereaving families and others. Bereaving families feel detached from each other and from others, therefore; the funeral director endeavors to connect the family to each other and to self:

> Very often, in the case of a family who is scattered, sometime we will put off the first interview for a day or even two days after the death in order to give some of the family members a chance to come together. And sometimes they will meet in our office; and it's the first time they've been together since the death. And so, what happens is that of course there's a lot of emotion, and when they first meet, we will withdraw from the office at that particular time and give them time to talk a little bit and to have their emotional stress kind of under control. And so it gives them time to relax and to feel a little bit at ease about what they're doing.

As families do try to buffer each other, sometimes the funeral director has to break down the barriers some family members have put up to protect the chief mourner:

> I [family member] took the role of basically relieving everything for my mom to make sure that everything that needed to be done I would do. And so if there was anything that the funeral director wanted or needed to know, he contacted me, and he dealt with me.

In other cases, the adult children may not invite the chief mourner to the arrangement room because they think the arrangement process is emotionally too difficult for that person. Funeral directors believe that it is important for the chief mourner to go through the arrangement process if they wish to be healed:

> You can give them advice and let them make decisions, and then they feel a part of what's happening. The things that are sometimes upsetting to a funeral director is mom dies and she's 80 years old, dad's about the same age. They don't let dad come in and make the funeral arrangements. Kids come in and make the funeral arrangements. So you say, okay, "Smith, Florence, she's a widow?" "Oh, no, she's married. Dad's still living." "Where is he?" "Oh, he's at home. We didn't think we should put him through this." And you feel like saying, "You stupid idiots! Like, what's the matter with you? You don't think he was married to this lady for a long time, raised you kids, you don't think he can decide how he wants to bury her?" But you can't tell them that. That's upsetting. And the poor old guy is left out of all the decisions.

In addition to bringing them together as a family, the funeral director also tries to connect with their feelings:

> I like to put myself in their shoes, see if I can become almost a part of their family. As the one girl said there [letter of thanks], "You laughed and you cried with us."

Keep the family together. The family is kept together during the services, and at the cemetery. While they wait in the chapel for the service to start, the funeral director suggests that they relax in the "family room"; and when the service is about to begin, they are ushered to the chapel. When the service is at the church, the family is ushered to the side, and they wait there as a group until the funeral director is ready to bring the casket in from the coach. The funeral director ushers the family to the coach and requests that they

proceed as a family behind the casket. At the cemetery, the family is ushered as a unit to the left hand side of the clergyman. By keeping them together as a group, the funeral director gives the family a sense of solidarity.

Buffering. At the time of death, family members are susceptible to such feelings as guilt, anger, and depression. They are very vulnerable to the comments, remarks, and behaviors of the funeral director. Discussing issues related to the church may evoke some feelings of guilt about their religious practices. Asking questions about the nature of the relationships between family members, especially between a former and present spouse or between adult children from a blended family and the deceased, may evoke anger if "unfinished business" exists between the parties. Also, general information about the deceased can intensify the family members' already depressed condition.

Buffering is a method used by the funeral director to reduce the intensity of the family's emotional responses. They may do this by going slowly during the arrangement and focusing on the provision of personal service or by becoming more objective and playing a more professional role:

> You have to go slow, go really slow, but mostly, they're not looking at us as being part of them kind of thing. They're just looking to us for guidance and to get the job done, so you have to be more professional. And quite often with people that are more distraught, you have to be more professional and, to the point, succinct, if you will.

If the the family is not comfortable dealing with matters related to their church, the funeral director buffers them by offering them the services of the minister associated with the funeral home. Prior to the service, the minister is introduced to the family. The minister talks to them on a first name basis about the life of the deceased, and from these snippets of information gleaned from his talk with them, he composes a sermon that has a general theme of love and is specific to the deceased. Funeral directors are confident that

the minister's remarks during the service will not intensify the guilt; instead, they are sure it will ease some of the "burden."

Funeral directors buffer the family from the noise made by the casket as it descends into the grave. Sometimes this descent makes a scraping noise as the casket touches the sides of the grave. Funeral directors position themselves on each end of the grave, and they swing the descending casket away from that side of the grave where it makes contact.

Allowing for Input. The rite associated with funeral services is proscribed by the culture, and the order of events is dictated by the rite. It is the ordering of events that helps give the family members a sense of control of their world. A general weakness of the rite is that little allowance is made for personal input into some of the events. The funeral director, however, invites people to personalize the service by giving them an opportunity to choose the times for the funeral service, the type of internment (burial or cremation), the type of casket, and the type of music:

> He asked us how we felt about that 'cause he could make the funeral music arrangements. And mom said no that was something she would take care of. If it gave the funeral a more personal touch, our personal touch, we could do it if we wanted to.

When the family is holding the services in a funeral chapel, the family members have a greater choice regarding the time to open the casket and the general order of the service. The services in a church may be subject to the policies laid down by the clergy:

> They may decide that they want to have the casket opened, and I'm [funeral director] saying, "You're going to have to ask the clergyman. It's not our church or whatever. You'd have to make sure; find out from that person whether they can have the casket opened before or after or something." Most case, we don't. I've never opened a casket inside a church unless I've got permission from the priest or clergyman.

When a bereaving family feels that their needs have been listened to and taken into account when arranging the funeral, they feel more connected with the funeral events. The fact that they are offered alternatives gives them a sense of participation and of "owning" the occasion. It becomes their funeral and their day to say "goodbye" in a very personal and tangible manner.

Language. Since language has the power to evoke feelings, the greater the size of one's vocabulary the greater is their ability to express feelings. Since North Americans have a tendency for denying death only a limited vocabulary has been developed to help one express one's feelings about death. This is unlike the legal, economic, and scientific fields where there is a wide variety of words. In addition to the limited number of words describing death issues many of the terms are couched in a language that is less stressful. Funeral directors recognize this and use terms that are less emotionally charged. The terms "corpse" or "body," are replaced with "deceased," or with the proper name of the deceased, for example; "Are you here to see Mr. Smith (the deceased)." The term "casket" has replaced "coffin," and "coach" has replaced "hearse." The language of greetings between the bereaved and the funeral director are muted, and rather than say "Good day" or "Good morning," the funeral director introduces him-/herself and informs the family that he/she is at their service during the funeral. No greetings are offered during this introduction.

Comfort By Facilitating Severance

Pain and discomfort are associated with many kind of separations. A pain, experienced as a "let down," results from separations such as the ending of a pregnancy, the detaching of parents from their adolescent children, and a family member's death. When the degree of emotional discomfort interferes with normal living, support groups are

attended, and/or therapists are consulted. With respect to death, the funeral director attempts to reduce the emotional pain by helping the family face reality and "end their nightmares." The main event used by the funeral director in helping the family "go through the hump" and be "restored to normal living" is the presentation of the body for viewing.

Embalming – Making the body "look peaceful." The face of death is ugly because it goes against our dreams and hopes. It is antithetical to our age, an age that strives for success. Our very natural instinct fights against death, and when it occurs, we are challenged to question our very "modus operandi."

The funeral director gives the family the comfort and strength to confront death. This results in the family being able to re-establish their family structure and return to "normal living." Family members are able to confront the face of death because the funeral director has made the face of death less lifeless and more life-like. The funeral director presents the body in such a way that the family goes away with an impression that is more in keeping with their long-term memory of that person:

> The body may not look, that expression is gone, the features may not look exactly as they were, but what we're doing is stopping the fantasizing, the dreams, the nightmares. They know the person is in that casket. Now they can accept because they can see. Even though it doesn't look alike, they accept the hair, the hands, the fingernails, maybe a little scar on the hand or something they can see.

The funeral director's work in embalming, restoring, and "finishing" the body is designed to present it in a state of "restful sleep" and at "peace." The funeral director spends time restoring the body to its "natural" state. Beginning with a recent photograph of the deceased, the funeral director attempts to make the present features match the photograph. The deceased are dressed in their "Sunday best" and placed in the casket with their hands gently crossed over their abdomen. Any blemishes caused by accidents, operations, or deterioration from a long illness are erased by the use of cosmetics.

Lacerations are sealed with wax, sunken cheeks are built up from inside the mouth, eye lids are sealed over, and skin discoloration is restored by powders and embalming fluids. After the hair is styled by a professional hairdresser, the body is placed in the casket in such a way that it is framed by the casket. The head is propped up by a pillow so that it appears that the deceased is in a "peaceful sleep." The peaceful facial expression is caused by the relaxation of the facial muscles following death. The funeral director embalms and restores the body so that the bereaving family will be comforted by the thought that their "loved one" died a peaceful death and that the facial expression of the deceased matches their memories of that person:

> A good funeral is when the family can come back to me [funeral director] and say, "At time like this here, we walked away with a good feeling." That is a good funeral. I don't care how much money they spent, what merchandise they purchased, as long as okay, they saw Mom or Dad dying at the hospital, they had a horrible picture with tubes in them and everything, If they saw them after they're embalmed and in the casket at peace and at rest, they've got a beautiful memory picture. Where they've participated, they've taken part in it, they're going through this pain, and they can say, "Hey, we're going to get better because everything was done properly." To me, that is a good funeral.

> We [family] didn't know whether we were going to have an opened or closed casket; and because Mom had wasted so much when they picked her up, they said they really didn't know what they could do for her cause she was really quite debilitated. He [the funeral director] said, "I'm not sure, your mother's not in very good shape, and I'm not sure what I can do for her." Anyway, so we had a small picture blown up so that we'd have one on the casket. We didn't go back until Thursday...[and when]...we came into the door he said, "The casket's opened. Do you want it left opened?" I said I wanted to see Mom, and so he said, "Oh fine, she looks fine. We were able to fix her up."

Funeral directors recognize the comforting role of viewing the body, and they encourage people to view the body, even breaking some ritual norms to help the family see the deceased:

> I whispered and told him that Mom would like to see C_____ [deceased]. So he didn't say a word. As we went out of the Church, he

> pulled the casket aside, and he opened it, and the grandchildren were around, and I think most of them saw my husband. We did it rather fast. And I wished now that we would have left it open after the service at the back of the Church because I have read that...there is less grieving...if they see the body of the person who has died, and there may have been someone [who] would have liked to see him. Yeah, I think I would leave it open the next time.

Comfort Through Facilitating Remembrance

Funeral directors help the family remember the occasion by presenting them with a pouch containing the condolence book, memorial cards, etc. Also, at the end of the funeral service or during the time of internment, family members are also offered flowers from the spray on top of the casket: "We ask the family if they would maybe like a flower out of the casket spray, that kind of thing as a memento." Family members have saved these flowers and used them to recall the good memories of the deceased:

> You know what they did [at the gravesite]? Yes, they gave those roses [from the casket]. Yeah, from the casket to the family, to my girls. We all had one. Right, and we dried those roses, and we still have them.

Summary

This chapter explored the comforting role of the funeral director by first identifying his objectives and then the family's experiences. From these accounts, the comforting role of the funeral director was identified. This comforting role was mechanically expressed by the ritual, setting, and food. It was personally expressed by, directing, caring, timing, movement, connecting, keeping the family together, buffering, being organized and patient, and allowing input from families. The comforting role was also expressed by facilitating the severance of the family from the deceased through embalming and reconstruction; and in giving the family momentos of the occasion, the funeral director helps the bereaving family have a positive memory of the occasion. This comforting role enables the family to recover from their grief and begin the process of re-constructing their family system.

V DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the elements that constitute the comforting role of the funeral director are discussed. First, there is an appraisal of the research methods, followed by a review of the concept of comfort, a discussion of the elements found, implications for families, and a list of questions for future research.

Research Methods and their Limitations

Qualitative data for this study were collected by tape-recording interviews with funeral directors and bereaving families and by observing funeral directors at work at two funeral homes. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed, and the observational notes were coded. Then, by identifying the recurring themes found in these recorded interviews and typed ethnographic notes, a list of the elements that constitute the comforting role of the funeral director emerged. Despite the facts that generalizability is not the purpose of qualitative research, that the size of the samples were small, and that the general tendency for participants in research is to seek social approval by providing socially desirable responses, these findings, nevertheless, help us by providing a list of the elements that are helpful in "easing the burden" during the initial phase of the bereavement process. Since the purpose of qualitative research is to "develop reality-based theory" (Field & Morse 1985), the findings will stand as an initial process in the generating of theories on the relationship between funeral directors and bereaving family members and on expanding our understanding of the concept of comfort.

Before discussing some of the limitations of this study, it is important to point out that it is not easy to collect data in a funeral home. Funeral directors are careful about who they allow into the "backstage" area because of the nature of their business. They carry out a business that is seen as both sacred and profane by the general public. It is sacred because they are entrusted with respecting the dead and profane because they have to work with dead bodies. These "mysterious" activities are done "behind closed doors" so that the general public (and that includes researchers) are not given a message that contradicts the impression created by the "frontstage" action (Goffman, 1959) . The initial difficulty with obtaining permission to observe funeral home staff as they carried out their work was reflected in the four visits the researcher had to make before full permission was granted to carry out this study.

Most observational data were collecting at one funeral home, one that tended to cater to a specific religious segment of the population. (Most well-established funeral homes have tended to serve specific religious segments of the population, for example, there are funeral homes that have become known to the public for their work in catering to Anglicans, United Church members, Roman Catholics, Ukrainian Catholics, and so forth). The consequence of serving a specific segment of the community is that emotional support is provided to bereaving families by many members of their church, a reality observed by this researcher at the funeral home where this study was conducted. Holding, hugging, guiding, shaking hands, engaging in conversation, etc., were many of the ways this support was extended.

Collecting observational data in a busy funeral home posed some problems. It was difficult to complete observational data on a funeral from the time the family came to the funeral home to complete an arrangement until interment at the cemetery because different funeral directors were involved. It was not uncommon for one funeral director to be informed by a telephone call that death had taken place, another one assigned to complete funeral arrangements with the family, while a third funeral director conducted the funeral

service and internment. Because of these shifts in the assignment of staff, it was difficult for the researcher to develop close ties with these different directors. This lack of personal contact with the directors made it difficult to fully observe all phases of the funeral.

In addition, the demands placed on the funeral home by the number of services conducted did not give the observer the luxury of time to make in-depth notes at the time events were happening. Since much of the data had to be recorded later, some gaps in recall were inevitable.

Only one observation was made of a funeral director making an arrangement with a bereaving family. It appeared that some directors were reluctant to grant permission for one of two reasons: either they did not wish to have the bereaving family burdened with another decision so early in the arrangement, or they were uncomfortable with the idea of a researcher observing them while they made an arrangement. Unlike most professionals (teachers, counsellors, social workers, nurses), funeral directors are not frequently observed by a peer, or other professional doing a research project. Because they are interacting during an intensely emotional period, they may feel threatened when an outsider observes and writes about their style of interaction with a bereaving family.

Corroborative evidence of the funeral director's role in comforting was collected by recording telephone interviews with eight bereaving family members. The composition of this sample was made up of seven females and one male, and most of them were similar in that they had some affiliation with a church community.

The use of the telephone as a method to collect information made it easier for families to arrange interviews, and since they were Caucasian and mostly elderly, they would, according to Rogers (1976), have preferred this method of interviewing. Unfortunately Rogers (1976) identified a weakness with this mode of data collecting. This weakness has to do with the style of the interviewer. Since this researcher classifies himself as "person-oriented and friendly" (as opposed to "task-oriented and businesslike),

obtaining full and accurate information on the telephone" may have been handicapped (Rogers, 1976, p. 63).

A difficulty encountered in collecting collaborative evidence from families was their recall of this stressful period. Although the funeral had occurred within the previous year, some families had great difficulties recalling details of it, while others were able to recall the funeral events but had difficulties recalling the funeral arrangement. Another category of bereavers who had very little to share about the funeral director (summed up their experience in a few words) were those who went to the funeral home to make funeral arrangements with their terminally ill spouse. Since all the funeral events were planned in advance, there was very little to be discussed with the funeral director when death did occur. Consequently, these informers had little to report about the comforting role of the funeral director. It is apparent that since death was inevitable and since the funeral was arranged prior to death, some initial grief work had already been completed . Therefore, there was less demand for the funeral director's comforting role.

Concept Of Comfort

Comfort, as used in this study, was defined as anything that helped "ease the burden" for bereaving families. These things, or activities, were either experienced by bereaving family as helpful in going through the funeral or intended to comfort. Comfort is defined as "to strengthen considerably" (Partridge, 1966, p. 227), and to experience comfort means to experience any emotional, social, or physical support that enables an individual or a family to fulfil assigned roles and to engage in healthy interpersonal relationships. To be comforted means to be supported in carrying an emotional burden. In this case, the burden is the loss of a family member due to death.

The history of the construct of comfort, its synonyms, cognates, and associated terms as expressed in the human sciences literature long precedes the emergence of the word comfort. Entomologically comfort means to strengthen (Webster's Dictionary,

1979), and it's synonyms are loosely used within the social sciences literature to identify activity and interaction that makes one "feel better."

As a construct, comfort has been associated with safety and security (Watson, 1979) and described as a physical characteristic (Ray 1984). Lack of comfort, which results in insecurity, has been used to account for the rise of religion or an increase in religious involvement (Glock et al, 1967; Cook & Wimberley, 1983), delay in personality development (Newson et al, 1982), and differences in male/female self-esteem (Levine et al, 1977). However, an over-abundance of comfort has been described as having a harmful effect on the quality of life (Allison, 1978). The factor of time was seen by Anderson (1986) as an important element for the development of the stages of comfort.

A component of comfort is empathy (Almeida & Chapman, 1972; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Roe, 1977; Todd & Shapira, 1974), and it has been defined as "an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition and that is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation" (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 5). Almeida and Chapman (1972) have described two types of empathy: the inarticulate and the conscious (as in nurse-patient interaction) and the inarticulate and partially conscious (as in mother-infant interaction). A variety of measures of increased adult empathy have a positive relationship with prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 310).

Morse (1983) defined comfort as a condition of well-being having two states: temporal (short-term relief of distress), and constant (long-term: optimal health). Morse (1983) identified its components as touch, talking and listening, or combinations of these actions. Each of these components has a distinct and unique characteristic according to the circumstances and perceived needs of the participant. The outcome of comforting was described as a change in mood, having a "warm feeling of relief," "feeling confident," being "in touch with self," and "at ease" (Morse, 1983, p. 15).

The one who can put people "at ease" or help them with gaining a "warm feeling of relief" is the comforter. According to Rosenthal (1987), the comforter within the extended

family is one who has the ability to provide emotional support, to listen, to act as a "sounding board," to provide information or insight, and to take action. These are some of the funeral director's qualities that were appreciated by bereaving families, that is, solving the problem of what to do following a death, listening to the family's agenda, providing information, and taking action. These elements were part of the greater role of the funeral director's work, that is, providing mechanistic comfort through orchestrating the ritual and ceremony, designing the funeral home, and supplying food.

Elements of Mechanistic Comfort

Ritual and Ceremony

Watson (1979) understood comfort as the provision of safety and security. Since the funeral is the chief means of reaffirming solidarity of the group at the time of death (Durkheim, 1961), the family is given a sense of safety and security by the community drawing around them. Habenstein (in Riley, 1983) informs us that "the funeral channels the responses of the bereaved as a collectivity....Mortuary rites [funeralization] characteristically operate to give meaning and sanction to the separation of the dead person from the living" (p. 207). This ritual gives the family permission to grieve, an initial but essential step in getting back to "normal living."

Bolton and Camp's (1987) general findings support the fact that ritual acts provide some support in grief adjustment. Kollar (1983) notes that "a ritual...provides a context within which the personal feeling of all the mourners can be expressed, and it offers each individual the occasion to support freely every other individual in this time of crisis" (p. 65). Therefore, the funeral ritual has the double task of providing the family with an outlet for the expression of their feelings, and at the same time, it offers the community the opportunity to console the bereaving family.

The spiritual dimension associated with the church has begun to be replaced by a psychological and social dimension. When the funeral is associated with the church, the

rite and decor beckons mourners attention to their moral conduct and the hope of "afterlife" by statues, crosses, altar and bible, and by such phrases as "preaching the gospel" and "proclaiming the resurrection. When the funeral is associated with the funeral home the rite and decor emphasizes the psychological needs of the mourners. "The psychological approach could be characterized by such phrases as "comforting the bereaved" and "providing an opportunity for the community to support the family of the deceased" (Bradfield & Myers, 1980).

This attitudinal shift from the sacred to the secular is also reflected by the decor of the funeral home chapel. In contrast to the decor of the church, the chapel in the funeral home has a low ceiling, carpeted floor, and oak panelled walls. Moreover, the inclusion of a family room and the removal of such traditional church fixtures as crosses, candles, statues, bible, and altar adds to the psychological bent of the chapel.

Despite this general psychological response of funeral homes and of funeral directors to the public's demands, the public's attitude toward the interpersonal behaviors and embalming practice of funeral directors is negative. Mitford (1963) and Harmer (1963) suggest that the present rituals associated with funeral homes are more in keeping with the professional and business orientation of the funeral directors. They suggest that the dead should be disposed with less ritual ceremony. However, this line of thinking fails to consider the psychological and social nature of funeral rituals:

> Dying and death are psychological and social roles, not merely biological events. The funeral ceremony, although personal in design, is certainly social in consequence. A person's death affects the emotional life of the bereaved, and it also entails changes in the status and social position of the survivors. Along this line, I think that grief and mourning tend to be too deritualized and short-circuited these days. There is a lot of folk wisdom and mental-hygienic support in the Irish wake or the Jewish *shivah*. They provide abreaction, relief, working-through, and ultimately enhanced mastery and control of one's feelings. If we don't grieve and mourn over our dead close to the immediate event, we tend to do so later on – only more inappropriately and regressively. The positive by-products of mourning would be magnified if more room were made for expressions of anger and guilt as well as idealization, loss and love (Feifel, 1971, p. 10).

Setting

"Home," "growing up at home," "coming home," and "homeward bound" are words and expressions that help conjure up images, memories, and feelings of happier times, that is, memories of a carefree, yet protected, environment. Again, the expression "I'm feeling right at home" uttered in the company of a "stranger", communicates a feeling of being at ease, relaxed, and comfortable in the persons presence, and by calling the funeral establishment a funeral "home," funeral directors attempt to evoke similar feelings in people by transferring the term "home" (with all that it symbolizes) to the funeral establishment. Other euphemistic words, (e.g., "parlor" and "slumber room") are used to describe the viewing room.

In addition to the use of comforting language, many of the elements associated with a living room, such as, coffee tables, couches, chairs, and table lamps, are found in the funeral home. The sterile fixtures of hospitals and the other-world fixtures of churches have been replaced by the funeral home's soft couches, plush carpets and semi-classical background music. The "home" is also made welcoming by accessibility and by the ever-present and attentive funeral director.

According to Habenstein (1962), the provision of mechanistic comforts reflects,the "aesthetic drift" that began in the funeral industry in the 1900's. Increased stress is placed on "beauty-in-externality, a tendency to dissociate or repress the grimness and coarseness of most aspects of human affairs, and the encapsulation and isolation of human crises such as death" (Habenstein, 1962). This trend, from the packaging of goods to the provision of services, is pervasive in our society and it has affected the funeral industry. The funeral home's decor reflect the funeral director's attempts to ease the discomfort of the bereaved by making the bereaved "feel at home."

Even though it is a setting for the rituals of death, the funeral parlor has more in common with a typical suburban home than it does with a church. Like a living room, and unlike a church, a funeral parlour offers the opportunity to sit comfortably and converse

with other participants as well as offering the option of avoiding religious reminders (Barley, 1983a, p. 406). According to Barley (1983a), the funeral director "chooses a decor and plans the architecture of the home to play down perceptions of the unfamiliar and to dissociate the home from a church environment" (p. 405). The "aesthetic drift", that is, the shift toward having everything associated with death "look nice," is "the imperative which shapes and gives content to his activities in the preparation of the dead and in organizing and directing the drama of human disposal" (p. 233).

The foyer, with its neatly organized desks, appropriate wall paintings, soft arm-chairs, and gentle music helps relax people. The addition of a family room at the side of the chapel is intended to help family members by removing them from the uncomfortable gaze of the audience. The soft beat of music helps distract mourners from thinking of their loss. According to Turner and Edgley (1975), the right mood of the funeral home is set by the "judicious use of music" (p. 387). This "aesthetic drift" of the funeral home is intended to help ease the burden of the mourners. According to Stephenson (1985) these acceptable images are not intended to deny death, but to "soften the blow".

Food

An important facilitator of comfort, one that is associated with the setting, is the offering of a beverage to the mourners after the viewing or prayer service. One informant in the study said the service of coffee was the most important part of the funeral home. Another family member noted with regret, the failure of a funeral home to supply coffee or tea after the viewing

According to Vaught (1979) food, in general, serves both an instrumental and a symbolic role. Serving coffee helps to distract the mourners from what is taking place. In securing cups of coffee, they are instrumentally distracted from the thoughts about the loss, and the process of eating and digesting food is soothing.

Historically, death has been refuted by the symbolic use of food. The Egyptians and Chinese used food to feed the souls in the after-life, while the early Christians used it

to expiate sin (Vaught, 1979). Food continues to be used to refute death. Eating is an acknowledgment that life must go on, and solidarity with one another is signified by the breaking of bread. During the meal, the family's memories of the deceased are embellished by friends and extended family members sharing uplifting stories of the deceased.

Comforting Role of Funeral Directors

The public image of the funeral director is not good because of the generally held believe that the overriding principle behind all the funeral director's behaviors is the selling of merchandise. Any comforting behaviors exercised by funeral directors are to be regarded as the necessary and direct outcome of this commercial interest. This negative image is fostered in books, plays, music, and television by depicting the funeral director as an unsavory character who is financially rewarded by another's pain. The development of this negative attitude may be seen as an attempt by the general public to distance themselves from death. Keeping the image negative means that limited interaction takes place between funeral directors and the general public. With the thoughts and feelings about death out of the way, the general public can pursue their more mundane interests. Habenstein (1962) points out that "there is no inherent or instinctive reason why funeral directors must be regarded negatively " (p. 244). He responds to the question on why there is a negative or at best, an ambivalent feeling toward funeral directors. His explanation has to do with the conflict between the "aesthetic drift" and the Christian tradition:

> A client-ambivalence explanation proposes that the current popular aesthetic of death makes for the alienation of the dead and demands at the same time the disposal of the dead within a setting of beauty. In face of the traditional Christian prescriptive for reverent, personal involvement in the care of the dead body, Americans delegate the task to a secular functionary...the funeral director. The clash of aesthetic impulses with traditional prescription provides the social basis of the client-ambivalence (pp.244~245).

It is important to point out that although the family members in this study said that prior to getting to know their funeral director they had ambivalent and negative feelings toward them, after the funeral service they had nothing but praise for the funeral director. The reason for the swing from a view reflecting the public's negative or ambivalent image of the funeral director to one of positive regard by the respondents in this study was related to them having a pleasant and comforting personal experience with the funeral director. The findings in this study are similar to Kalish & Goldberg's (1980) study of the relationship between families and funeral directors working in small towns and those working big towns. He suggests that families were generally satisfied with funeral directors, but "when funerals were held in small towns, the people making arrangements are slightly more satisfied with funeral director practices that are their counterparts in the larger and more urban areas" (p. 344). Similar findings were reported by Glick, Weiss, and Parkes, (1974):

> Yet none of our respondents spoke of funeral directors in these terms [...exploitative,...unscrupulous,...overeagerness for business a comic lugubriousness]; nearly all were grateful to the funeral directors with whom they dealt for the helpfulness and kindness they displayed. Almost all our respondents believed that the funeral directors with whom they dealt had provided support and advice that went beyond anything that could have been expected of them had they been mere businessmen. Instead these men seemed to them to have acted as conscientious professionals providing a service in a time of need. Widows felt that charges were entirely justified, given their services (p. 104).

Barley (1983a) notes that all the activities of the funeral director are to be interpreted as, among other things, "putting people at ease" (p. 401): "From the funeral director's point of view, participants who are 'at ease' are less likely to disrupt a smoothly flowing funeral" (p. 404). If the funeral director is focused on putting people "at ease" so that the result will be a smooth running funeral, then he is entitled to benefit financially from a successful endeavor.

Staged Performance and Comfort

According to Turner and Edgley (1975), all the work of funeral directors is a reflection of their "on stage" performance. The "staged" performance that is executed by funeral directors is done in a manner that will later be seen by the mourners as a sign of respect for the deceased. The behaviors enacted by funeral directors around the deceased, while in the presence of the mourners, are not behaviors one would associate with a lifeless object: the funeral directors behave as if the deceased was "resting peacefully," that is, they refer to the deceased by name, do not touch the body and maintain a space of at least two to three feet from the body, communicate with the family in a subdued voice, and when the body is reposed in the chapel or viewing room, the lights are dimmed. These behaviors are intended to treat the body with a "human identity" (Turner & Edgley, 1975).

> The funeral director "is indeed a 'director' controlling a dramatic production: that is, preoccupied with ensuring that this staged performance goes off without a hitch....In order to preclude any miscues in the performance, the rehearsal covers entrance cues, exit, places to sit, and timing of events; special requests by the family can also be included in the script and program" (p. 384)

The many efforts undertaken in "stage management" are done in order to create the impression of control, order, and good timing. These are experienced as comforting by bereaving families. The "props" used by the funeral director in giving comfort include the role of directing and organizing the ritual, developing trust with the family by "bridging the gap," showing care by "doing it their way," connecting the family to each other and to outside agencies, and by allowing the family to have input into the proceedings. Other "props" supporting this "staged performance" that were seen as helpful in "easing the burden" of the bereaving family were the funeral directors effective use of time and movement and the practice of buffering the family from their painful loss through the use of language. These comforting techniques used by the funeral director are no different than the "props" used in by a parent with a sick child, a physician with a patient, or a counsellor with

a client. These "props" may not be as elaborate as the funeral director's props, nevertheless, the "healing" that takes place in these cases is transmitted by their use of such "props" as re-assuring language and an appearance and manner that exudes confidence. In all these situations, it is the case of the parent, the physician, and the counsellor drawing the "wounded" child, patient, or client into their confidence by creating a sense of security. It is within this secure environment that healing can begin to work. This happens whether it be the case of a mother and child, a counsellor and client, a nurse and patient, or a funeral director and a bereaving family member.

Manners and appearances. The uniformed dress, pleasant appearance, and manners of the funeral director comfort the bereaved by conveying a sense of dignity, composure and importance to the occasion. According to Reynolds and Kalish (1974), the image of professionalism to clients is a very important concern for "the death-related professional" (p. 231). Turner and Edgley (1975) note that it is the funeral directors demeanor that helps establish the appropriate behavior in the funeral home. Grooming and appropriate dress were very importance in dignifying the occasion and in conveying a sense of respect for the family and for the deceased.

Maintaining appearance is so important that funeral directors police each others' appearance and behaviors. If there is a flaw in their appearance, for example, shoes are not polished, a jacket is wrinkled, a button is loose or a tie is displaced, funeral directors have the freedom to inform each other of any such lapse in personal appearance. Funeral directors are aware that such "frontstage" discrepancies would undermine the "managed impression" given both by the decor of the place and the behaviors of staff members. A funeral director is part of a team, so any weakness on the part of one member will reflect on the performance of the "staged impression."

Involvement and comfort ("allowing for input"). An important component in "putting the bereaved at ease" is the funeral director's encouragement of the bereaved to become involved in planning the funeral. By putting the bereaving in a comfortable setting and then allowing them to provide input into the funeral arrangements, the funeral director empowers them with "symbolic mastery." According to Doka (1984), "symbolic mastery" may be gained by the bereaved in the following ways:

> Interpreting the event in a manner in which either the death is defined positively, such as release or an entry into an afterlife, or by assuaging any negative feeling of the family, such as guilt. Another way to gain symbolic mastery might be to involve the self in acts that give a sense of control over at least some aspect of the death process.

Planning the funeral service is a critical aspect of the "death process," and participation in this planning is an important way for achieving mastery. The therapeutic value of involving the bereaved in the care of the dead by the bereaved is supported by research. For example, widows appreciated the clergy allowing them to personalize the service (Carey, in Doka , 1984), and Fulton and Geis (1976) found that the participation of the bereaved in such rituals [funerals] aided their grief adjustment. Parkes (1972) suggests that active participation by the bereaved in the making of funeral arrangements aided in adjustment to grief. By allowing families to "personalize" the service, funeral directors allow the family to have a sense of mastery over aspects of the ritual. Granting the family permission to "do something" for the deceased helps remove guilt, and engaging in"symbolic mastery" positively affects their self-esteem.

Comfort through timing. An important comforting quality of the funeral director was the management of time. The bereaved were comforted by the timing of events, by the efficient use of time, and by synchronizing behaviors with the family's time-frame. Unruh's (1976) exploratory construction of a "temporal 'model'" of social time (by his analysis of the interactions between social actors and the temporal aspects of the

funeralization process) is helpful in understanding the positive sense of timing experienced by the bereaved.

According to Unruh's (1976) analysis, the funeral process is not only concerned with the ending of human relationships, but it is also the means by which bereaved family members move from one developmental stage of life to another. New roles are assigned to family members as they continue their own life cycle. In order for the funeral to proceed, a temporal awareness of the situation must be shared between the participants. Timetables must be constructed and activities must be coordinated. Funeral directors stress the times for viewings and of funeral services to the family.

Funeralization is made up of a number of independent processes: arrangement, embalming, viewing, funeral service, and internment. These temporal epoches ("an extended period of time characterized by a distinctive development or event" [p. 13]) must be allocated, allotted, and delineated according to the specific functions desired by participants. It is around these smaller, though interrelated processes, that the funeral director tends to structure his activity. These smaller processes are very important to him since these structured and organized activities are built around the bereaving family members. A sense of control of the situations is created when the funeral director is engaged in organizing, structuring, and supervising groups of individuals as well as attending to the family.

With respect to temporal management, the funeral director has a timetable for completing of the funeral arrangements with the family, but he must proceed slowly and appear as if he has all the time in the world. If he appears hurried or impatient, he runs the risk of destroying the bereaving family's image of his comforting role. Funeral negotiations and preparations are made in the presence of the bereaved family whenever possible because if there is a scheduling problem, say with the clergy or with some social agency or with the medical office, the family is right there to help straighten it out. By making a telephone call

to agencies while in the family's present, the funeral director engenders a feeling of patient and shared concerns in the family.

For the funeral director, there is an increase in the tempo once the arrangements are complete. The body has to be prepared for viewing, and there has to be a strict coordination of timing so that the funeral service goes ahead without pressures from other in-house events. To ensure that all these events move according to the timetable, a funeral director will leave for a ten to fifteen minute journey, forty-five minutes before the commencement of the service to pick up a family and transport them to the church or funeral home. The coach and "lead car" will leave for the church an hour before the service begins so that funeral directors are not observed setting up the "stage," that is, setting up flowers or the condolence book by arriving mourners. The timing of the arrival of the family at the funeral home or at the church is important in fostering the smooth tempo of funeral events. The family arrive some minutes prior to the funeral event, and after meeting friends, they are ushered to the family room or to the side of the vestibule. The movement of the bereaved family members in and out of the church and of the cortege to the cemetery is timed as to give a sense of order and of a free-flowing movement. In order to make the journey to the cemetery as smooth as possible, the "lead car" will have a flashing light, and the cars in the cortege will have a cardboard sign, (signifying "funeral"), magnetically attached to the hood of each car in the procession. When the cortege is long, city police may be asked to assist in keeping the procession moving. All of these controlled actions of the funeral director are acknowledged by the bereaving family. The funeral director is complemented for his good sense of timing and for making the different parts of the performance roll like a "slow-motion movie."

Comfort through knowledge. The "knowledgeability" of the funeral director was considered comforting by family members. Families who were undecided about whether to have the traditional funeral service or a cremation were informed about the regulations

regarding the funerals, burial practices, and cremations by the funeral director. The projection of an aura of experience and knowledgeability is important for presenting an image of professionalism to clients. Reynolds & Kalish, (1974) note that the professionals in death-related occupations have a repository of knowledge related to customs and appropriate behaviors in death settings. Cooperation is gained from clients by trading this knowledge. In order to benefit from this information, the bereaved must submit to the role of the professional. When one allows oneself to be dependent on another at a time such as bereavement, one gains a sense of security and comfort.

Comfort and efficiency. In his detailed study of organization for dying and death in a modern public hospital, Subnow (1967) identified efficiency as more highly valued that human dignity in the work of hospital staff caring for the dying. Efficiency with respect to the funeral is reflected in the tempo of funeralization. However, this efficiency is not linked to the business management of funerals; instead it is the contrast between the emotional world of the bereaving and the tempo of the ritual. What is experienced as comforting is not so much the efficient disposal of the body as it is the expedient movement of people into and out of buildings, around the casket, of cars moving to the cemetery, and of the transferring, in an orderly manner and an aesthetically pleasing way, of the casket from the funeral home to the cemetery. According to Raether (in Turner & Edgley, 1975), the funeral director is, recognized "as a skilled director...often acutely sensitive to matters of promptness, overall courtesy, ushering, and other tasks involving a sizeable number of people" (p. 385).

Comfort by keeping the family together. The loss of a parent has a serious impact on the identity of family members. A family's identity is very much dependent on the role played by parents. When a parent dies, the loss effects the family's collective identity. A natural response of the members to this loss is to draw closer together and shield each other from the painful grief they have to go through. Some of this pain is a reflection of the fears

and anger associated with the diminishing of their identity by the untimely demise of a father or mother. The funeral director ensures that as much of the family's identity is preserved by keeping them together during funeralization. The director attends to the family as a collectivity, that is, they are requested to attend the arrangement as a family unit, and the viewing is organized with the family mind. During the funeral service, the family is given special prominence by being requested by the funeral director to remain in the "family room" before the service; and at the cemetery, they are ushered as a family to the right hand side of the grave. Keeping the family together is helpful since it enables them to have a common experience of the funeral. Sharing in a common experience is an important factor in "normalizing" feelings.

Embalming and the family

Comfort through viewing the deceased. On a number of occasions the funeral directors remarked on the comforting value of viewing the body. In order for the bereaving to have a positive "memory picture" of the deceased, careful attention is given to embalming the deceased and restoring the facial appearance. It is believed that by the family observing the body in its "natural state," that is, with a "peaceful look" and having a "relaxed expression," they are being provided with the assurance that the death of their "loved one" was painless. A number of authors discuss the embalming and restorative work of the funeral director. According to Habenstein (1962), embalming and restorative art practices are a distinctive feature of the American style of burial, and they reflect the "aesthetic drift" that has placed stress on "beauty-in-externality," Foreman (1974) describes the funeral director as a "beautifier" and "sympathizer." These qualities are communicated to the bereaved by creating "a beautiful memory picture" (p. 231). According to Turner and Edgley (1975), restorative art is designed to make the deceased look natural and, in a sense "alive.". They go on to note that "what might be seen as 'art for art's sake" is justified by funeral directors as a vital element in what has come to be

known as 'grief therapy'...which most practitioners in the industry now espouse" (p. 384). A more pragmatic approach to the work of embalming and restorative work is taken by Raether and Slater (1974). The two-fold objective of this work is to help the bereaving family become "more aware of the reality of sudden, accidental, or lingering death" (p. 194) and to provide an image that will help the family with recall: "Preparation, restoration, and the use of cosmetics are not meant to make the dead look alive. They provide an acceptable image for recalling the deceased. Viewing is therapeutic for people, regardless of age" (p. 195). Kollar (1983) notes the symbolic power of giving a life-like quality to the deceased:

> It [embalming] may be a more contemporary endeavor to give a corpse the appearance of life in an attempt to cope with the reality of death. It may be the death-defying Christian affirmation of resurrection (p. 71).

Implication For Families

In this study, the main focus of funeral directors was the work of "easing the burden" of bereaving families. This comforting role was provided mechanically by the ritual and setting and personally by the qualities and skills of the funeral director, and the bereaving family was helped to let go of the deceased by the funeral director's work of embalming the deceased and restoring the facial appearance so that the deceased appears to be sleeping. In the light of the findings that were described as comforting, some tentative implications can be made with respect to supporting bereaving family members. Tentative is the appropriate word at this time since the findings in this study, as already noted, are derived from a limited sample size, a homogeneous group (all bereaving family members had some sort of church affiliation and had "lost" an adult family member following a long illness), and most observations made at one funeral home. These implications are listed below:

1. The request made by the funeral director that the family as a unit come to the funeral home to make funeral arrangements and their practice of keeping the family together during the ceremonies comforts the family by engendering in them a sense of solidarity. Following the death of a member, the family system is disrupted, and family identity and personal identities are challenged. In keeping the family members together during this crisis period, the director is helping the family have a sense of solidarity as well as ensuring that family members have a common memory of the event. A long-term effect of having a common memory of these events is that communication between members is greatly facilitated. Sharing common experiences helps "normalize" the grief experience and rebuild the family system. To avoid weakening family solidarity at a time like this, it is important that friends personally communicate their condolences to as many members of the family as possible and not to single out individual members.

2. While funeral arrangements with the funeral director are, for the most part, a family affair, it is advisable for family members who may have difficulties "bridging the gap" with the director to invite a friend. The presence of a friend would be most appropriate in facilitating communication between director and family if the surviving family consisted of a lone member or if the "loss" was traumatic. The funeral directors in this study encouraged the presence of a family friend. Their input helped to convey the family's needs, to clarify funeral director's requests (i.e., the bringing of clothes for the deceased), and to reconfirm the timing of funeral events.

3. Funeral directors made a strong case for embalming the body: seeing the body helps the family confront death more readily. It may help resolve "unfinished business" for friends of the deceased. Regret was expressed by a family member for not having presented her deceased mother for viewing. She recognized that

friends of the deceased, who had been unable to visit the deceased for some time prior to her death, were disappointed at not being able to see the deceased laid out at the funeral home. It appears that seeing the deceased may help people resolve some "unfinished business." It is recommended that family members consider the extended family and friends of the deceased before making a decision to have the casket closed throughout the funeral service. Presenting the deceased for viewing may have therapeutic value for members of the community or for extended family members.

4. Family members expressed the importance of being able to have a beverage at the funeral home following the viewing. It gave them a chance to engage in conversation with extended family and friends. Not all funeral homes offer this service. Since family members in this study felt it was an important service, the availability of this service may be an significant criterion when choosing a funeral home.

5. Families were pleased to have directors take responsibility for the details of the funeral. It allowed them the comfort of attending to their own feelings instead of worrying about the funeral. If the role of the funeral director of "taking responsibility" is comforting for families, then there is a case for friends of the family to assume aspects of this comforting role during the funeral events, for example, taxiing bereaving family members from airports or bus stations, providing accommodation to out of town mourners, making telephone calls on behalf of the family to friends, and helping with the post funeral reception.

6. It was observed that the funeral ceremony at the cemetery was brief and intense and reported to be "short and cold." It appeared that the event was so brief that family members did not have time to comprehend what was happening. They stood as a group to the left hand side of the clergy while he/she prayed and/or read a passage of Scripture and the director sprinkled water or ashes on the casket and

operated the lowering device. Since family members, in general, appreciated personalizing the service, and since the family remain inactive during the interment ceremony, therefore, inviting them to participate by operating the lowering device, sprinkling the casket with water or ashes, adding prayers, or reading a passage from Scripture may make this service less "short and cold."

Research Questions

This study has revealed an important aspect of the relationship between funeral directors and bereaving family members. It also raised questions that need further investigation.

The embalming of the body and presenting it for viewing, was received with positively by the bereaving family: the deceased appeared "at peace" and "looked beautiful." But did embalming and restoration work help the family come face to face with death? Is the practice of embalming and restoration work subscribing to our preoccupation with denying death, thereby, making the practice of "letting go" of the deceased more difficult in the long run? Comparing those family members who were comforted with the results of embalming and restorative work with those members who were displeased with the image produced may identify some interesting aspects of the course of grief or of family dynamics.

The families in this study appreciated the work that funeral directors had done; however, some of these families had emotional support and comfort from extended family, friends, and church members. Further exploration needs to be carried out with families who do not have such supports. Family members bereft of such comforts may demand more from their funeral director, and the elements found in such a study would add to the present findings.

In this study, family members were interviewed during their first year of bereavement. A longitudinal study needs to be undertaken that focuses on the

families' understanding of their relationship with the funeral director, at one month, six months, and one year after the funeral. The elapse of time may identify the enduring qualities of the director that were significant in coping with grief.

Summary and Conclusion

While there are generalizable limitations to this study, a number of elements that constitute the funeral director's comforting role were discovered. The funeral ritual is important for channeling the grief of the bereaving family as well as a mechanism for allowing the community the opportunity to publicly support the family. The decor of the funeral home provides a warm and friendly atmosphere, while the chapel has been modified to meet the psychological needs of the bereaving rather than the transcendent needs of the deceased. The provision of food was an important source of comfort immediately after the wake and internment. Although operating in the "frontstage" for "impression management" of the bereaving, there were a number of funeral director qualities and skills that were considered as helpful in "easing the burden." Such qualities included the manner and appearance of funeral directors, their ability to direct the funeral, their efficiency with time and movement, and their ability to help the family participate in the funeral by "bridging the gap" and by connecting them to other agencies. It was these qualities and skills that were recalled as being comforting by the family members in this study. An important dimension of the funeral directors' work is the embalming and restoring of the deceased to the image held by the bereaving. The controversial work of presenting the deceased in a "peaceful and relaxed" state was an important comforting feature for the bereaving, and this comforting role of funeral directors challenges the publics' negatively held image of them as being only interested in furthering their business.

In providing comfort to the bereaving, the funeral directors have to balance between fulfilling the task of burying the dead within the cultural proscriptions and of providing comfort to the family as they bid farewell to their deceased mother, father, son, daughter, or friend. Some people will have done much of their grieving prior to the funeral and will be less demanding of the funeral director's comforting role, while others will be involved in the initial stage of grief and demand comfort. The funeral director's comforting role is important to this latter group, and the funeral director can have an important bearing upon this phase of grieving. Their ongoing ability to comfort mechanistically, personally, or through embalming and restoration work will determine the future importance of the role of the funeral director in thantology.

This study set out to identify the elements of the funeral director's comforting role. Since there was a paucity of literature, the ethnographic method was used. By coding observational notes and tape-recorded transcripts from interviews with families and funeral directors, a number of elements were identified and categorized as mechanical (setting, ritual, ceremony), personal (timing, movement, open to input from others, connecting, bridging, caring), and a category related to helping the family let go of the deceased. Many of these elements are part of "impression management" work done by the funeral director, that is, they are associated with helping families experience the "cleaner and neater" side of death. Let these findings stand as a tentative step in furthering this important field of research, the comforting role of funeral directors.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY STUDIES
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Support of the Bereaved: Comforting role of Funeral Director.

Investigator:
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Supervisor:
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Professor,
Faculty of Nursing
Clinical Sciences Bldg.,
University of Alberta.
Office Phone: 492-6250

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that funeral directors, (i.e. all employees of a funeral home who personally interact with the bereaved), interact with bereaved family members.

The research method used is an ethnography which means I will be observing at the funeral homes over a period of several weeks and conducting several tape recorded interviews at a time that is mutually convenient.

Consent:

This is to certify that I _____ know about and agree to be a participant in this research study outlined above. I agree to allow Mr Hyland to observe my day-to-day work provided permission has been granted to me by my clients.

I agree to be interviewed and I understand interviews will be tape recorded. I realize that any names will be removed from any tape recorded interviews. I understand that the tapes will be transcribed and that they and the transcripts will be retained indefinitely by the researcher after this study has been completed. These data may be used for research and educational purposes in the future provided complete anonymity is assured. It is also my understanding that while interviews may last approximately one hour, I am free to terminate any interviews at any time. I realize that the researcher will only observe when invited to do so by the funeral director or his appointee, and that the researcher may be requested to leave at any time.

I understand that I do not have to talk about any subject I do not wish to discuss and that my identity will be protected. I am assured of anonymity for myself and my firm. Although Mr. Hyland may publish, my name will not associated with the quotations in the publication. I may withdraw from this study at any time. There may be no direct benefits to me from any participation in this study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions concerning the study and they have been answered to my satisfaction.

Unless otherwise indicated, a summary report on the findings of this study will be forwarded to me.

Date:_____ **Signature:**_____

Witness:_____ **Researcher:**_____

Appendix B

Transcription of the Tape Recorded Consent to Participate in Research Study

The University of Alberta

Transcription of the Tape Recorded Consent to Participate in Research Study

May I turn on the tape recorder?_____

My name is Liam Hyland, formerly a pastoral assistant, and now a counsellor and presently completing a thesis at the University of Alberta. I thank you for your response to my request. I am conducting a study called 'Support of the Bereaved: Comforting role of Funeral Directors.

I will be interviewing funeral directors, recently bereaved adults, and others who come in contact with funeral directors.

Your decision to contact me suggests that you are willing to participate in this project. I will now share with you the amount of involvement you may be asked to give to this study. Should you decide to participate, you will be interviewed once, and perhaps a second time over the phone for about one hour. I will be asking questions about your experience with the funeral director. You can refuse to answer any question, or stop the interview at any time.

I would like to tape record the interviews and then have a written record of our conversation made. Your name will be erased from the tape and will not be used on the written record. The things you tell me will be used in this research project. The written records of our conversations may be used in other similar projects provided complete anonymity is assured. Your name will not be mentioned in any way when the research is published and all our discussions will only be discussed with myself, and those assigned to work with me in the fulfilling of this research project. All records will be locked in a cabinet and held indefinitely.

If you no longer wish to participate in the study you can withdraw at any time without penalty, simply by stating your wish to do so.

If you wish I will send you a summary of the results of the study. Do you have any questions about this study?_____Do you have a pen or pencil to record the following phone number?_____

If you do have a question at a later date you may phone me at the University of Alberta, 492-8233. You may also phone my supervisor, Dr. Jan Morse at 492-6250 at the University of Alberta. Do you have these phone numbers? Are you willing to participate in this study?_____Is this a convenient time to talk, or can you suggest another time for me to call back? Would you like a report of this Study? Yes_____No_____Since you have said 'yes', please give me your name and address and I will be pleased to forward a summary report of this study to you in approximately eight months.

Date_____

Appendix C

Transcription of Informal Verbal Consent Obtained by Funeral Directors from their Clients

Transcription of Informal Verbal Consent
Obtained by Funeral Directors from their Clients

The funeral director will be asked to introduce the researcher to clients as follows:

"During our visit today I have given permission to Mr. Hyland, former pastoral assistant, and counsellor, to observe me at work. He is completing a study on funeral directors. He will not participate in any part of our conversation, and whatever is talked about will be treated in total anonymity. Is it all right for him to be here, or would you like him to leave?
Yes_____ No_____

If you feel uncomfortable at any time with his presence please tell me and I will request that Mr. Hyland leave."