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**DEALING WITH DEATH: PROBLEMS AND RESPONSES IN AMERICAN
FUNERAL PRACTICE**

by

Matthew JeckerByrne

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York**

2000

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

**DEALING WITH DEATH: PROBLEMS AND RESPONSES IN AMERICAN
FUNERAL PRACTICE**

by

Matthew JeckerByrne

Adviser: Lindsey Churchill

A descriptive, exploratory study of the workings of a medium-sized independent funeral home. The study describes the social forces both internal and external to the lived order of the funeral home.

This study focuses on social control, cultural proscription, impression management, institutionalization, role taking, role constraints, and ad hocing in the American funeral service. Through direct observation of the funeral setting I am able to provide detailed descriptions of the practices of the American funeral and the conditions which shape it. Through narrative description and analysis I report on the every day practices in an independently owned funeral home and how these practices are a reproduction of the social order common to American funeral homes.

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Chapter 1-"The Problem and How I Studied It."

Death is a problem in any society. People have fears about it; and there are taboos associated with dying and the handling of the dead. These vary by society. Usually some institutions are set up to deal with it. In American society it used to be the family, as it has been in many other societies. However, over the past century there has been an increasing reliance on professionals. Thus we have a profession of funeral directors and their staffs. These professionals (along with the clergy) have assumed social control over the rituals and practices of dealing with the dead. The Normal American Funeral and the funeral director provide the social structure for handling the dead and provide the living with an institutionalized means of dealing with the sadness and pain associated with death.

Americans deviate very little from a funeral model which has been in place in the United States since the late 19th Century (Lynch, 1997; Runblad, 1995; Farrell, 1980; Pine, 1975; Habenstein and Lamers, 1959). An overwhelming majority don't choose to die at home or to assist in the death or memorialization of a loved one, but instead are horrified by death and the smells, sights, and sounds associated with it. Over the past one hundred years, death, like the birthing process, has become medicalized and bureaucratized (Moller, 1996). No longer is it the responsibility of family members to perform last offices; clean, dress, wake, and bury the

body. Each of these tasks and others have become the duty of the hospital/nursing home attendant or funeral director. As the years have passed and ordinary citizens have become distanced from death, they've come to rely exclusively on others to do the *dirty work* (Hughes, 1971 and 1958) of death handling. Funeral directors, as caretakers of the dead, have therefore been able to set the conditions for memorialization of the deceased. This is a fact that has been met with some resistance by clergy (French, 1985; Fulton, 1961) and the public, and one that has shaped the professionalization project of funeral directors.

This dissertation focuses on the controls exercised by the funeral profession in creating a model of a standard American funeral, at the same time as they face problems in establishing authority, respect, and economic viability in a generally changing society.

The enactment and maintenance of funeral rituals on the part of funeral workers largely impels people to conform to a standard model of funeralization. As I will show, funeral workers are experts in impression management, and in defining the funeral situation. Bereaved clients are at a loss to know how to handle the ritual and, perhaps themselves, because they lack experience and are emotionally vulnerable. Funeral workers set the tone, make the rules, and hold the scene together.

Many factors affect the ritualized handling of dead bodies in the

United States. Social facts¹, such as culture, organizational structure, economic conditions, history, and political realities influence the practices of the American funeral². These sociological processes define and maintain the funeral rituals on the part of funeral workers and impel clients and their families to conform to a standard of death care. I use both classical sociological theories and ethnomethodology to analyze the way professionals deal with death in a death aversive society.

Relatively little research exists on death, death workers, funerals, and funeral homes. At least one writer attributes this to lack of interest in and an aversion to death by most Americans (Blauner, 1968). Despite its everyday occurrence, death has long been a taboo subject in American society. Although, it is frequently depicted in popular culture and is a topic for box office hits, when faced with death in their own milieu, people pass it on to professionals. This paradoxical fascination with and avoidance of death, and the means by which it is dealt with in the funeral service is what attracted me to the subject. Although there has been some research on the

¹. Social facts may be described as "forces beyond the control of any individual, which can be explained only in terms of social patterns, not in terms of individual psychology", (Gelles and Levine, 1995, p. 13). Durkheim (1915) suggests they are external to the individual and constraining on behavior. They are held in place and enforced by a moral authority.

². In this dissertation the funeral service is defined in two ways: 1) as a ritualized response to a social event: death, and 2) as the practices of an occupational group aspiring to professional status. Each of these definitions has been applied in my study of the American funeral.

"American way of death" (Lynch, 1997; Moller, 1996; Farrell, 1980; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Mitford, 1963/1998) the amount of first-hand research reported on death care workers is paltry.³ I hope to contribute to the literature.

Some of the concepts used in the analysis of the data are discussed in the next section.

Theoretical and Empirical Concepts

The following concepts are used in the analysis of my research data:

The Normal American Funeral is referred to elsewhere (Lynch, 1997; Frederick and Strub, 1986; Pine, 1975) as the "standard adult funeral" and consists of a series of steps aimed toward the proper and efficient treatment of the dead person and their living relatives. The steps include first contact with the funeral home, removal of the body from place of death, conference with the family to make funeral arrangements, visitation, funeral ceremony, and final payment. These steps are routinized and vary little from one funeral to the next. All funeral homes follow a similar routine. Funeral workers, along with the bereaved, actively maintain this routine.

Thus, *disruptions* in the routine are a problem. Because death is already a disruptive event (Lynch, 1997; Aries, 1974; Fulton, 1965) for

³.There are contributions by Howarth (1996), Smith (1996), Cahill (1995), Thompson (1991), Petrillo (1990), Barley (1983a, 1983b), Pine (1975, 1969), Raether (1971), Sudnow (1967), Bowman (1959a), Habenstein and Lamers (1959), and Habenstein (1954).

individuals, breaches in the way groups deal with the disruption of death constitute a challenge that the institutions devoted to death - funeral homes and churches - must deal with. There are "everyday" disruptions within these institutions. Disruptions may be in the form of difficulties organizing and controlling the behavior of the bereaved (ie. emotional outbursts by families), unexpected complications associated with preparing a body for display (ie. disfigurement or rapid decomposition), or scheduling problems with persons and services outside the funeral home (ie. cemetery and livery workers and clergy). Funeral workers seek to avoid these interruptions in the normal flow of events through the use of preventive practices and other social control devices. If these fail, corrective or normalizing practices are employed.

Proper handling of the dead is a phrase used to describe the funeral worker's moral requirement to treat the body with dignity and respect. The cultural assumptions associated with death and the body imply that both are sacred and mysterious and must be treated accordingly. An analysis of embalming procedures and other non public activities will shed empirical light on how background expectancies regarding death and death handling inform funerary behavior. Practices such as casketing a body are shaped by an internalized code of ethics instilled in the funeral worker by the funeral home, mortuary education, collectivity membership, and membership in a dominant culture that treats dead bodies with reverence.

Although funeral workers routinely and "coldly" handle bodies, they do so with a measured level of respect.

Cotton Wooling which refers to the handling of the living, relies on the assumption that the bereaved, because of their lack of experience with funerary practices and because of emotional disruption caused by their loss, are unpredictable. They are in an unfamiliar world at a difficult time and must be treated carefully by the funeral team in order to avoid disruption. The director is morally required to manage the family smoothly through the event so as not to provoke further disruption. Again, observation and analysis of preventive and corrective practices as well as public behavior of staff indicates the role of routine in easing the grief process for the bereaved and the work of conducting the normal American funeral for the director (Barley, 1983b; Pine, 1975).

Front room and back room regions involve the maintenance of public and private spheres in the funeral home for the purpose of protecting families from the profane aspects of funeral work and the provision of safe havens for casual behavior⁴ on the part of the staff. Behavioral boundaries are created by physical (ie., closed doors and lights) and attitudinal spaces

⁴. Goffman contends that the "back stage" is a place where social actors can comfortably let down their guard and not manage others' impressions of them (1959). In his analysis of Agnes's passing project (1967, pp. 116-185), Garfinkel argues this can never happen completely. In a funeral home workers vigilantly keep in place a code of respect for the dead even when the door is closed to the public.

(ie., shunned knowledge, behind-the-back expressions, and conversational asides).

Stigma or the mark of social devaluation discussed by Goffman (1963) is influential in understanding the social construction and routine maintenance of the normal American funeral. Death is feared and marginalized in American society, and those closely associated with death, especially funeral workers, assume the lower social value associated with it. Some theorists (Becker, 1966; Rosenhan, 1973; Altman, 1986) have noted that the consequences of a negative label can be reduced economic opportunity, limitations on social contacts, and lowering of self esteem. In their professionalization project, funeral directors have attempted to increase their social status by raising their occupational status. At the same time, despite their stigmatized status, or perhaps because of it, they have assumed a monopoly over the conditions of the funeral service which allows them to organize the process. This exclusive jurisdiction and how it relates to stigma are analyzed in Chapter 5 on professional conditions of the normal American funeral.

Passing involves the attempts by the funeral worker to avoid the look of a necrophiliac⁵ or someone who is overly concerned with death and death work. This impression management project is an ongoing process

⁵. I refer to the literal sense of the term as someone who is in love with, rather than the colloquial sense of someone who makes love to the dead.

akin to Garfinkel's "intersexed" Agnes playing the part of the "120 percent female", (1967, p. 129). The use of language and behavior is analyzed as a record of how funeral staff distance themselves from commonly held negative attitudes toward handling death.

The Method

In order to study the practices of the profession and its role in defining the terms of dealing with the dead--the grieving process, the assignment of responsibility, and the creation of boundaries around their authority and those of the clergy and family--I conducted a participant observation study of one funeral home outside a metropolitan area, underwent training as a funeral worker, and studied the professional literature for nine years.

My fieldwork involved interviewing participants in the funeral trade, including twelve funeral directors. In one to three hour interviews I gathered data about the practices of the field and the culture of the trade. I also interviewed four funeral service educators, asking them questions about training, curriculum, examinations, licensing, professionalization, and the future of the profession. Data from archival research as well as a review of the literature were reinforced by observations in a funeral home. In the spring of 1993 I began working as a porter, and later an attendant⁶, in a

⁶. Porter and attendant are terms referring to funeral team roles. They mean custodian and funeral assistant respectively and will be explained in detail and context in the chapter on "The Division of Labor in the Funeral Home".

funeral home.

As a porter and attendant over a four month period, I repaired, cleaned, and painted the funeral home as well as assisted funeral directors on house removals, embalmings, and coverage of visiting hours. In the first days of work at the funeral home I was asked by several employees if I was "squeamish around bodies" and was carefully monitored in my contacts with grieving families. After a short time I proved myself to be one of the crew and was asked to participate in all aspects of the funeral process, with the exception of arranging funerals and selling caskets. At the same time, I kept detailed notes⁷ on the social relations within the funeral home, the number of calls, the clinical components of the embalming process, the management of the bereaved, and the mundane details of the funeral sequence.

The Scene

The Metropolitan-Suburban (M-S) Funeral Home, as I will call it, is one of more than a dozen located outside a downtown metropolitan area. The area is a working and middle class suburban neighborhood that extends over approximately 90 square miles. The inhabitants are for the most part of Italian, Anglo Saxon, Irish, and African American descent. Growing numbers of Asian, Caribbean, and East European immigrants are

⁷. Handwritten notes on scraps of paper kept in my shirt pocket. They were transcribed to computer files at the end of each day.

moving into the area seeking affordable housing, green landscapes, and safe streets. The funeral home I studied was among the top performers in the area with approximately one quarter of the market share of funerals. Another half of the market is shared by two other area funeral homes and the remaining quarter is spread among the other homes.

M-S Funeral Home is a medium sized, independent funeral home and does an average of 220 funerals (calls) per year. It is located in a three-story colonial house on a busy thoroughfare surrounded by shops, restaurants, and private homes. The house has operated as a funeral home since the early 1930's. Michael, the owner at the time of my employment, had run M-S since the late 1970's. He combined the Metropolitan Funeral Home with another funeral home (Suburban) he owned in 1981. He sold the business to another of the firm's directors, Stan, in 1997.

Summary- of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 on "American Death Culture", gives a brief history of American death culture and its role in shaping the American funeral. I explore the cultural conditions of the American funeral through analysis of an ethnographic description of the funeral service.

Chapter 3, "Funeral Directing: The Social Construction and Constraint of a Profession", is an institutional view of the occupational and professional status of the funeral director. I argue that funeral directors are engaged in a professionalization project aimed, in part, at raising their social status and

reducing the stigma associated with the financial and death handling aspects of their work. A historical and theoretical treatment of the funeral service is followed by a description and analysis of the constraints on the professionalization project including occupational stigma as a constraint. Issues such as training, monopoly, and collectivity membership are related to the problem of managing orderliness in the funeral scene. The common methods of impression management show ethnomethodological aspects of the professionalization project.

Chapter 4, "The Funeral Home as a Place of Work: The Division of Labor in the American Funeral" is a description of role relations in a funeral home. Traditional role theory is applied to an ideal typical description of role playing in the funeral service. Examples and analysis of role conflict, gender roles, and role flexibility are provided.

Chapter 5, "Role Constraints and *Ad Hocing*. The Organizational Methodology of the Funeral Home", a challenge to "traditional sociological" role theory and a description of an alternative model to explain funeral work in action. I begin with a critique of role theory and then show how the *ad hocing* principle works in an analysis of disruptions in the routine practices of a funeral.

Chapter 6, "The Changing Context of the American Funeral", discusses institutional, as well as ritual[istic] alternatives to the traditional way of memorializing the dead. These alternatives include corporatization

of the funeral service and the slow movement toward client-based, direct treatments of the body. Some closing thoughts and speculations about the future are included.

Chapter 7, "Conclusion and Summary of Findings", provides a wrap up of the study and reviews some of my findings regarding the management of death in the United States.

Chapter 2-American Death Culture

The American Culture: Dealing with Death

In this section I discuss the cultural conditions for the normal American funeral and analyze the practices described in the next section.

Americans, like members of other societies, don't like death. In fact, they fear it, deny it, put it off through medical intervention, and pass it on to professionals (modern day sineaters⁸) who handle it for a fee. But why do Americans so dislike death? Probably because in a culture that honors youth and acquisition, death represents an end to each. It has not always been this way.

Before advanced medical technology, "first world" diplomacy, and agribusiness, death, and the treatment of the body, was a regular part of the lives of Americans. Hundreds of thousands of people died in wars, at birth or shortly after, and the elderly and sick typically died at home surrounded by their family and friends. Death handling was a regular part of the lives

⁸ Sin-eating was customary at funerals in Wales and the Welsh Marches. According to an entry in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1987), "In the county of Hereford was an old custome {sic} at funeralls {sic} to hire [have] poor people, who were to take upon them all the sinnes {sic} of the party deceased. One of them I remember lived in a cottage on Rosse-highway, he was a long, lean, ugly, lamentable, poor raskal {sic}, (pp. 572-573)." When the corpse was brought out and laid on the bier a loaf of bread was delivered to the sineater over the corpse. Along with this was a maple wood (Gossips) bowl full of beer which was to be drunk. The sineater was paid six pence for their service of taking up the sins of the deceased and freeing them from walking after death. The consumption of the bread and the beer was followed by the recitation of the lines, "The ease and rest of the soul departed, for which he would pawn his own soul," (*ibid*, 1987).

of the young and old. It was not viewed as an abnormal breach of everyday life and was not treated with mystery and revulsion as it is today.⁹ Family members died at home where their bodies were cleaned, dressed, and laid out by other family members or by "shrouding women"¹⁰. The deceased was then transported to the burial place by family members or an undertaker who may have provided a coffin. Services were performed by a clergyman at the graveside. The handling of death and dead bodies was considered a normal aspect of everyday life (Moller, 1996; Aries, 1974).

As society has become more complex the response of individuals toward death, their own and other's, has been to view it as an untimely end to an otherwise productive life (Aries, 1974; Moller, 1996)¹¹ and to pass the

⁹. Lynch (1997) points out that, "the medical-technical parlance of death emphasizes disorder", in the term pathology. This is the hospital department where bodies of the dead are autopsied and stored before they are removed by the funeral director. David Sudnow (1967) reminds us that they are marginalized in the bowels of the hospital, trapped between the wheezing gases of furnace rooms and the clang-clang of workshops, somewhere near the laundry and the loading dock.

¹⁰. In her study "Exhuming Women's Pre-market Duties in the Care of the Dead" (1995), Rundblad reports on the role played by 18th and 19th C. "shrouding women" (women of the community, often midwives, who assisted family members with the final offices of the dead) and their displacement by the American funeral director. The story she tells is one of modernization and professionalization of traditional practices. She claims the "official" history of American funeral direction as presented in the trade journals and textbooks excludes women and buries their contributions to the occupation of death handling and the creation of the funeral process.

¹¹. One could view Dylan Thomas' poem "*Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night*" (1962) as representative of this attitude. Moller also cites Tolstoy's "*The Death of Ivan Ilych*" (1859) as another literary example.

responsibility for handling the body over to a professional and their staff. In his book *Confronting Death* (1996) Moller has described the Twentieth Century as the "age of death denial", (p. 15). In the past death was seen as something that affected the entire community and the response to it was communal. Family members were closely involved in the dying process, lending support and comfort to the dying person. Friends and fellow churchgoers were involved in the funeral preparations. The funeral of a member served the *function* of bringing together the entire community to pay homage and reflect on their own mortality. Arguably, the modern funeral serves a similar (perhaps secondary) function but there is a degree of change that has occurred with the institutionalization and professionalization of the funeral service and the medicalization of the dying ritual. The average person has been distanced from death and this separation has bred suspicion and derision toward death and its handlers.

Social forces underlie the meaning given to the funerary event. Individuals within a community of bereaved bring their own meanings to the situation and also look to "the family" to set the tone and construct the definition of the situation based upon their shared interpretation of it. In the case of the unreported/unspoken death¹² (suicide or death from socially unacceptable causes-A.I.D.S. or alcoholism for instance) what's left unsaid is

¹². Kenneth Doka (1985/1998) speaks of "disenfranchised grief" in his book of the same title, in his discussion of the difficulty mourners have defining the situation when ambiguous feelings exist around a death or toward the dead.

important to the construction of meaning (Howard, 1994). A facade may be created. When a young person dies, at least in contemporary American culture, there is a feeling of the unjust death, a death that is not supposed to happen. Such a death occasions more grief than the death of an elderly or sickly person.

Mourners look also to the family for guidance in the grieving behavior, and in turn families look to the funeral director and staff to provide support and direction at the time of death. Their familiarity and the public's lack of familiarity with the culturally appropriate treatment of the dead makes them apt managers of the funerary performance. Ironically, this cultural knowledge, based on "proper and dignified" handling of the death is known in common by competent members but is part of the shunned knowledge of America's dominant culture and is left to the domain of the stigmatized funeral worker.

Another aspect of American culture which may affect funeral service attitudes is fear of death. Fear of death may also be accompanied by fear of what awaits us after death. Around the 13th Century the possibility of an individual "bad death" marked the movement from universal salvation to individual judgment and the fear of divine punishment began to haunt humanity (at least in the Western World), (Moller, 1996, p. 8). According to Kubler-Ross, "Death is still a fearful, frightening happening and the fear of death is a universal fear even if we think we have mastered it on many

levels," (1969, p. 5). This being said, humans have dealt with death differently throughout history, and in other parts of the world. In ancient times death was met with an attitude of "tranquility and acceptance, and was a communal and public act," (Moller, 1996, pg. 4). Family members and others in the community surrounded the dying person and offered their assistance and sympathy. Death was viewed as a natural sequence in the life course, and when the spirit gods called a person, they were prepared to go. In fact, as reported by Moller, accidental or unexpected deaths were viewed as bad signs and the body was disposed of with little ceremony or attention.

The expansion of Catholicism and its tenets of salvation necessitated a different attitude toward death, one that recalled the life of the deceased as an indicator of their eternal fate. The death bed scene was one of accounting and confession as the priest performed Extreme Unction and prepared the dying person's soul for entry into heaven. Later, the beliefs of the Calvinists and other protestants suggested that one's fate was predetermined by God and that death bed confessions were unnecessary. The Protestants (Puritans, Quakers, Huguenots, etc.) that left Europe to avoid religious persecution brought to the New World a variation on the ritual of dying. Family and community members would surround the deathbed and offer comfort to the dying person because it was believed to be a harrowing experience to enter the unknown. Offerings of thanks for good

deeds and reminders of the pious example set by the dying were made by survivors in hopes that they would ease the mind of the dying. With the onset of the Victorian Age came another variation on the familiar deathbed scene. The grieving people surrounding the dying were limited to the immediate family in keeping with secularization and stricter rules of decorum, so the community and eventually the family were distanced from the dead. As society became more urbanized and people's lives more compartmentalized, there came an increase in the "emotional and material excesses of grief as a way of compensating for a painful loss," (Moller, 1996, pp. 12-13). The decline in community involvement and the increase in materialism surrounding the dying ritual indicates that death was no longer being calmly accepted. As family and community were distanced from the dying ritual, attitudes toward death became more fearful and disdainful (Aries, 1974).

The increased urbanization of, industrialization of, and immigration to 19th Century America further accelerated the secularization of death and ushered in a process of professionalization that continues today. By the end of the United States Civil War the funeral trade had established credentials as the leading caretaker of the dead, taking responsibility for the handling and preparation of the body away from the family. This occurred with the consolidation of tasks formally under the control of families, cabinet makers, shrouding women, and church sextons by an occupational group calling

themselves undertakers. The large number of Union soldiers killed in battle far from their homes necessitated an effective means of transporting bodies back to burial places in the North. Embalming became the method of choice and its techniques were honed during this time. In 1882 the first meeting of the National Funeral Director's Association was held and the funeral service was established. From that point on, the power to direct and organize funerals turned over to professionals and along with it, the stigma associated with death. The concurrent development of professional medicine and hospitals helped remove responsibility for dying relatives from families. With increased medical technology there has been a slowing of the dying process and an end to direct confrontation of death by loved ones. This has contributed to an unfamiliarity and disdain for death in the living.¹³

Description of the Normal American Funeral

A common model for funerals exists¹⁴, is taught in American mortuary

¹³. Because of the fear and disdain associated with death and because of their close contact with the dead, funeral workers have become a stigmatized labor force and must manage this mark of disgrace/reproach as they provide services for families of the deceased. More on this in Chapter Five.

¹⁴. Variations on the model occur depending on the religion, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age and sex of the deceased, as well as other factors unrelated to the deceased. Jews, for example, have funerals with a closed coffin, and by religious practice are supposed to use plain pine. So, they do not conform completely to the model I employ. Another growing variation in the model, substitutes cremation for burial.

schools, and is passed down from generations of funeral directors and bereaved families. This model may be seen in the routinization of funeral performances and in attempts by funeral directors and staff to maintain this routine. Following is my attempt to typify the funeral experience in the United States. It may not represent an exact reproduction of practices but rather stands as an ideal type construction of the handling mechanisms of funeral directors.

The Normal American Funeral Model

The normal American funeral begins with the "first call" to the funeral home. At this time the death is reported, and the services of the funeral home are requested. According to the steps in the "first call information" sheet (see Appendix 1a¹⁵) the name and age of the deceased, place of death, name of person calling and their relationship to the deceased, their address and telephone number is gathered from the caller. Also, the director asks whether the person died at home, the name, address, and telephone number of the attending physician and whether a death certificate has been completed. An arrangement conference is scheduled with the caller.

When the funeral director hangs up the phone, he or she makes

¹⁵. The document shown in Appendix 1b is used by non-licensed funeral personnel to take information in the event a licensed funeral director is not available. The funeral director later calls the family or meets with them in the case of a home removal, and uses the document in Appendix 1a.

provisions to remove the body from the house, hospital, or nursing home. Directors obtain the death certificate (see Appendix 2) either at the time of the removal in the case of an institutional death or shortly thereafter in the case of a house death. The body is then brought to the funeral home. This is done before a contract for service has been signed. If prior agreements have been made with the family, the body is then cleaned, preserved, and restored. Each of these steps is necessary for the "proper" display of the body, in those cases where a viewing will occur.¹⁶

The family arrives at the funeral home for the arrangement conference bringing burial clothes and perhaps a photograph of the deceased for use in cosmetizing and displaying the body. The funeral director offers condolences. The director will then ask more detailed questions (see Appendix 3) about the deceased such as their maiden and/or nickname, residence at time of death, birthplace, occupation, employer name and years of service, community affiliations, and other information that will be used to write an obituary.

¹⁶. According to *The Principles and Practice of Embalming*, (Frederick and Strub, 1986) preparation or embalming of the body entails disinfection through cleansing the body, preservation through the replacement of bodily fluids with formaldehyde-based chemicals, and restoration to a "natural, life-like" appearance. Of course, in the case of a Jewish or Muslim funeral where open casket display is not customary the second and third steps are not followed. The ritual cleansing or *taharah* as well as the dressing and casketing of the body is then performed by the funeral director, members of the deceased's family, or a special religious organization such as the *Chevrah Kaddisha* for observant Jews.

Other information is gained from the family following a specified format outlined on the arrangement sheet and may be used to make specific provisions for the funeral. Such things as veteran status and clergy and location of funeral service may indicate to the director the need for an American flag to be given to the family, the need for prayer and mass cards, and the use of a plain cross, Crucifix, or other religious symbols around the display of the-body-in-casket. The location of the service is arranged and will be confirmed with a call to the appropriate religious facility. The selection of the time, the date, and the music for the service is made during the arrangement conference. The services of a cemetery or crematory are discussed and chosen and will later be confirmed by the funeral director by telephone. Visiting hours are arranged and other funeral home services are discussed and selected.

"Other services" include supervision of the funeral by the director and the staff, use of facilities, livery (hearse, flower car, limousines), merchandise (casket, outer burial container if required by cemetery, container for cremains, clothing or burial garments, additional death notices, register book), and services requiring cash in advance, such as cemetery/crematory, clergy, death certificate transcripts, pallbearers, bridge and road tolls, phone and fax charges, and gratuities.

If germane, the family is then led to the casket display room and shown various models of caskets, outer burial containers, and urns. The

funeral director makes recommendations and answers questions regarding the selection of the merchandise and, when appropriate, leaves the family by themselves to discuss their alternatives. The group then returns to the arrangement room, perhaps along the way being shown the funeral home's facilities (ie. smoking lounge, elevator, chapels where the body may be "laid out", and waiting areas). The funeral director goes over the itemized price list (Appendix 4) with the family and points out what each service or piece of merchandise is and its corresponding price. S/he gets a signature from one of the family members and gives them a copy of the bill. First payment may be requested but is not required at this time. The funeral director tells the family when to return to the funeral home for visiting hours (an hour before other mourners are scheduled to arrive), which are typically between two and four in the afternoon and seven and nine in the evening.

Shortly after the family leaves, the funeral director compiles an order sheet like the one in Appendix five and uses it to keep track of the merchandise and services needed for the funeral. The clothes and other effects of the deceased are then brought to the embalming room by the funeral director. If the body was not embalmed earlier, the embalming takes place. The burial container is brought in and the body is dressed and casketed. In the mean time, other funeral home personnel may be preparing the chapel for the funeral performance. The rugs are vacuumed,

the furniture dusted, and folding chairs are arranged toward the front of the room to accommodate mourners. A register book is placed on a podium near the entrance to the chapel and flowers are brought into the room as they arrive. Once the casket has been placed on the bier, the flowers are arranged around it.¹⁷ A kneeler rests at the foot of the bier, and appropriate religious icons are installed in the room. The room is left until shortly before the family arrives. The door is closed.

The funeral director must return to the phone to confirm details with the cemetery or crematory, the church, and pallbearers if needed. This and the other tasks described below are important to the achievement of a trouble-free performance of the funeral and may be considered preventive. S/he writes the obituary and calls it into the newspapers. S/he makes plans for transporting the body and the family to the church and cemetery. If necessary, s/he makes provisions for music at the funeral home and at the service. S/he may file any insurance claims made by the family and handle details regarding Veteran's benefits and Social Security. In line with funeral home staff, s/he will make provisions for floor coverage on the days and evenings of the viewing as well as on the day of the funeral. Someone is

¹⁷. I observed a protocol regarding the placement of floral memorials near the casket. Memorials from spouses were placed closest to the casket followed by those from children, living parents, siblings, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, co-workers and employers, community affiliates, (ie. Lions Club, Alter and Rosary Society), and family friends. Size of the floral arrangement often circumvents this system when smaller memorials seem out of place near the casket.

sent to the Post Office to get a Veteran's flag, if needed.

On the first day set for visiting the family is greeted by the funeral home staff and led to the chapel by the director. They are given the opportunity to view the body privately before other mourners arrive. At this time the family has the opportunity to initially grieve outside of public view and can react to the embalmer's work on the body. If there are any problems with the way the body has been presented (i.e., too much make up, wrong hair or tie color) they can negotiate a solution. However, as Pine (1975, p. 96) suggests:

[The bereaved] usually make it clear that they are pleased or that something could be modified. Such modifications are handled in an interesting fashion [and represent an area of further control over the process by the funeral director]. In most cases, the family is asked to leave the room while the funeral director makes an effort to correct things. Change at this time is often not easy, and it is common that the funeral director actually does not do much. He might make minor readjustments in the vicinity of the requested change, or, as is more common, he does almost nothing at all. In the vast majority of cases observed, the family came back and said, 'Oh, that's wonderful. That's just perfect. That makes so much difference'."

During visiting hours the funeral director typically retreats to the business office or other part of the funeral home to prepare for this funeral or others.

Coverage of the floor, which includes answering questions, fielding telephone calls, and adding more chairs to the chapel, is left to the receptionist on duty. The director, however, remains on call. At the end of the first visiting session the family is sent out of the funeral home. In an effort to maintain the stage for the funeral performance the receptionist goes to work tidying the chapel, adding additional flower arrangements and mass cards that may have arrived during the viewing, cleaning bathrooms, and reporting to the director any problems that must be resolved before the next viewing session. The chapel lights are turned off and the door is closed.

Before the family arrives for evening viewing hours the body is briefly inspected by the funeral director and the cosmetics are touched up if necessary. When the family arrives, they return to their stations near the casket. The staff encourages immediate family members to occupy seats in the front rows closest to the casket or to stand in a reception line to one side of the casket. A receptionist is again on duty, and by now the funeral director has gone home. S/he is available should a question arise or another "call" come in. At about nine o'clock the family and other mourners begin to leave and they are reminded to return to the funeral home the next morning to view the body before the service. A last sweep and clean up of the room is done by the receptionist. The bathrooms are cleaned and all files and/or notes related to the next day's funeral are left for the funeral

director's use in the morning.

On the morning of the funeral service the family may be picked up by a limousine at their home and brought to the funeral home or they may get there on their own. They are encouraged to arrange a ride home following the funeral. They are given some time to view the body before other mourners arrive and before the casket is closed and transported to the church and/or cemetery. Unless other arrangements have been made, final or full payment for the funeral is requested by the funeral director at this time. The funeral procession begins, and the family is led to a limousine. Other mourners are directed to their cars and asked to form a single line and light their head lamps.

The casket is carried out of the funeral home and into the hearse by pallbearers. The funeral director gathers up any papers (ie., burial certificate) and props (ie., church truck, cash for the pallbearers) that s/he may need at the church and cemetery and gets into the passenger seat of the hearse. The line of cars proceeds.

Upon arrival at the church, all mourners are led to their seats by the director before the casket is carried from the hearse by the pallbearers. Once inside it is placed on a "church" truck (a collapsible cart with wheels) and may be covered. The casket is wheeled down the aisle toward the altar, led by the funeral director. During the ceremony the funeral director may go outside and pay the hired pallbearers. They go for coffee or hang

around the hearse and the funeral director goes back inside the church and waits for the service to end. Instructions may be given by the presiding cleric or the funeral director regarding the logistics of the procession to the cemetery. After the service the family and other mourners are led from the church and asked to return to their cars. The funeral director and pallbearers carry the casket back to the hearse. Flowers are once again arranged around the casket. The funeral proceeds to the cemetery or crematory.

At the cemetery the casket is removed from the hearse by the pallbearers and brought to the grave site. The mourners are asked to remain in their vehicles while this takes place. The broken soil around the site is usually covered with *Astroturf*® and the casket is placed over the grave on a mechanism used to lower it to the ground. The area was prepared by cemetery workers earlier in the day. Inclement weather and prior arrangements made by the director may produce a tent-like covering. Otherwise, the director provides umbrellas and plastic rain hats to the mourners. The graveside service is performed by a cleric, or in rare cases, the funeral director, and announcements about receptions after the burial are made to the mourners. At the end of the service the family and mourners are sent on their way, and the funeral director may remain to settle accounts with the cemeterian. S/he then catches a ride back to the funeral home with the hearse driver.

Back at the funeral home the funeral director completes any remaining paperwork regarding the funeral (ie. requests for additional death certificates, insurance claims, billing notices) and enters it into the home's filing system. The steps that make up the normal American funeral, from first call to final billing, typically take three days to complete.

Responses to Death in American Society

Different attitudes toward death in America are reflected in how it is handled, that is, a respect for death. Death, because of its unfamiliarity, breeds suspicion and mystery. The dead are handled, and often spoken of, with reverence and the idea of a "decent burial" is a common thread throughout human history. As far back as the time of Sophocles (496-406 BC)¹⁸ the dead were expected to be treated with dignity. More recently an article in the *New York Times* (5/4/96) reported on the reaction of family members, funeral professionals, funeral service critics, and even the reporter to the "indecent burial" of the dead and the fact that some bodies had been stacked on top of others. Durkheim reflects, "...{T}he dead man is a sacred being...everything which is or has been connected with him is, by *contagion* (my italics), in a religious state," therefore prohibiting it from any profane contacts, (Durkheim, 1915, p. 435). Articles in the *Winston-Salem Journal* (1/6-10/98) reported the horror of the community over the discovery

¹⁸. As evidenced in his characterization of Antigone' defying her uncle, the king's, order that she not remove her brother Polynice's body from the battlefield (Sophocles, 1971).

of three decomposed bodies in the basement of an area funeral home. According to one police investigator, the funeral director's actions were "tantamount to breaking into a church," (1/6/98), illustrating, once again, Durkheim's distinction between sacred and profane areas of social life. Durkheim defines sacred as "the characteristic of all that is religious" (1915), or those aspects of life that have to do with the supernatural and inspire awe, reverence, deep respect, and even fear. By profane he meant to include the ordinary aspects of everyday life. Consistent with his view, the dead and funerals are treated as sacred objects and rituals, respectively, in contemporary society despite the fact that we relish neither. This duality 1) shapes the treatment of the body by professionals, 2) contributes to the expectation that the NAF must be a trouble-free performance, and 3) defines the disparity between the attitudes of the membership collectivity of funeral workers and those of the lay public.

The dignity and respect granted to the body by the funeral worker and the bereaved are related to the cultural proscription that things sacred are to be treated with reverence. We may shun death but we honor the dead (Quigley, 1996). Perhaps this is connected to irrational fears that the dead will "come back to haunt us" if we do not care for them properly¹⁹ or

¹⁹. Durkheim offers what he calls a mythological explanation for this obligation to care for the dead; "{they} wish to be lamented...by refusing them the tribute of sorrow which is their right, men offend them," (p. 443, 1915).

that the dead are defenseless and therefore in need of fair and proper treatment. Or, possibly, that we will find ourselves in similar circumstances in the future and want to be handled appropriately. Whatever the explanation, we expect our dead to be treated with respect and we require a level of *ultrarespectability* from those who are handling them. The contagion referred to earlier is transferred to the funeral worker when they assume the handling of the dead. Despite or because of the stigma, funeral directors observe this norm of respect in presenting themselves, the body, the funeral home, and in the way they attempt to conduct a flawless funeral performance on behalf of the bereaved. They are both putting on an act for the benefit of the public and, (as I observed first hand) as competent members of American culture exhibiting respect for the dead in their dignified treatment. One example from my fieldnotes comes to mind. At the end of evening visitation I was preparing a body for burial the next day. This included lowering the body in the casket by cranking down the mattress, folding the hingeskirt and overlay into the casket, and sealing the top. When my boss returned to the chapel he asked if I had removed the deceased's ring to return to the family. I said no:

Michael opened the casket to check the body for jewelry. He noticed that I had draped the covering over the deceased's face and thrown the blanket into the casket. He said "You have to tuck this under the head and place this blanket neatly over the legs and waist." I said

"What's the difference, nobody's gonna see her." To which he excitedly responded "That's your grandmother in there!! Everyone that goes out of here could be your grandmother, your mother, your father. You have to treat them that way", (fieldnotes, 6/30/93).

This attitude toward the dead is one I observed often and was evident in many of the funeral workers' behaviors behind the scenes. I did, however, observe Michael in a conflicting attitude. I remember an incident on my first day of work. I was helping another director load two bodies into the funeral van for transport to the crematory. To avoid a second trip Michael wanted both bodies in despite the tight squeeze. On the one hand he acted torn by the need to "stack" the cardboard caskets saying, "I criticize other guys who do that!". On the other, he was watching the bottom line in saying "just get them out of here, I don't want to know," (fieldnotes, 3/10/93). Certainly the funeral worker "protects" the public from their profane handling of the dead, but at the same time I observed a level of dignified treatment and a line that was rarely crossed even in the cloaked privacy of the back room.²⁰ Although workers, at times, treated the body technically, as an object rather than a deceased being, I observed little mistreatment of the body.

²⁰. It is newsworthy when funeral workers who neglect bodies take money for services. An example was reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (8/22/98) of an investigation of a funeral home that was collecting bodies and payments from families for cremation and letting them decay in a cellar, a defective cooler, and a company van.

The duality of sacred and profane shapes the expectation of the NAF as a trouble-free performance. Funeral workers seek to protect families from the technical and "gory" aspects of the performance through the use of *cotton-wooling*, preventive and corrective practices, and separating front room from back room regions. This process is informed by an understanding that the public does not want to know the details that bring a dead body to a life-like form; the cleaning, primping, and in some cases, reconstruction necessary to achieve the agreed-upon model of the life-like-but-otherwise-dead person. Because the culture does not prepare them for death and because they avoid death and shun knowledge about it, Americans know as little as possible about how their "loved one" has come to be prepared. The preparation takes place in areas inaccessible to the public.

I mentioned earlier that funeral workers are experts in the area of death care and accustomed to the sights, sounds, and emotions that surround it. This ability to temper the horror of death felt by most competent members of our culture is prerequisite to performing in the funeral service²¹. I argue that funeral workers represent a membership

²¹. Consider the graveyard scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1968). Hamlet, observing the light humor of the gravedigger remarks to Horatio, "Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?" To which Horatio replies, "Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness", suggesting the death worker's seeming lack of sensitivity is a result of his/her familiarity with handling the dead. Hamlet is at first horrified by this easiness.

collectivity or subculture that shares in common an acceptance of the profane aspects of death and grief, one that is in opposition to the attitude of the larger culture. Whereas most members of American culture would be appalled by the sights and smells of the dead body, funeral workers are accustomed to them in their transformation from death-like to life-like.

The duality of the sacred and profane also shapes this disparity between the attitudes of the membership collectivity of funeral workers and those of the lay public. The public is treated only to the sacred presentation of the body; embalmed, dressed, casketed, surrounded by flowers and prayer cards, and laid to rest before a room full of reverent mourners. The funeral director is morally required to avoid discussing the profane details of this sacred public display. Workers resent the stigma associated with their work. The resentment may stem from the need to hide the "good work" or the funeral performance for the protection of the grieving family and from the ambiguous cultural messages the funeral worker receives regarding their purpose. They are preserving the body to a life-like appearance, presenting it in a casket so that it appears to be sleeping and, in effect, they become an aide to the other side.²² What is

²². The funeral worker, like the garbage collector or hangman, experiences "status incongruities" in that s/he is responsible for "the enforcement of the normative values of the community", in this case, regarding the proper handling of the dead, through means "usually perceived as necessary but nonetheless distinctly unpleasant by most people," (Hornum, 1968).

required to make this appearance (draining of bodily fluids, exercising *rigor mortis* out of the limbs, undressing the body, pinching, pushing, probing, and other features of handling) is viewed by the public as "sick", "ghoulish", and unnecessary intervention, despite their demand for covering the uglier sides of death.

The funeral director rather than a family member is responsible for handling the body and the details of the funeral. The body is typically removed from a hospital or nursing home where it was surrounded by machines and monitoring devices and prepared at a funeral home, hidden away from the family and the public. In the past (before the late 19th Century) all preparations were done in the home where the death occurred. Moller claims that "dying is no longer supported by deathbed ritual and community", (1996, p. 17) and has therefore become meaningless in modern society.

Instead, the death handling has become an institutionalized aspect of modern life, one that is expected, even required, to be complete in a week's time. The socially expected duration (Merton, 1984) for grief is approximately one year. After that, most folks don't want to hear about *it*. Life goes on because death and mortality are too much of a burden and because boundaries are placed on appropriate grief by the funeral director, the length of the funeral, and the common culture. Parsons describes "a set of institutionalized expectations and...corresponding sentiments and

sanctions" associated with the *sick role*. These include exemption from normal social responsibilities and acceptance that wellness is not an act of will or decision but rather a state of being preferred by the sick person and sought in cooperation with a caregiver. This can be related to the role of the grieving in that they are given the benefit of the doubt that they are out of their normal element and therefore out of control. However, as competent members of their culture they are expected to recover in a "reasonable" amount of time and to seek help in their recovery should it "go on too long". The normal American funeral and the funeral director provide the social structure for handling grief and provide the grieving with an institutionalized means of dealing with the sadness and pain associated with death.

Chapter 3-Funeral Directing: The Social Construction and Constraints of a Profession

Funeral directors are engaged in a professionalization project which is aimed at securing their occupational niche and increasing their economic, political, and social power.

This chapter investigates the conditions and practices that promote or inhibit the progress of funeral directors in their quest to professionalize. Part one chronicles the social construction of funeral directing in its professionalization project. Part two focuses on the dimensions of professionalization and the progress, to date, made by funeral direction (Cahill, 1999). Part three reports on some of the constraints (both intrinsic and extrinsic) blocking the project. Finally, part four looks specifically at stigma as a constraint to, as well as a motivator of professionalization. I begin this chapter with a review of the professions literature.

Theoretical Background: The Social Construction of Funeral Directing

The professions have been a topic for study in sociology almost from its inception. Many contributions have been made to the understanding of the professions, their organization, their relation to the state and to their constituencies, and to the relations of various professional groups to one another. Most sociologists agree on a limited number of criteria by which an occupational group is judged to be a profession. Many of these were first proposed in Carr-Saunders and Wilson's treatment of the professions

(1933) and were later expanded upon and/or refined by others.

Carr-Saunders and Wilson suggest that a profession is first distinguished from other occupations by its "possession of an intellectual technique acquired by specialized training which can be applied to everyday life" (1933). That is to say, professions, such as medicine and law, possess a body of abstract knowledge that can be widely applied to everyday problems. As early as 1882, Auguste Renouard (1839-1912), a pioneer of embalming practices, claimed that "embalming was the basis of professional rank for funeral directors," (quoted in Charles Renouard, 1951). Funeral directors, like physicians, lawyers, and other professionals, deal with ordinary and normal (if unfamiliar) disruptions in the life course.

The "body of knowledge" specific to funeral directing is gained through a long and rigorous training program. To Parsons (1968), "formal technical training accompanied by some institutionalized mode of validating both the adequacy of the training and the competence of the trained" (p. 536) is required. Funeral service education began in the United States around the turn of the century and was focused on the newly accepted technique of arterial embalming. Through the years, as death workers have gone from being undertakers to morticians to funeral directors, the emphasis and length of education has changed. According to Frederick and Strub (1986), funeral training in the early days involved one or two days attendance at embalming instruction schools set up by chemical

manufacturers. Along with the purchase of a quantity of embalming fluid, attendees were granted a diploma and the right to practice as an embalmer. Today's "mortuary science" curriculum includes social sciences, business management, accounting, computers, grief therapy, law, and traditional courses such as, biology, chemistry, embalming practices, anatomy and physiology, and pathology.

Once gained, this specialized knowledge is then applied to practical affairs. Freidson (1970) and Larson (1977) suggest that control over an area of specialized knowledge allows the profession to protect itself from "quacks", "charlatans" and other challengers to its domination of an area of society. Funeral directors face challenges from casket retailers (1997), movements to limit licensing, and the clergy (Fulton, 1965). These challenges will be discussed in this chapter under the heading "Constraints on Professionalization".

Freidson sees the profession of medicine (and uses it as an ideal type to analyze other professions) "as a kind of occupational organization in which a certain state of mind thrives and which, by virtue of its authoritative position in society, comes to transform if not actually create the substance of its own work" (1970). This is a theme developed in greater detail in the work of Abbott. Funeral directors are able to set the conditions of the Normal American Funeral because of their exclusive hold on death handling. .

Another distinguishing feature of the professions is professional autonomy. Unlike most other occupational groups, much of the work of professionals takes place outside the view of supervisory personnel and the public. Professionals are theoretically their own bosses and deal on a direct level with their clientele. In Freidson's words, "a profession is an occupation which has assumed a dominant position in the division of labor, so that it gains control over the determination of the substance of its own work" (p. xvii, 1970). With the development of HMOs and the bureaucratization of many law firms, the level of professional autonomy of doctors and lawyers has decreased, but professional independence and self-motivation has, to a large extent, continued. According to Cahill (1999), funeral directors "conduct much of their work in virtual seclusion" and by Abbott's account, are "among the few professionals who work alone or in small worksites," (1988, p. 80, quoted in Cahill, 1999). Cahill goes on to claim that this autonomy and the shunned aspects of death work makes funeral direction less "vulnerable to the vagaries of intraorganizational divisions of labor found in larger, more complex worksites," (*ibid*).

The funeral director has always maintained a high level of independence in the workplace. The social control component of "handling the bereaved" suggests the power the director has in shaping the practices of the funeral. The funeral director is an expert in leading the "non-wise" through the details of the funeral. The handling and preparation of the

body takes place outside the view of the public, and quite often the embalmer is alone doing his/her work. As well, the social stigma attached to funeral direction has had both negative and positive impacts on the professionalization project. The former will be discussed below, the latter is reflected in the mystery associated with death work and what Goffman describes as "self-protective disdain" (1967) from those outside the field that has contributed to the exclusive jurisdictional power of funeral directors. In other words, few occupational groups want the work that funeral directors do.

Professional training and membership in professional organizations contributes to the internalization of the values and norms of a profession. Cahill describes mortuary school as "a significant component of its students' professional socialization. It immersed them in the occupational culture of funeral direction, providing them with the collective opportunity to forge a distinctive and confident professional identity that they could carry elsewhere and into the future," (1999, p. 107). Once the doctor, lawyer, or funeral director leaves school, it is assumed that s/he will govern his/her own activities in a way that is socially responsible and in line with the ideals of their profession. The code of ethics is reinforced by peers in the workplace and membership in professional associations.

It is assumed that the professional associations will control their members and protect their interests. Professional regulatory bodies consist

of members recruited from the profession they are governing. The American Bar Association and the American Medical Association are examples of professional organizations that establish much of the agenda for the work, compensation, and disciplinary action against errant members. As with other professional groups, they establish and enforce the code of ethics for the profession. Professional associations also contribute to the independent nature of professional work by providing a strong political challenge to individuals and groups outside of the profession.

To other parts of society and with the state, the professions have a special relationship. Doctors, lawyers, architects, and the clergy represent some of the highest status groups in American society (National Opinion Research Center, 1997). Professional status is maintained by the users of professional service, by professional practitioners, and by the state through licensure. In his discussion of "modern" medical practice, Parsons constructs the role of patient as the "helpless, technically incompetent, and emotionally involved" recipient of the doctor's orders (p. 440, 1951). The patient or client comes to the professional seeking expert advice and care and they bring with them a trust in the professional's ability and honesty. The "social relationship between a helping agent and a person needing help" (Bloom, 1983) is an important factor in the maintenance of the professions. And one that is being challenged in today's more client-informed economy.

Should the public demand for professional services decline and the trust in professionals with it, the state would continue to play an important institutional role in preventing untrained individuals from doctoring or lawyering themselves as well as handling of the dead. The relationship of the state to the profession is an important one. Through legislation and accreditation, government agencies support and maintain a professional monopoly over areas of competence. In conjunction with professional organizations, the state has sanctioned the professions. Without state approval, a profession is not a profession.

Many occupational groups perceive and promote themselves as professionals. Established professions, such as medicine and law, retain a large measure of power and status in American society. Developing occupational groups seek professional recognition for the social mobility it brings. The American funeral care establishment differs little in this regard from other aspiring occupations in its desire to be accepted as a profession. Although it may not fit all the criteria discussed above and is not recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as a "professional specialty", it is a self-styled profession. According to Cahill, "both associated professionals and clients readily concede that the custody and care of corpses are funeral directors' professional prerogatives," (1999). For lack of interest in crossing jurisdictional boundaries, the funeral service remains a distinct occupational group.

Dimensions of Professionalization: Funeral Directors as Professionals

As indicated in the previous section and in Appendix 7, there are a number of accepted criteria that distinguish professions from occupations. Among these are specialized knowledge, formal training, certification/licensure, autonomy, professional association, state and community recognition, and an orientation toward community service. In this section I will suggest that these are sufficient, objective conditions for recognition, acceptance, and classification of funeral directing as a profession, but that the public does not recognize it as a full-fledged profession. Funeral directors enjoy moderate political, economic, and social status in the United States but suffer status inconsistency related to their inability to promote their good work. Although they perceive themselves as professionals and may be highly regarded for their conspicuous status symbols, funeral directors are plagued by their association with death handling.

The legal and medical professions have served as models for the concept and the reality of professionalism. Many occupational groups have sought to obtain professional status and have progressed or failed accordingly. One explanation for this is that there is only so much room at the top. A functionalist explanation assumes that valued labor is given higher status and rewards to encourage the most talented and brightest members of a society to occupy those roles. It is also assumed that they

have invested more in training and must be rewarded for their time and effort.

If professionalization is seen as a project, with the end result being the achievement of enhanced socioeconomic status and occupational prestige, then how have the funeral directors fared along the way? A model of professionalization that traces the development of an occupation or semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969) along the dimensions of professionalism will show the progress made by the funeral director in achieving professional status and occupational prestige.

Specialized Knowledge, an arcane body of facts and information is the primary distinguishing feature of professions. Lawyers have "the law", physicians have "medicine", and since the turn of the century, funeral directors have had embalming; an area of expertise exclusive to their group.

Although it was developed as early as the 1860's in the United States, arterial embalming²³ did not become regular practice until the 1880's. Prior to this, bodies were washed and dressed by female family members or other "shrouding women" (Runblad, 1995), preserved on beds of shaved

²³. Arterial embalming, which involves removing fluids from the organs and cavities of the body and replacing them with a formaldehyde-based chemical preservative, was first used in the 1860's to prepare the bodies of Union soldiers for transport from southern battlefields to burial grounds in the north. Because of its high cost and limited number of practitioners, it fell out of use for a short time after the war.

ice, and buried as quickly after death as was feasible. Embalming allowed the body to be preserved for longer periods, giving families the opportunity to travel to memorialize their loved ones and giving morticians greater control over the funeral process. Along with the practice of embalming, other services such as casket sales, livery, removals, parlor rental, and more recently, insurance and public assistance claims, and financial services related to "preneed"²⁴ grew as well. Embalming has remained the exclusive jurisdiction of funeral directors and according to Farrel, "Enhanced professional status because it allowed undertakers to sell a scientific service in addition to the traditional wares of the funeral trade," (p.151, 1980).

However, the intensity of expert knowledge required to be a professional embalmer is quite thin. As W.E. Thompson reports, "Most morticians readily admit that embalming is a very simple process and can be learned very easily," (1991). My own experience working in a funeral home preroom confirms the *thinness* of expert knowledge required for embalming, as does an interview with a practicing funeral director. During the course of her apprenticeship, "Maureen" was asked on many occasions

²⁴. A growing area of business for funeral directors is the preplanning of funeral arrangements. According to a NFDA publication, this area entails "discussing the service and merchandise you prefer with your funeral director prior to a death," (1995). "Preneed" also involves prepayment of funeral costs to the director. These funds are held in escrow and protected against inflation.

to embalm a body for a closed-casket funeral. Over time, as she practiced and became more "expert", her responsibilities increased. Before long she was doing most of the prep work for her employers. This, despite the fact she had not finished her degree or become a licensed funeral director. As I learned later, this practice is not uncommon and represents one of the only ways that trainees get to hone their skills. According to Maureen, a licensed funeral director and mortuary school educator, "You're not allowed, as a resident, to do anything without a licensed person there. So you're always with someone, except when they decided to leave and you were stuck there. I would go on a removal at certain hospitals where I knew I could pick up a body. I didn't even have a resident's card that showed I was allowed to do certain things unsupervised", (Interview, 1993). This may or may not challenge the legitimacy of the funeral director as a professional. It could be argued that a trainee can only learn the trade through on-the-job experience, much like the medical intern who is forced into situations where s/he may not have suitable credentials or training. The fact remains that funeral directors' exclusive possession of embalming expertise is sanctioned through formal training requirements and licensure. Both specialized knowledge and formal training help to establish a monopoly over an area of occupation. This monopoly is held in place by a strong national professional association, state associations, and the state, through licensure and regulation. I would add that the standardized

curriculum in schools of mortuary science condition the practices described in my model of the normal American funeral.

Training and Licensure

Licensing for the funeral service follows at least a year's worth of formal mortuary training in an American Board of Funeral Service (ABFSE, also American Board) accredited mortuary school (exceptions are Colorado and Hawaii), a year's residency in a funeral home, and a passing grade on both the National Board Examination (NBE) and a state administered exam on rules and regulations.

Typically the acquisition of specialized knowledge takes place through formal training at an accredited institution devoted to that task. In the funeral service a course of study has been overseen and taught by other professionals in colleges of mortuary science since the early twentieth century. In 1894, Virginia became the first state to pass a law regulating embalming (Kearl, 1985). By 1900, with the help of state and national organizations, twenty-five states required embalmers to be licensed. College programs and mortuary schools cropped up nationwide. Five existed in New York City alone from the 1920's through the 1950's.²⁵ Today there are over fifty.

The curriculum for the mortuary school is part of a national standard

²⁵. They have since gone out of business or consolidated into the Metropolitan Mortuary School described elsewhere.

established by the American Board. The ABFSE is closely linked to the International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (ICFSEB, or the Conference) which administers the NBE. Both have mortuary school educators, funeral directors, and NFDA representatives in their memberships. The Board, according to one informant, "distributes curriculum outlines to *all* (her emphasis) mortuary schools," (Maureen, Personal Correspondence, 2000). The schools then distribute these to the instructors and the instructors organize their classes around them. The instructor must teach, at minimum, what is on the outlines. They can add to the course but they can't omit material from the outlines. The subject areas of these outlines match those of the NBE application brochure (ICFSEB, 1999) and are broadly described below. According to the director of one mortuary school, and to the curriculum bulletins of several others, there are no elective courses provided in mortuary schools. Training is aimed at passing the exam and not at stimulating students intellectually.

The exam consists of two parts: 250 questions in the funeral service science section and 250 questions in the funeral service arts section. There are six subsections in the science section (embalming, restorative art, microbiology, pathology, chemistry, and anatomy) and seven in the arts section (sociology, psychology, funeral directing, business law, funeral service law, funeral service merchandising, and accounting).²⁶

²⁶. See Appendix 8 for sample questions from the NBE study guide.

The NBE is the exam that all mortuary school students must take at the end of their schooling and as part of the licensing procedure. According to Maureen, "In order to fulfill the rest of the requirements that are needed for their particular state...they must pass this exam, (Personal Correspondence, 2000). The contents of the examination are based, in part, on the curriculum outline of the American Board and on current textbooks that are approved by the American Board. According to the Conference's study guide, "The National Board Examination Committee of the International Conference has the responsibility for the material on the NBE which reflects current thinking on the knowledge, philosophy, attitudes, and skills required to function as an entry level professional in funeral service," (1999, ICFSEB, p. 8).

The guide further reports that in 1995 and 1996 an extensive job analysis of 6000 funeral practitioners was conducted. From the analysis of this data, a new content outline for the exam was developed. The outline reflects a practical orientation for the examination. Arguably, this contributes to the transmission and reinforcement of the standard death care model reflected in the normal American funeral.

However, according to some informants, there are two orientations to mortuary education. One is very mundane and may be reflected in the comment, "I want to learn so I can pass the goddamned exam and so that I can get to work." The other suggests the student is more interested in

learning for the sake of learning. Pine gives the example, "...there seems to be less interest in how quickly I (*sic*) can do trade embalming, and much more [interest] in the historical antecedents, the intended purposes, and the link to ritual...", (Interview, 1992). Add to this the comments of a mortuary school director, "Mortuary education is designed to create a level of competency for minimal expectations to get the *learner's permit* for the funeral profession," (Interview, Winston, 2000) and that of a mortuary school educator, "We are more of a vocational school. Most colleges will not accept our credits because we're just gearing [the education] toward the funeral industry," (Interview, Maureen, 1992). The value of mortuary education beyond licensing is debatable.

In some ways mortuary school represents anticipatory socialization for the NAF. Exposure to dead bodies and the psychology of grief prepares the student for the field better than someone without the exposure. But according to those I interviewed, what you learn in the field is most important:

"When you talk to funeral directors about their education and training, many of them would tell you it's a joke. There's no linkage between what you learn in school and what you do on the job. I think the field has an inordinately high expectation of mortuary education. Funeral directors tend to be suspicious of systems...one year we're teaching [the students] too much and the next we're not teaching

them enough. One year they come out and they think they are managers and the next they don't even know what a carotid artery is. I hear that stuff all the time," (Interview, Winston, 2000).

This leads me to stress the importance of informal, on-the-job training in preparation for the normal American funeral. One funeral service educator I spoke with claimed that mortuary education provides only a "learner's permit" to enter the field and that there was very little connection between what you learn in school and what is expected in the field (Interview, Winston, 2000). He emphasized that the brightest students don't make the best funeral directors because they may lack compassion and common sense. My own experience and success in the field supports this evaluation of formal funeral service training. I entered the field without any previous experience or training in the funeral service. Within a few weeks time I was involved in all aspects of the normal American funeral and was often complemented by my colleagues on my good sense and quick learning. On the other hand, Kip, the mortuary school resident at the Metropolitan-Suburban Funeral Home had formal training, but was viewed as incompetent and unlikely to succeed long term in the funeral service.

Over the last century all but one state has required at least an associate's degree and a one year residency for licensure²⁷. Some states,

²⁷. In all but one state, Colorado, funeral directors are licensed to perform arterial embalming. They gain licensure through a period of formal education and through passing both national and state board exams.

including Ohio, require a Bachelor's degree. In addition to college level training some states require continuing education credits for license renewal.²⁸ All graduates of mortuary science programs are required to take a Conference-administered examination covering all aspects of the funeral service prior to serving their residency. Following the residency they are required to pass an examination on state rules and regulations relevant to the funeral service.

As noted earlier, both the American Board of Funeral Service Education and the International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards are composed of funeral service educators and practitioners drawn from the ranks of the state associations and licensing boards and from the mortuary science programs around the country. In many cases, those creating the exams are implementing the curriculum. Beyond potential conflicts of interest, this has a reinforcing effect on funeral service education. Those who evaluate new recruits to the field are the same ones who train for and regulate the funeral service, and in some cases, run a funeral home. This type of self-regulating practice is not uncommon in the professions as evidenced by Millman in her book on the sanctioning of

Licensure and education will be explained in greater detail below. Licensure no longer exists in Colorado.

²⁸ This is monitored by The National Funeral Service Education Board which administers the national exam. This board is made up of trustees from the NFDA as well as selected educators from mortuary science programs around the country.

physicians by physicians, (1977).

Informal Training and Residency

Part of the education and training for the normal American funeral involves an apprenticeship or residency in a funeral home. In New York State, a resident must perform a minimum of forty embalmings and fill out quarterly reports on the number of supervised arrangement conferences, dressing and casketings, embalmings completed, and the number of funerals taken out. An actual list of the number and names of the deceased handled must be submitted to the state board along with the quarterly reports.

State Recognition

State recognition is another dimension of professionalism provided by licensure and state boards of morticians. In general, state boards of morticians regulate professional boundaries by overseeing the examination and licensing of embalmers and funeral directors, monitoring residencies, granting reciprocity, approving the course of instruction at mortuary colleges, providing consumer information, and seeking injunctions against violators of funeral service law and regulation, in addition to handling complaints by the public against the funeral industry (Kearl, 1989).

Professional Association

The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) was founded in 1882 by a small group of embalmers and morticians and is a federation of

state, county, and local associations. It is now the largest group serving the professional interests of over 22,500 licensed funeral directors in the United States. According to Farrel, "A forty percent increase in the cost of burial containers" by manufacturers newly organized in the National Burial Case Association (*circa* 1880) precipitated the creation of the NFDA. From 1850 to 1880 undertakers went from sellers of products to sellers of services and became increasingly reliant upon manufacturers to supply them with funerary products. In the 1880's the introduction of embalming consolidated the funeral service around a specialized knowledge base and efforts at organizing increased considerably. "From the beginning," Farrel states, "NFDA members *injected* (italics mine) embalming into their discussions of professionalization," (1980, p. 151). Professionalism along with education and financial security were the three main goals of the NFDA. At the early conventions, "instruction in the science of embalming was the primary educational feature," (Farrel, 1980). Today's conventions provide a host of topics.

From 1880 to 1920 the number of funeral directors and the power of the NFDA increased considerably. According to Farrel, "economic pressures joined technical expertise, professional aspirations, and changing cultural tastes to transform the American funeral," (p. 156, 1980). Urbanization and immigration also played a large part in the growth of the funeral service by creating a need for large public spaces for apartment

dwellers to memorialize and by transforming the funeral home into a safe-haven for ethnic-cultural practice. Funeral directors provided space in funeral homes in an ever diminishing housing market and often represented a liaison between the ethnic community and the larger society. The NFDA led the transformation by focusing the services of the funeral director on the care of the body, the container of the body, and the place and the procedures for a funeral. Today the NFDA is expanding its horizons to include grief therapy and financial services as vital components of the funeral director's repertoire. This is reflected in funeral service curriculum and in the content of licensing examinations.

In addition to providing up-to-date information on legal, social, educational, professional, and practical developments in the funeral service to members through a professional journal called *The Director* and through annual meetings, the NFDA "maintains a liaison with agencies of the federal government which have any interest in funeral service," (Pine, p. 82, 1975). These agencies would include the Federal Trade Commission, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and on the state level, the Public Service Commission. Funeral home owners are also subject to regulations under the American's with Disabilities Act and are required to bring their buildings into compliance with ADA codes, including wheel chair accessibility and handicapped bathrooms. In a regularly featured column of the trade journal *Mortuary Management*, attorney Douglas Meyer

discusses compliance and liability problems faced by funeral directors. *The Director*, the official trade publication of the NFDA also features reports and articles on compliance to government regulations.

In addition to the NFDA, American funeral directors are served by a number of state and local associations. A select number of funeral directors are asked to join The International Order of the Golden Rule and the National Selected Morticians. Both are by invitation only and are committed to upholding a code of good funeral practice²⁹. Local associations hold monthly meetings where members are informed of changes in OSHA and FTC regulations. In one director's words, "They will get together and make the funeral directors understand them in simpler terms. They try to simplify the legal jargon for the funeral director," (Maureen, Interview, 1992). The monthly meetings are not limited to business; they also provide opportunities for local directors to socialize with one another and maintain professional ties.

The attributes approach applied above is one method of measuring the progress of occupational groups in achieving professional status. The section below discusses another method, the systems approach, developed by Andrew Abbott.

Constraints on Professionalization

²⁹. See Appendix 9 for a copy of the funeral director's oath. This appears in many of the mortuary school bulletins and was prominently displayed in the student's lounge of the Metropolitan Mortuary School.

Abbott challenges the attributes approach to professions used above, which seeks to find universals among professional groups and those groups that call themselves professions. He offers, instead, an approach to understanding the "system" of the professions and the interrelations and competition between professional groups and other occupational groups aspiring to gain professional status. He characterizes knowledge as a distinguishing feature of professional groups and he states "...professions are exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases," (1990, p. 8). Yet he goes on to state that abstraction sets interprofessional competition apart from competition among occupations in general. "Only a knowledge system governed by abstractions", he argues, "can redefine its problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers, and seize new problems," (*ibid*, p. 9). The professions, in Abbott's view, possess a considerable amount of power over their individual jurisdictions and provide considerable social control over relationships with clients.

Abbott adds to this the issue of jurisdictional conflict. In his model, professional and other occupational groups battle over limited areas of expertise. As one occupational group's area is trespassed upon, the group either challenges and defeats its adversaries, or seeks more professional power by trespassing on another group's boundaries. An example is the attack on and elimination of midwives, osteopaths, homeopaths, and other

non "medical" providers of health care by late 19th Century physicians and the American Medical Association. In their efforts to professionalize, funeral directors have not been spared these types of trespasses nor have they avoided trespassing on other's jurisdictions. They have faced challenges from casket retailers (*Poughkeepsie Journal*, 1997), movements to eliminate licensing, and the clergy (French, 1985; Fulton, 1965). There appears to be a limited amount of "professional power" available to occupational groups, and the competition can be fierce.

The history of the funeral service has been a history of attempts to expand its boundaries from furnishing funeral supplies and undertaking, to embalming, grief therapy, and more recently, through "preneed" programs and money management. It could be argued that from its inception the funeral service has invaded the jurisdictions of traditional professions such as the law, medicine, and the clergy.

Since the end of the 19th Century, funeral directors have taken over a role once occupied by women and other lower status members of traditional cultures, such as the *Burakumin* in Japan³⁰ and the Untouchables of India. Funeral direction has carved out a unique occupational niche by

³⁰. According to an article in *The New York Times*, The *burakumin* were "an occupational minority group...discriminated against simply because they were...people whose jobs were considered ritually unclean, like butchering, tanning skins, making leather goods, digging graves and handling corpses," (Kristoff, 1995). The article reports that the descendants of the *burakumin* continue to suffer discrimination in contemporary Japan despite government action.

consolidating the details of death handling and by emphasizing embalming practices as its claim to professional expertise. But at the same time has marginalized its members and activities under a mysterious occupational stigma. More on that later.

Following Abbott's model of jurisdictional expansion and contraction, I suggest that funeral directors have had confrontations with various public and private interest groups. The three vignettes below describe some of the tensions/conflicts funeral directors have experienced over the last hundred years and the ways they have tried to protect and expand their interests.

Licensure: "To be or not to be..."

One of the issues under study by the Maryland State Task Force to Examine the State's Cemetery and Funeral Industry (1996)³¹ involves a conflict over the boundaries of professional autonomy and jurisdiction. That is, should a non-licensed funeral worker be allowed to perform certain functions under the supervision of a funeral director? More specifically, can a non-licensed person accompany a body to the cemetery or sell funeral

³¹. The Task Force was created to investigate complaints against the funeral industry in Maryland and to monitor compliance to state and federal regulations, according to one member. The Task Force was made up of elected officials, current and former heads of funeral director's associations, and members of the public. Testimony was taken from funeral directors, clients, and interested members of the public.

services and merchandise to a client? One witness, Mr. W.³² requested the Task Force recommend a change in the licensing law to allow certain funeral practices to be conducted by non-licensees. His request was challenged by Task Force member Mr. M., a funeral home owner operator and recent head of the State Mortician's Board (the licensing arm for the funeral service in Maryland). According to him, "there would be no protection for the consumer when something goes wrong, if the licensed mortician were not there," (p. 11, Task Force Minutes, 12/2/96). Mr. W. replied that the family should have the choice as to whether they wanted to have a "license" or not and therefore pay a higher price for the "license's" services. Another owner/operator and member of the Task Force, Mr. C. "resented being told that the family does not deserve being served by a licensed professional". Mr. M. said funeral directors worried about the whole picture, "they are trying to upgrade the profession, they have come a long way and do not want to go backward," (1996, p. 12).

Dan Morhaim (a Maryland State Delegate, member of the Task Force) suggested that the task force investigate a return to an earlier practice where the state required separate licenses for people who practiced embalming and those who only handled the business end of funeral service (this practice continues in some states according to *The Professional and*

³². A funeral director who, under duress, sold his funeral home to a conglomerate, and had his mortician's license revoked "because it was said he had abetted the practice of mortuary science without a license".

Occupational Licensing Directory, 1993). This would allow non-technical workers to work with families. It was recommended by others on the Task Force that some responsibilities for funeral services be given to non-licensed people in an effort to reduce costs to the consumer. This recommendation was again met with resistance from Messrs. M. and C., using the argument that it would reduce the quality of service to families. The professionalization project of funeral directors would not be helped if the lines between professional and non professional services were blurred.

According to its *Final Report* (1996) the Task Force recommended that the existing law requiring one license for embalmers and funeral directors be kept in place. The Task Force voted to retain the current regulations pertaining to the delegation of duties to non-licensees (1996, p. 21). In essence, the Task Force, although representing the public, was protecting the professional jurisdiction of licensed funeral directors from incursions by unlicensed workers. This may have strengthened claims to professionalization.

Increased Regulation and Third Party Sellers

An important part of the business of funeral directors is the sale of funerary merchandise such as caskets, burial vaults, and cremation urns.³³ Traditionally, the costs of services like embalming and preparation,

³³. A recent but growing practice is to rent caskets to families choosing cremation over burial. The funeral home keeps a supply of rental caskets on hand and transfers the body to a cardboard casket after the viewing.

insurance filing, wake management, and transportation have been combined with the cost of the casket to produce one basic³⁴ funeral price to the customer. Recent litigation in state legislatures and rulings by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have brought about changes in this practice and have created a niche for third party sellers of funerary merchandise. In 1984 the FTC handed down the Funeral Rule "mandating that (1) caskets aren't necessary for cremation without viewings, (2) customers can choose whatever they want but must pay a service fee" and the most significant change in traditional practice, that (3) "funeral directors must provide all customers with a detailed price list of goods and services". In a commentary in *The American Funeral Director*, Associate Editor Nick Verrastro complained about the growing number of regulations on the funeral service and specifically the Funeral Rule. He wondered about "the ultimate effect of the growing regulatory web on the profession's ability to provide its clients with the services they need and want at prices they can afford and still maintain viable enterprises," (1992). This has brought about a greater use of "nondeclinable" service fees and an emphasis by funeral

³⁴. Before the 1984 FTC ruling, all funeral homes used unit pricing or the Single Unit Method where a single price was quoted which covered all funeral director's services, casket, and use of funeral home facilities. Following the Funeral Rule, funeral directors must provide Multi-Unit Itemization or functional pricing in the form of a price list and Itemization of Funeral Services and Merchandise Selected (referred to as the arrangement form throughout this dissertation). The arrangement form is to be signed by the funeral arranger and customer and represents a binding legal document. The price list typically does not leave the funeral home.

providers on service rather than merchandise. Recent legislation in the state of California and a new FTC ruling has made it possible for non-licensed individuals to sell funerary merchandise. As a result, more and more funeral supply stores are cropping up around the country. In 1992 California Assemblywoman Jackie Speier sponsored legislation that eliminated handling charges of as much as \$75 that were incurred by customers for using caskets supplied by a company other than the funeral home; in 1993 the FTC imposed a similar rule, after hearings at which the state funeral directors' association protested vigorously.

Alternative merchandisers offer lower prices by providing only graveside or church/temple services and by cutting out the funeral director as middle person. Granted, these firms can only succeed in states where the law permits a nonlicensed person to transport a body or where the store is owned, operated, or associated with a licensed funeral director. The Family Heritage Gallery in Memphis, TN, as reported in a *Sunday Star-Ledger* (NJ) article sells only caskets, but for up to 50% less than funeral homes (10/8/95). The casket is then delivered to a funeral home selected by the family and all other services are provided by the funeral home. In an effort to assuage disgruntled funeral directors some casket companies have blocked sales of burial containers to retailers but this practice has been challenged in court.

As one would suspect, this is viewed by funeral directors as a threat

to business and to the profession. According to one discount casket seller, "The funeral directors view us as the enemy because we're taking away their gravy," (*Poughkeepsie Journal*, 1/19/97). Because an important source of revenue comes from the sale of caskets (Some funeral homes may mark up caskets as much as 600% above the wholesaler's price, (*The Wall Street Journal*, 11/12/96)). and other funerary merchandise (prayer cards, religious icons, burial clothing, cremation urns, and burial vaults) funeral directors feel that their livelihood is threatened by third party sellers. Van Pine, author of *Caretaker of the Dead* (1975), believes that the approach funeral directors have toward pricing their services is misguided. He argues that they should charge more for professional services like embalming and removals that require licensing and training, and deemphasize the sale of funeral merchandise (Interview, 1992). He added that such pricing would put funeral directors more in the league of doctors and lawyers who charge high fees for services and deemphasize the cost of merchandise.

Third party sellers have played a part in challenging the monopoly funeral directors have enjoyed over the sale of funerary merchandise and service by passing laws and imposing executive rulings. But control over their professional jurisdiction is complex and not easily weakened by this recent incursion. A more lasting challenge to professional autonomy has come from the clergy. More on that below.

Sacred Ground

Funeral directors have had conflicts with clergy since the early days of the profession. Ministers, priests, rabbis and other clergy typically performed rites in the deceased's house and at the graveside, while the role of the undertaker was limited to building, delivering, and transporting the coffin to the cemetery. Robert Fulton suggests the funeral director role emerged in the middle of the 19th C. to "assist the clergyman in the physical arrangements of the funeral," (1961). As the role of funeral director expanded and as the funeral moved from private homes to the funeral parlor, the funeral director took on more of the responsibilities formerly assumed by the clergy. As funeral directors pushed for more control, they sought to include in their duties comforting and consoling families in their time of grief. The clergy did not relinquish the role of comforter to funeral directors, and thus competition emerged. As noted by Fulton, the tension between funeral directors and clergy is based on this and other factors which include "the basic religious distinction between the spirit and the flesh, the duality of the funeral director's role, and fear of taint," (p. 317, 1961). In a survey of South Carolina clergy and funeral directors, French (1985) observed variations in belief regarding the necessity of embalming, and in the viability of the funeral director's role as a grief counselor. Catholic clergy, along with funeral directors were in support of current practices, Protestant and Episcopalian clergy were critical of high funeral costs and elaborate practices. Also in this report,

findings with regard to the usefulness of viewing and funeral services were similar to those in Fulton's 1961 study. Catholic clergy and funeral directors supported viewings and funeral services as a means of "mov[ing] the grieving survivors along from a shocked denial of death to a final acceptance of it," (Fulton, 1961 and 1979, as quoted in French, 1985).

The distinction between spirit and flesh mentioned by Fulton suggests the differing view of the purpose of a funeral. For clergy, the funeral is a rite of passage for the soul of the deceased to move from this world to the world beyond. This emphasis on the soul of the deceased is greater among Catholic than Protestant clerics and differs from the focus of the director, which is on the body as a last reminder or "memory picture" for the bereaved. A difference of opinion on the need for "the wasteful trappings of death", (*ibid*, p.323) such as flowers, expensive caskets, embalming and restoration, and other funerary merchandise and services, is an example of the spirit versus flesh emphasis and is a source of tension between clergy and funeral directors. The group of clergy studied by French (1985) suggested a need for reform in funeral practices. Most of the changes were in the direction of simplicity, less expense, and with more funerals being held in the church. Although, he finds, "major denominations create a climate which favors funeral industry practice," by participating in the process and referring families to particular funeral homes (*ibid*, p. 144).

The duality of the funeral director's role, professional and

businessman, is recognized and criticized by the clergy. On one hand, the funeral director as a professional ministers to the needs of the living and the dead by providing a dignified ritual at the time of death. On the other hand, the funeral director is a business person seeking to make a living selling services and merchandise to others at a very emotionally-charged time of their lives. This conflict in roles highlights the tension between the sacred and profane elements of the funeral director's work and is a source of stigma from clergy and the public alike. Interestingly, both Protestant and Catholic clergy viewed the director as both businessman and professional and some even put them on par with doctors and lawyers (Fulton, 1961; French, 1985). For the most part the clergy do not believe it unethical for funeral directors to advertise their services. This may be related to the fact that funeral directors are viewed as businessmen as well as professionals. But this dual role poses a problem when it comes to social contact between directors and clergy. Fulton found that a very small number of clergy associate with funeral directors outside of the funeral home, and he explains this finding as a "tension or confusion in the relationship" between the professional and business roles (1961, p. 321).

According to Fulton, the relationship between clergymen and funeral directors suffers from the fact that funeral directors as businessmen must be all things to all people. They cannot for economic (and, increasingly, legal) reasons deny their services to families based on religious or ethnic

differences.³⁵ The funeral director is neutral and accepting of different religious beliefs, whereas the clergyman, "(b)y the very nature of their faith," Fulton claims, believes that his church's death rites and ceremonies claim a "priority of sanctity" over those of all other churches. The funeral director thus muddies the spiritual waters with a relative attitude toward the care and burial of the dead and is, "in a religious sense, *unclean*," (Fulton, 1961, p. 322). In general, the clergy, for fear of taint, avoid relationships with funeral directors.

Fulton found some differences in the way that Catholic and Protestant clergy viewed funeral directors. Overall, the Catholic priests found the role of the funeral director not in conflict with their own role, whereas the Protestant ministers viewed directors as a nuisance and perhaps a threat to their own ministry of service to the bereaved. There was a feeling on the part of the ministers that some of the duties of funeral directors and clergy were unnecessarily and wrongly overlapping³⁶. As suggested by Fulton

³⁵. Funeral services may be nonreligious, but often they do reflect the religion of the family, so funeral directors must be familiar with the funeral and burial customs of many faiths.

³⁶. It was my experience in observing over 70 funerals that the majority of non-Protestant funerals took place in a church, synagogue, or graveside where there was a distinct physical separation of the clergy and director's roles. The Protestant services that were performed in the funeral home most often took place behind closed doors with the director listening from another room. The funeral director's duties were limited to providing directions to the cemetery, directing mourners to their cars and instructing them to turn on their lights, closing the casket and preparing it for transportation after the public had left the funeral home, and leading the

this may have something to do with the divergent views on the funeral held by Catholic and Protestant clergy. In general, Catholics view the funeral as an opportunity to focus on the transformation of the deceased from a human body to an eternal soul. The religious funeral services are oriented toward the deceased rather than toward the living. On the other hand, Protestants typically focus their services on the survivors and ministering to their grief. As a result, the Catholic clergy researched in Fulton's study found the role of the Funeral director to be quite distinct from that of the clergy and oriented more toward the physical or mechanical aspects of the funeral, including arrangements, embalming, restoration, and transportation. They did, however, encourage funeral directors to take a more active role in attending to the emotional needs of the bereaved, but sought to limit this to empathy and comfort in the time of sorrow. Protestant clergy, on the other hand, were found to be against any ministering role for the director and were adamant about limiting funeral directors' duties to the physical and mechanical aspects of the funeral. In addition, the Protestant clergy felt they should be more closely involved in the arrangement of the funeral and should have final say on such things as "the selection of hymns, the time and date of the funeral, the role of the funeral director as counsellor, and the differing {duties} of the funeral director and the clergymen to the funeral," (*ibid*, p. 320).

procession of pallbearers out of the funeral home and to the hearse.

As intended by French's follow up on Fulton's research, tension still exists today between the funeral director and the clergy. This is evident in findings from my field research in the Metropolitan-Suburban funeral home: "Rich (a funeral director) said, regarding one of the callers for the deceased, 'In this business you'll learn to hate people. Especially the religious ones.' She was a nun," (fieldnotes, 1993). Now this may not represent anything more than misanthropy on the part of Rich or a latent response to his Catholic school upbringing, but it is indicative of the feeling of all three of the directors I worked with at the funeral home. I would add here that one of the directors is a warden at the local Episcopal church. The warden role includes the supervision of the laity and the hiring and firing of workers and decision making on spiritual and financial matters.

On several occasions the directors at the M-S funeral home complained about the demands of clergy and the tensions that had developed over the years regarding loyalty (traditionally, clergy refer members of their congregation to funeral homes if the family does not already have an association with one), money (sometimes the funeral director is responsible for paying the clergy's honorarium), and time (a significant part of the funeral director's role includes coordinating the opening of a grave, use of church facilities, and the preferences of the bereaved. Clergy members can complicate this work if they are late or unavailable). So, viewed in a jurisdictional sense, the conflict between the

funeral director and the clergy is one based on narrowing boundaries and uncertainty over roles in the death ritual.

A more serious challenge to the professionalization project is the low status given to occupational groups whose primary focus is dealing with the dead. More on the stigma attached to funeral work and the constraint it poses to professionalization below.

Stigma as a Constraint on Professionalism and Motivator

In the 1880's, the National Funeral Directors Association followed the growing trend of professionalization and sought to find a niche for its members. "Undertakers wanted more than financial rewards for their work", suggests Farrel (1980). They sought the status of doctors and clerics and its associated "power over people". Early NFDA members cited both a medical and a ministerial model for their progress toward professionalism. Farrel (1980) notes the ambiguity of this model which on one hand calls for an objective, detached practitioner and on the other a warm, concerned provider. This ambiguous professional role is best captured in Renee' Fox's descriptions of "detached concern", (1963). In addition to expert knowledge of arterial embalming, the recognized traits of the professional undertaker were to include:

"mastery of self and situations, delicacy and tact, urbane manners, the ability to be all things to all people of all classes, quietness and quickness, and a temperament of assured equanimity. Well-dressed,

well-groomed, ever alert to appearances...in short, a gentleman," (1884, Renouard, cited in Farrel (1980)).

Many of these traits are expected of and looked for in modern day funeral directors. The impression managed by funeral directors is one suggesting that s/he can be trusted to handle the details of your loved one's death in a dignified manner.

Although funeral directors have achieved the financial security they once sought, due to the nature of their work and its connection to death, they have been saddled with a social stigma. A stigma according to Goffman is a label used by others to deny the *deviant* full social acceptance (1963). One attribute is used to form a general conception of an individual or group. A stigma is used to discredit an individual's, or in the case of funeral directors, an entire group's worth. I argue that the professionalization project of funeral directors is, in part, aimed at reducing this stigma and raising their social and occupational standing.

The stigma or mark of social devaluation discussed by Goffman (1963) is applicable to funeral directors in two ways. On the one hand, they are death handlers, and the tasks associated with this are perceived as odious by the public. On the other hand, funeral directors are profiteers in an area considered by many to be sacred. Although many funeral directors claim a calling to the profession/occupation, the public often perceives them as "in it for the money" and assumes they have a morbid attachment

to the death business.

Funeral directors use professionalism as a mask for or preventive measure against public aversion to the morbid details of their work. Although funeral directors don't necessarily fit neatly into academic categories of professionalism, they view themselves as professional. It is an issue of perception rather than fact, and since, according to Cahill (1995), funeral directors are "an insecure occupational lot,"³⁷ and like Rodney Dangerfield feel that they "get no respect," they are hypersensitive to criticism and manage their public image accordingly. Funeral directors attempt to manage stigma by:

1) hiding/downplaying the backroom work of embalming and handling of the dead. For instance, by making the prep room off limits to the public, by relegating the family to another room when doing a house removal, and through the use of euphemisms³⁸ for death related items and practices.

2) hiding/downplaying their profit motives. For instance, by limiting discussion of money to the arrangement conference and to casket selection,

³⁷. This is evidenced in Winick's findings on the personality characteristics of professional embalmers (1964).

³⁸. Fulton claims the use of euphemisms regarding death is characteristic of American society. These auspicious substitutions represent another manifestation of the general reluctance to accept death's inevitability. "Linguistically", according to Fulton, "a person 'passes away', instead of dying, and installment buying of funerals is referred to as [preneed planning] rather than as 'lay away plans'," (1979, p. 69).

as well as the use of pricing lists and arrangement forms as objective, outside demands for costs.³⁹

Among some groups, superstition about funeral directors and their death work, as well as their outward appearance of wealth and their contributions to the community, may earn them a level of respect. But the funeral director, like the garbage collector and the executioner of old experiences "status incongruities" in that s/he is responsible for the "enforcement of the normative values of the community", in their case, regarding the proper handling of the dead, through means "usually perceived as necessary but nonetheless distinctly unpleasant by most people," (Hornum, 1968). Van Pine describes the ambiguous relationship between the public and funeral director in the following quote from our interview:

...when I was working as a funeral director I used to get furious at people who would make fun of the funeral director job. Because everytime someone has their kid killed in a car accident and they called me up they were desperate, absolutely desperate. They wanted to be helped and they wanted their kid to be made alive again. In other words, they would trust me with everything. And so, when I would get done with the funeral they were like this, "Oh my

³⁹. See Fulton (1979) pp. 72-73 on "...the ambivalent demands of the funeral director."

God, you stepped into the breach of our lives. You meant so much to us." And then you get the teasing and so the funeral director is confronted with these two conflicting messages. The one of adoration for doing this job that is so difficult in the minds of people...but then you get the shit all the time, the jibe, the jibe, the jibe. I mean, it's a very, very stressful kind of experience, (Interview, 1992).

Another incongruity, hinted at by Goffman (1963), exists for the funeral worker. It has to do with the expectations associated with a given social identity (ie. normal) and shortcomings in an individual or a class of individuals (death workers) as it relates to those expectations. Most members of society would agree that handling the dead is an unpleasant, if not repulsive act, and therefore are likely to stigmatize those individuals who do it, labeling them as "non-normal". Funeral directors, as members of society, seek acceptance and therefore desire to distance themselves from, or at least manage, this stigma.

There is a tendency for people to avoid death as much as possible and to avoid those associated with death. The aversion to the remains is not eradicated when passed from bereaved to funeral director, however; "it is transferred in some measure to the person who has taken charge of them," (Bowman, 1959). Undertakers are very defensive on the subject of aversion to themselves. Frequently they deny that any such aversion exists at all.

However, according to Bowman, "in discussion, almost all of them will expand on the injustice of such a reaction at much greater length than would be normal if no actual slight were felt", (*ibid*, p. 72). Funeral directors are aware of the public reaction to their line of work and therefore keep a low profile to protect their self image.

In his book on the treatment of death in two hospitals, David Sudnow (1967) found that nurses and attendants avoid as much as possible having to deal with patients who die under their care. When possible, there is an attempt to leave the body for the next shift.⁴⁰ This avoidance of and aversion to death is also apparent in the proximity of the death workers' workspace to others. In the hospital studied by Sudnow the morgue, as in most hospitals, was "located in a relatively inaccessible corner of the basement." To reach it requires a maze-like walk past various workshops and service locations in the bowels of the building, along "...a noisy and busy corridor, which is the province of blue collar workers," (p. 50, 1967). In the funeral home the embalming facilities are typically located in an area inaccessible to the public and outside of their view.

According to Robert Merton, "Individuals have multiple social roles

⁴⁰. This may not only be an aversion to death but also a symbol of failure and an unwillingness to be held accountable, "...[D]eath becomes transformed into an enemy to be defeated," (Barton, 1979). Studies have shown that physicians often see death as a sign of failure and clearly as something that is never to be an accepted outcome of medical intervention (Hafferty, 1991).

and tend to organize their behavior according to structurally defined expectations assigned to each role," (1949). For the morgue attendant it was most difficult for him to go about the hospital unnoticed. Sudnow suggests he was "trapped in his role", (Sudnow, 1967). As with funeral workers, "who by the virtue of the scope of the activities they engage in always appear on the job", the morgue attendant was perceived as either undertaking or having just undertaken death care activities. Upon first arriving at a scene he was often asked, "Who died?". On an individual level, "John" the morgue attendant, must deal with the fact that hospital staff regularly avoid him. It is difficult for him to divorce himself from his role as the hospital's deathcare worker. I recall, when I was a funeral home employee, the daily ribbing I received from the deli man across the street from the funeral home. When I would go into his store I would be greeted with such taunting comments as "How's business, dead?" and "People are dying to get a ride in your car." On one occasion he asked me how I could work in *such* a place. I learned to avoid his shop or his service when I entered his shop. When that wasn't possible, I would respond to his comments with a half-hearted laugh.

As with other deathcare workers interested in distancing themselves from the work they do, John, the morgue attendant, had methods by which he would attempt to create role distance. In Sudnow's words, "[The morgue attendant] attempted to convey a sense of not being at work, by developing

clear styles for use when he wished to provide others with a basis for disattending what they inferred his relevant attributes to be", (Sudnow, 1967, p. 53). Some of these role distancing practices are described below.

a) **dress**-when not performing tasks related to his job, John would change from his gown to an attendant's uniform. At other times he was seen wearing a shirt and tie as he courted a woman in the cafeteria. Some of the lower level employees at the "cosmopolitan funeral home" dressed in street clothes to travel to work and changed into "funeral" attire when they arrived, (Pine, 1975). Another example, is my colleague Rich's reluctance to drive the removal car or hearse for non-business errands. In his words, "I hate driving around in that thing. I feel like I am on display and everybody knows what I am up to.", (fieldnotes, 1993).⁴¹

b) **ambiguous accounts of occupational tasks**-John did not discuss

⁴¹. Rich's take on public perception is not without merit, as evidenced by the following comments from my fieldnotes:

"One of my errands took me through a black neighborhood. While there I had to make a phone call back to the funeral home to get directions. I parked outside of a *bodega* to use a public phone. As I got out of the hearse and moved toward the pay phone an African American man said to me 'Don't park that hearse here. It's bad luck.' This struck me as not only humorous but also as interesting. I said to him, 'No, it's good luck.' To which a woman on the corner said 'It's good luck for you 'cause that's how you make your money'," (fieldnotes, 1993).

I would add that when I would bring the hearse to the service station, the owner would make some comment about not wanting to work on the car for fear of ending up in it.

the details of his work with employees outside of the pathology department and when asked, "would highlight the interesting facts and deemphasize the grosser aspects of his work," (Sudnow, 1967, p. 55). When asked by strangers what he did, he would refer to himself as an attendant or as an employee in the Department of Pathology. This is not unlike the responses of Pine's "cosmopolitan" funeral workers when asked by neighbors or others about their line of work. They would often describe themselves as service workers or business men and avoid a more specific reporting of their work because they believe their occupation is a hindrance to social contacts and hesitate to admit their occupation to those they meet outside the funeral home, (Pine, 1975, pp. 77 & 78). This was also evident in the social relations of mortuary students studied by Cahill (1999).

One of my interviewees was very adamant about the need to keep backroom descriptions of embalming and handling outside of public areas:

"...a few too many negative comments that are loosely thrown around in a bar or at a party can be the downfall of your business. So you can't let that get into the public. [P]eople start saying things to you in a bar and little do you know but two people are eating dinner over here and they hear someone making fun of me or what I do...You know, 'I heard David talking to Tom about working on this body.' It's just a rumor that starts, it wasn't true but that's when we're out in public discussing what went on down in the prep room. Which is an

absolute taboo. You can't let that get out," (Interview, Dave, 1996). This sort of hidden dialogue contributes to the mystery of funeral work and to the stigma associated with it. The public is protected from the gory details of the prep room, "for their own good", but left with their imaginations to fill in the sordid details. Because of their tenuous status as professionals and because of the public aversion to their work, funeral directors must be cautious about keeping the details of their work to themselves in order to protect their professionalization project and their business. Dave did offer that he was willing to answer any and all questions of curious listeners, but only in an appropriate, non public setting. Another interviewee remarked on the benefits of bringing the public into the funeral home for non funeral events and for guided tours. In his words, "...[W]e are open to the community," encouraging school classes to tour the facilities. "It takes some of the mysterious feeling away from it, you know, 'cause as you said before, everyone's on kind of pins and needles about death," (Interview, Paul, 1992). He believed this would work to reduce some of the distance between directors and the public.

c) Avoid interaction with others while performing occupational tasks.

1)The morgue attendant would carry along a logbook or patient chart and read it as he was riding the elevator or was stopped in the hall. This gave the appearance of being engrossed in the contents of the book and

not available for social interaction.

2) As he carried on his work throughout the hospital, he would keep his eyes averted downward to avoid eye contact with others and the social interaction which may result from it.

3) He avoided using elevators with non-staff members and superordinate staff members.

For funeral workers in particular the primary way to "avoid interaction with others while performing occupational tasks" is to maintain front and back regions in the funeral home and at the time of the removal. In all cases the public is discouraged from entering the embalming room at anytime (Goffman, 1959, p. 114). As stated earlier, the preparation room at the M-S funeral home was located in the recesses of the building and kept private by locked doors, closed lights, and a maze of hallways.

In situations where the body must be removed from a home and transported to the funeral home, we see a transformation of the private home to the backstage region of the funeral director. The funeral director asks the family to leave the room, so that he can go on with his work of removing the body. This serves the purpose of relieving the family of the necessity of seeing their love one encased in a body bag and handled as an object and allows the director to drop his/her guard while they are doing their work. Changes made to the body, the casket, and the flower arrangements in the viewing room are done during breaks in the visitation,

or when absolutely necessary, the mourners are asked to leave the room, the doors are closed, and the makeup is reapplied or the body's features are adjusted.

The following comes from a conversation I overheard in 1991 in the Metropolitan Mortuary School library, referring to the trade journals that all students are required to subscribe to and are available for pick up in the library, "Yeah, I take the magazines home but I don't leave them layin' around. I don't want people to think I'm morbid or anything." The outsider feeling is conditioned early in funeral workers. They know what they must face, the professionalization project is an attempt to control the social stigma as much or more than it is to increase the financial and political rewards of funeral directors, and to retain control over the jurisdiction of death handling. The next chapter will explore how funeral directors, through institutionalized roles, organize and perpetuate the Normal American Funeral.

Chapter 4-: The Funeral Home as a Place of Work: The Division of Labor in the Normal American Funeral

This chapter is a description of the institutionalized roles of various funeral workers that shape the NAF and help to resolve the problem of death in American society. Two sets of role expectations exist for funeral workers. One set applies under normal circumstances and another applies when the normal sequence of funeral events is disrupted in some way. I view roles as a set of expectations and obligations associated with a status. A status is a person's position in a social institution. I will distinguish work roles from broader social roles, such as gender, that cut across organizational demands. Ascribed statuses like sex are more pervasive than work roles and are therefore more rigid. Work roles are position specific rather than person specific and allow for a greater amount of flexibility in their playing. In some workplaces, including the funeral home, gender supersedes the expectations and obligations of a work role.

In this chapter I will also discuss "contested terrain" (Edwards, 1980) in funeral work, i.e., how the choreographed normal American funeral is threatened by labor issues within the funeral home. This is important because the roles of funeral director, receptionist, and porter are distinct, yet their duties often overlap. Some uncertainty about who is to do what can arise when work conditions change. I shall also discuss how gender roles play out in the funeral service. In a succeeding chapter I will provide

a description of disruptions in the NAF and the improvisational character of funerary work roles.

Work Roles in the Funeral Home

Work roles in funeral homes vary according to the size of the home. Independent funeral homes are staffed by as few as two or three people including at least one licensed funeral director, and operate under an informal organizational structure which permits role flexibility. Larger funeral homes (described by Pine {1975} as *cosmopolitan*, and in this monograph as *corporate*) have a clear division of labor among roles and as many as fifty employees organized under several occupational headings. Where unionization exists these work role boundaries are more distinct. Independent funeral homes operate with the expectation that anyone on the staff will lend a hand in the actual work and will do their best to manage the impression defined by the NAF. Enumerated below are funeral home work roles and a description of the expectations and responsibilities associated with each. This list will be followed by a description of how the various roles of the funeral team complement one another and condition the performance of the NAF. This list is neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

The Multidimensional Role of the Funeral Director

The funeral director is the only licensed member of the funeral team. Each funeral home must have at least one licensed director on staff. In

some states a license is required to transport a body, and in all states (except Colorado⁴²) it is required to embalm the body. Some states require a license for making funeral arrangements, (*Professional and Occupational Licensing Directory*, 1993). Licensing follows a period of at least one year of formal mortuary education and one year of apprenticeship in a funeral home. Pine (1969) described funeral directing as "multiprofessional", suggesting the various activities either carried out or supervised by the funeral director in accomplishing a funeral. These include: removing the body, embalming, arranging, managing, directing of funeral services and the burial or cremation, salesperson, business person, and grief counselor. In corporate funeral homes (14 percent in the U.S. in 1998 according to Kathy Walczak, Librarian, National Funeral Director's Association) these headings are organized into distinct occupations or roles. For my description I will treat each role as a separate unit.

Removal man⁴³ refers to the person responsible for removing the body from the place of death. They are charged with obtaining the death certificate and keeping track of any jewelry or other valuables that may be

⁴². Colorado is the exception to the rule. That state requires no license for any part of the funeral process. Where rules apply in other states they do not apply in Colorado. According to Carlson, "The Funeral Board for the State...no longer exists...anyone can make funeral arrangements in Colorado," (p. 107, 1987).

⁴³. The term removal man is a colloquialism which is probably associated with the long history of funeral service as a "man's working domain".

transported to the funeral home. If the death has occurred at home, the removal man is responsible for leaving the death scene clean and orderly. This may include removing soiled linen, opening shades and windows to allow light and fresh air into the room, and according to Barley (1983b), to remove any other reminders of death. The removal man also verifies preliminary information on the deceased, including name, birth date, social security number, religious affiliation, time and date of death, cause of death, and family preferences for the handling of the deceased at the time of removal.⁴⁴ An arrangement conference is scheduled with the family, and they are asked to bring burial clothes, wigs, eye glasses, and other personal belongings of the deceased that will be used in the restoration process. The removal man then returns the body to the funeral home where it awaits embalming or other preparation.

The embalmer prepares the body in conformity with legal requirements and according to a three-part process that includes; disinfection, preservation, and restoration. Disinfection involves washing the body after removing any soiled clothing, bandages, and artificial limbs

⁴⁴. The adage, "Possession is nine tenths of the law" applies here. When the removal man takes the body and the information, the funeral home takes charge of the body, and the family is limited (by decorum and tradition rather than the law) to making arrangements with *that* funeral home. Quite often the body is embalmed (with verbal approval) before the family meets with the director to plan the funeral. This decreases the likelihood that the family will choose another funeral home and allows the staff to get a head start on the funeral.

and hair pieces. The body is then sprayed with a topical disinfectant to inhibit the growth of germs and dried with towels or a hair drier. The body orifices are packed with cotton saturated in embalming fluid to prevent the escape of gas and waste matter. The finger and toenails are clipped, eyes and mouth bolstered with cotton or plastic inserts and sealed, and stray hairs are clipped from the ears and nose. Where needed, the face is shaved and the hair is washed.

Preservation requires that a small incision be made in the carotid artery where a pump tube is inserted. The tube is connected to an embalming machine and the blood is drained from the body and replaced with embalming fluid. The embalmer monitors the process by observing the color of the skin beneath the nails. S/he knows the process is complete when embalming fluid replaces blood in the exit tube leading from the embalming machine to the sink. The pump tube is then attached to a long pointed tube called a trocar. An incision is made in the abdomen and the trocar is inserted. Blood and waste matter are removed from the stomach, abdominal wall, and other organs. The flow valve on the embalming machine is reversed and the trocar is used to insert embalming fluid into the cavities and organs. The tube is removed and the incision is sutured.

Restoration includes the dressing, casketing, and cosmetizing of the deceased as well as the normalization of disfigured features. The embalmer attempts to give the body a "natural pose" which suggests peaceful sleep

rather than death. This may involve the use of various chemicals, cosmetics, and household items, such as rolls of toilet paper and rubber bands. In order to "restore" a natural look to a cancer patient, the embalmer may have to employ a tissue builder which, when inserted by hypodermic needle into the cheeks, chin, and forehead, provides a malleable subcutaneous substance that "fattens" the appearance of a depleted face. The embalmer may also stuff the deceased's clothing with tissue paper and/or rolls of toilet paper. Rubber bands or some other device are wrapped around the wrists and hidden beneath sleeves to keep the hands in a composed, prayer-like position. Once dressed, the body is placed in the casket, and cosmetics are applied to the face and hands to give them a more "life-like" appearance.

In arranging the funeral, the director organizes the details of the funeral service with members or representatives of the deceased's family. This may include gathering information for death notices, explaining funeral service protocol, and explaining various options for preservation, internment, and services. The funeral arranger makes use of a funeral arrangement planning sheet (Appendix 4) that itemizes services and prices. It also serves as a punch list for the director. When signed by the director and the family, it is a legal contract.

A closely related activity of the funeral director involves directing the funeral services. In this role the funeral director is expected to coordinate

the activities of others on the funeral home staff and those affiliated with the funeral home. This may include calling the local newspaper to report the obituary, calling the cemetery or crematory to dispose of the body, and calling the church or synagogue to reserve a space and time for the funeral. The funeral director must also set in motion his/her staff to prepare the funeral home for visitors and "cover the floor"⁴⁵ during viewing hours. Other mundane activities like washing windows, painting, and gardening will be suspended in preparation for the funeral. The funeral director is also responsible for "taking out the funeral"; that is to say, s/he is in charge of closing the casket on the final day of viewing and leading the body in procession from the funeral home to the hearse and then to the cemetery or crematory.

The funeral director also plays the part of salesperson. In the sale of caskets, cremation urns, and other funerary merchandise the funeral director is expected to provide the family with information regarding the quality and availability of various funeral products and services. As well, they are now legally required (Federal Trade Commission, 1984) to provide an itemized price list of all merchandise and services. Recently, a new service has been added to the funeral director's sales repertoire, preneed

⁴⁵. Also referred to as "door work", covering the floor involves supervision of the funeral home during visiting hours. It is described in greater detail under the heading of the receptionist, because these activities are part of his/her normal role.

insurance. The funeral director sells funeral services to a living customer who makes the arrangements for his/her own funeral. Payment may be made in parts or in full and goes into an interest bearing account that will be used to cover funeral expenses at the time of death.

In the role of a business person, the funeral director is expected to oversee the day to day operations of the funeral home and to maintain the "bottom line". This includes the hiring, firing, and management of employees, upkeep of the physical plant, payment of bills, advertising, public relations, ordering supplies, and the handling of vendors. Records of all funerals must be kept, and state-mandated forms, such as death certificates, must be filed. The director must keep financial records or hire someone to handle the books and must make pricing adjustments to assure that expenses are not higher than income.

The funeral director as caregiver ministers to the grief of their client families. Although the subfield of grief therapy has been growing only since the 1970's and has been a disputed jurisdictional niche for funeral directors, in some form or another funeral workers have been responsible for easing the grief of the bereaved since the earliest days of the profession. The "skill of emotion management" is pertinent to this cause. The norms of the funeral presentation obligate the director to show sympathy and "quasi-genuine" sorrow for the bereaved's loss. Hochschild describes this "on the job task of creating and sustaining appropriate

meanings" in the social scene as the commoditization of feeling and argues that it is integral to emotion work, (p. 569, 1979). Funeral directors must engage in feeling management and deep acting to ease clients through the funeral, and at the same time must distance themselves from too deep an emotional investment.

The various activities of the funeral director discussed above suggest a multidimensional occupation. In small funeral homes directors are truly jacks-of-all-trades doing everything from washing hearses to selling caskets to taking out funerals. In the larger funeral homes, especially those owned by corporations, the division of labor is more clear-cut. There are job classifications for funeral directors, funeral arrangers, funeral managers, grief therapists, embalmers, and removal men.

Role Flexibility and *Ad Hocing*

The funeral team that assists the funeral director in the production of the normal American funeral consists of, but is not limited to, the housekeeper, the porter, pallbearers, receptionists, drivers, "trade men", and the beautician. Although the expectations associated with these roles may be specific to their titles, there is also an expectation that any member of the funeral team will pick up slack or fill in where needed.⁴⁶ To explain these expectations I will employ what Garfinkel calls *ad hocing* (1967, pp.

⁴⁶. All members of the funeral team are expected to appear clean-cut, reserved, sympathetic, and comfortable with grief and dead bodies. All members are expected to be responsible for the performance.

21-24 and Chapter 6). By this Garfinkel suggests that social life continues along an orderly path that is achieved through mutual expectations and actions on the part of co-participants in a scene. However, sometimes actions and expectations run off course and are disrupted by some unforeseen event. In this situation, bereft of some of the normal features of the scene, actors improvise according to known-in-common background expectancies. Sometimes roles are not so clearly defined. What Garfinkel is suggesting is that "in this particular scene at this particular time this is what will happen, unless something else happens," (1996). Garfinkel is challenging the notion of a fixed set of structured expectations associated with a role and strict conformity to those expectations on the part of actors. Instead, he suggests orderliness is achieved through mutual action by actors in "just this scene".

All employees are expected to contribute to the performance despite contradictions to role expectations and unwillingness. All funeral workers are obligated, through their membership in the collectivity, to fill in (ie. "*ad hoc*") wherever needed. I argue that a camaraderie exists among death workers that is associated with the marginalized character of their work. When hired in a funeral home, it is implicitly agreed, although not overtly stated, that the employee will make unquestioned contributions to all areas of the performance, because funeral workers are not easily replaced and usually come from a larger community of people who are drawn to the

death trades rather than repulsed by them and who are therefore, "not squeamish around bodies". In small, independent funeral homes or those where the division of labor is not highly specified, the expectation is that as you gain experience in the field, you will lend a hand to others when the funeral home is overloaded.

An example of a problem that arose at M-S was when John, a receptionist, refused to lift flowers and furniture in the course of setting up the viewing chapels. His refusal was based on health reasons; he had a weak heart and had recently had surgery. But his inability to perform the normal tasks of the receptionist rendered him relatively useless to the funeral home. He was unable to fulfill his role obligations and did not act as a good utility player, so he was replaced. Other refusals to fill in and help out, as infrequently as they occurred, were met with similar derision and consequences. When an employee was regarded as incompetent, his/her responsibilities and mobility were limited. An illustration is described in my fieldnotes in the case of one funeral director's unhappiness with the performance of an attendant:

"The problem with Kip is that you always have to tell him what to do. For instance, the other day in the showroom I had to tell him to take the other end of the casket and lift it onto a truck. I shouldn't have to tell him that. He's been here a year, he should know these things. That's why I don't want him to serve his residency here. He's been

here a year and he still has to be told what to do. He's a really nice kid but...", (fieldnotes, 1993).

This conceptualization of role flexibility and its importance will be taken up as *ad hocing* in the next chapter. With this in mind I will describe the responsibilities of the auxiliary members of the funeral team and suggest how they "fill in" when needed to accomplish the NAF.

Funeral Team Roles and Duties

Housekeeping duties fall under a defined role in some funeral homes, but in others they become the responsibility of the funeral director and attendant during slow times. The "housekeeper" is responsible for keeping an orderly appearance in the funeral home. This may include washing, cleaning, vacuuming, dusting, as well as ordering cleaning supplies and arranging for professional help to steam carpets or repair furniture. As an available employee during the day, the housekeeper may be asked to change their clothes and "cover the floor"⁴⁷ or to answer the phone or run a death certificate to the department of health office. S/he may be asked to assist in the embalming room with the dressing and casketing of a body, but not with embalming, or may be asked to sit with a family until the funeral director is available. In corporate settings housekeeping tasks may be subcontracted out.

⁴⁷. This term refers to greeting visitors to the funeral home during "waking hours" as well as other duties and responsibilities of the receptionist mentioned below.

Responsibility for maintaining the outside appearance of the funeral home and for handiwork inside and out falls to the porter or to outside contractors hired for that purpose. This may include painting, gardening, snow removal, car washing, garbage disposal, simple plumbing and electrical jobs, carpentry, and furniture repair. Like the housekeeper, the porter is expected to keep a set of dress clothes in the funeral home so s/he can be ready to cover the floor, "carry" on a casket, or assist a funeral director on a house removal. As with the housekeeper, the porter may be a "go fer", running to the store, bank, or insurance agency to complete errands on behalf of the funeral director and the performance. The porter may assist in the prep room in the dressing and casketing of bodies. Whatever needs to be done, it is expected that the porter and other auxiliary help will do it.

The receptionist is responsible for "hosting" visitors to the funeral home during viewing hours. "Two to four and seven to nine" are words familiar to the receptionist because these are the typical hours for viewing the deceased in the NAF. As part of his or her official responsibilities, the receptionist arranges seating in the "chapels" or viewing rooms, carries and arranges flowers around the casket, places prayer cards and other memorabilia in the room, greets visitors and directs them to the appropriate chapel, answers visitor questions and acts as a buffer between the family and the funeral director who may be working in another part of the funeral

home or may have left for the day. The receptionist also answers the phone and may arrange paperwork on the funeral to go out the next day. This includes the "call sheet" or a listing of various details that must be accomplished by the funeral team in the course of the NAF. In addition to these clearly defined responsibilities, the receptionist may also be asked to clean bathrooms during visiting hours and make sure they don't run low on supplies. S/he may be asked to assist in the prep room in the dressing and casketing of a body, but not with embalming.

Non Staff Members of the Funeral Team

Pallbearers at the funeral home where I conducted research were unionized and worked for a private livery service. In other locales funeral homes will have a group of retired and active police officers and firefighters on call. These workers are paid per diem at a rate of about \$35 a "carry". Conversations with several funeral directors revealed that cops and firefighters make good pallbearers because of their open schedules and their familiarity and relative easiness with death. In other instances pallbearers are selected by the family from friends or relatives of the deceased. All pallbearers are responsible for carrying the casket from the viewing room to the hearse, from the hearse to the place of service, from the place of service back into the hearse, and from the hearse to the gravesite or crematory. They are also responsible for selecting and arranging floral displays around the casket in the hearse (and flower car

where appropriate), the place of service, and the place of disposition.

During the funeral service the pallbearer is expected to wait in the wings for their call to carry (unless they are family members or friends of the deceased).⁴⁸

The funeral car driver may be an employee of a private livery service or may be drawn from the ranks of the funeral home staff. In the latter case the employee is typically a "nonlicense" and is paired with the licensed funeral director who is "taking out the funeral". The driver is responsible for driving the hearse and leading the funeral procession to the funeral site. S/he may assist in the carrying of the casket and be asked to assist in the preproom. The driver, when an employee of the funeral home, may transport bodies from the place of death to the funeral home and assist in home removals. Finally, the driver may clean and service funeral vehicles before and after the service.

A "trade embalmer" is not an employee of the funeral home but is instead, a freelance, licensed embalmer who may also be the funeral director. S/he may be employed on a per diem basis by a funeral home to assist in the removal, preparation, and viewing of a body. They may also

⁴⁸. The typical group of pallbearers includes six men but this number may go as high as eight in cases where the casket or body is heavy or where several relatives and friends would like the honor of carrying or as low as four in the case of an infant casket. As with other members of the funeral team, pallbearers, excluding those selected by the family, may on occasion be asked to assist in the preproom, in such tasks as lifting a body into a casket.

take out funerals for a family. They are in a sense substitute funeral directors who fill in for the regulars during vacations and holidays or when the funeral home staff is overwhelmed. In some cases these "trade men" are regulars at another funeral home and are working on their days off. In other cases the trade embalmer works exclusively freelance. In some cases they have their own prep room but in most cases they use that of the funeral home where they are temporarily employed. Their responsibilities may include all those under the heading "funeral director".

The responsibilities of the "beautician" often fall to the person embalming the body and may be included under the heading of cosmetizing. However, there are cases when the funeral director must call an outside, trained beautician to dye, cut, and/or set the hair or manicure the nails of a body. In some instances the family goes to the deceased's regular beautician and asks if they would perform the tasks, but this may be met with discomfort and refusal. For this reason the funeral director keeps on call a trained beautician who works on the body for a set fee. The family incurs the charges for the beautician's services.

Other members of the funeral team who are not part of the regular funeral home staff include plumbers, electricians, accountants, salespeople, and delivery people. These people are, generically speaking, responsible for providing services to the funeral director and staff in their construction of the normal American funeral. These supplemental workers are, like

regular employees, expected to conduct themselves with dignity and grace in the funeral home. It is expected that they will add no further disruption to the normal routines of the funeral home. In some cases (following a long association with the funeral home) they may be asked to assist in the prep room.

"I don't want to do that": Role Conflict and The NAF

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the duties assigned to various roles in the funeral home are neither clear-cut nor conformed to completely by the players. In the following section I will provide findings from my field research to describe this gray area of role playing and answer the questions: What is the contested terrain in funeral home work? How are these contests played out? How and when is the choreographed performance of the NAF threatened by labor issues?

In the case of the Metropolitan-Suburban Funeral Home, the prep work (and in some cases, other dirty work like paperwork) was passed from one director to the next, and in some cases from the director to the nonlicensed staff. In my months of observation I noticed a growing resentment on the part of the directors and a power play occurring between them. Rich was very resentful that 1) Joe left him with all of the embalming duties when he left to work at another funeral home, 2) Stanley showed little interest in doing prep work, and with Michael, found ways to use the trade embalming service when they were stuck with embalming, 3) Michael

reprimanded Rich the few times he called the trade service for a removal and prep while he and Stan were away, and 4) that he was unofficially the house embalmer. But this resentment did not affect his performance as an embalmer although it may have carried over to other aspects of his work, especially in the way he made arrangements, sold merchandise, and otherwise handled affairs with the living. Rich often complained about the non preproom aspects of his work while at the same time complaining about the lack of respect given him by Stanley and Michael and the unequal distribution of embalming work in the funeral home. Many of his comments about the living suggested he defined work with them as "dirty", while the pride he took in his finished products (hidden as it often was) suggested that he viewed the back region work as "clean" despite his complaints.⁴⁹

Stan, on the other hand, was more interested in the pomp and circumstance of the funeral proceedings and the sale of funeral merchandise than in handling the bodies. To him, working with the living was the best part of the job, and he found every opportunity to avoid the other work. He would probably define "dirty work" as that involving the handling of the dead and the handling of the living as the "clean work". A story he related to me suggests his attitude toward the dirty work of

⁴⁹. This runs contrary to the logic of the lay public, other funeral directors I spoke with, and Everett Hughes' (1971 and 1958) argument. One would think, with all the foul sights and smells, handling bodies would be the dirty work. But for Rich it was easier to deal with a customer "that {didn't} talk back," (fieldnotes, 1993).

handling the dead:

"When I was a kid and someone in the neighborhood had a pet that died I would bury it. I even designed a mechanism to lower the bodies into the ground (he smiles). I'll never forget, one time Charlie "O's" canary died and his father comes to me to bury it. He says 'You gotta dig the grave.' and I says 'Oh no, I'm the director.' He says 'Who digs the grave?' and I said 'You do.'," (he laughs)."

Michael, the funeral home owner and a licensed director, was simply detached from the whole process and didn't want "to be bothered" with the mundane tasks of the funeral home. A former "trade man", Michael had "juiced" his fair share of bodies, saying at one point, "I used to do this (embalming) all the time, now I'm happy to be away from it" (fieldnotes, 1993). Once the sole operator of two funeral homes, Michael had met with and consoled many families. He was burnt out and busy pursuing a side career selling industrial products. The few times that I saw him assisting in the preproom, he appeared rusty and spoke of being out of practice. He would only handle funeral arrangements when he was specifically requested by a family or in a case of overload where neither Stan nor Rich could cover. Even then, he might call in a trade embalmer to do the removal and the prep work. In the latter days of my observation, following the resignation of the bookkeeper (who was also Michael's mother), he took on her duties begrudgingly, eventually trying to pass on as much as

possible to the other directors and to his accountant. This built further resentment in Rich and contributed to resentment in Stan.

When Michael hired a consultant to bring the funeral home up to OSHA⁵⁰ compliance he tagged Rich as the employee responsible for making the lists, buying products, and implementing changes. On one occasion Rich complained to Stan that he was running out of time to prepare for his next day's meeting with the consultant. Stan made it clear that he did not want anything to do with it. He said to Rich, "That prep room, OSHA shit is your business. My business is business." Rich was pissed the rest of the day⁵¹.

Conflicts over duties were not limited to the funeral directors. At times some of their responsibilities were passed over to other staff members, and at still other times we passed our duties over to them. A couple of examples from my fieldnotes will show that in a funeral home the duties assigned to various roles are not necessarily carried out by the occupant of that role. Here is a typical day:

"Rich began the day complaining about the lack of items available to

⁵⁰. OSHA stands for the Occupational Safety and Hazards Administration, a federal agency responsible for fostering and enforcing safe working conditions.

⁵¹. The relationship between Rich and Stan could best be described as a sibling rivalry. One that at times was quite heated. Because I was a third party and kept my mouth shut, I was on the receiving end of their complaints about one another.

use as props under the arms and heads of bodies when we casket them. He blamed Betty (the housekeeper and part-time receptionist), saying she never returns them after we break down the rooms. Typically they are thrown (literally) behind the bier as we are cranking down the mattress and closing the casket. Betty is supposed to bring them back down to the prep room. I made it my responsibility today. Rich also complained that Betty doesn't set up enough chairs for the viewings. He asked rhetorically, 'What *does* that woman do', and said he is usually stuck putting out additional chairs," (fieldnotes, 1993).

Another conflict occurred when I was left to direct a client family through a disruption in the viewing. I was working as a receptionist and the son of the deceased came into the office. He was incensed, "What is that crucifix doing over my mother's casket?" I sat there stunned, not quite sure what he was asking. "My mother is a Protestant and you have a Catholic cross over her!" I told him I was sorry and that I would call the funeral director. I suggested he return to the viewing room while I solved the problem. I paged Stan in the business office upstairs. "Stan, Mrs. T's son is down here complaining about the crucifix over his mother's casket. She's a Protestant and he's pissed." Stan responded, "Oh, just give them a regular cross and take away the crucifix." Again, I was stunned. "You want me to go in there in front of all those people and take down the crucifix? What if I fuck up?"

He nonchalantly answered, "You won't fuck up. Just go in and do it." So I grabbed a cross from the storage closet and proceeded to the viewing room. The son met me at the door. "What are you doing?", he said. I told him what I was about to do. Although not happy, he was satisfied that the change was being made. He thanked me as I walked out the door and I asked him if there was anything else I could do for him. He said, "Just keep that Stan S--- away from me."

This was Stan's mistake and probably should have been handled by him but since he was upstairs and I was on the scene he delegated the task to me. I was able to change the cross and to smooth the situation over with the son, but it would have been more appropriate and professional for Stan to deal with the family.

Gender Roles in the Funeral Home: "Women in the funeral service don't have it easy."

Work roles in the funeral service and death care itself have traditionally been gendered. Only about 5% of licensed funeral directors are women, although this number is growing due to corporatization and general work force gains. Within funeral homes the duties performed by women have been limited to those of "funeral arranger" (in corporate homes), receptionist, housekeeper, beautician, and bookkeeper. As a result, women have been excluded from the funeral service both institutionally and culturally.

Funeral directors, funeral staff, and client families alike have kept women from the trade with attitudes that suggest that women are not up to the tasks of handling bodies or grief. A comment by a male respondent summarizes this attitude. Referring to one of his employees who was also participating in the interview:

"She's very profeminine as far as funeral directors are concerned. And of course I'm not. And mine is strictly from a business aspect, a financial aspect. They've come a long way but still can't put the bodies on the stretcher or the embalming table," (Mr. Smith, Interview, 1993).

To which the female employee responded:

"I don't want to hear that. Unless there's a room and you get the arrangements firmed up and the money paid up there's not gonna be anything on the table. We can motorize the prep room if we have enough money. Everything can be picked up and put here and rolled out. You can do that with machines. So that's not the funeral service. And Mr. Smith you know it. They don't come back because you picked up a body," (L.V.H., Interview, 1993).

The task of removing the body from the home or hospital involves some lifting and shifting of dead weight and has been used as a justification for limiting women's opportunities in the funeral profession. Another respondent commented, "...women in the funeral service...even today...are

regarded as a liability...because {they} can't lift. What makes me any worse a lifter than you?" (Mary Ellen, Interview, 1993). Various technologies, including *sheet shifting*⁵², along with advances in the cause of women, have negated this argument and opened the door (however slightly) for women to enter the profession.

All of the women I spoke with agreed that "It's not easy for women in funeral service," (Mary Ellen, Interview, 1993). However, it has been easier for women in the corporate world than for other women who confront the traditionally male-dominated independent funeral homes. Mary Ellen, as a vice president of a funeral service corporation, claims she:

"...could not imagine making the headway that I've made anywhere else. The corporate funeral homes obviously are going to be much more careful about that kind of thing (sex discrimination). And a family business, unless there are several firms involved, is not going to have that kind of opportunity. So it's a unique situation here. At least we're being given the opportunity to do more," (Interview, 1993).

Women have also been denied substantial entry into the funeral service because of their presumed "emotional fragility". It has been argued that women can't handle "the burdens of grief and death," (Runblad, 1995). This

⁵². A technique for moving bodies, dead or alive, that involves pulling and rolling the body on a sheet. It is something that has been practiced by nurses and other female caregivers for centuries.

notion is absurd as well as ahistorical given the fact that before funeral directing, women were the primary caretakers of the dead.⁵³ But the attitude expressed in a turn of the century funeral trade journal remains in place today, "it seems almost wicked to hold out any inducement for women to enter...embalming...for indeed very few are fitted by nature for this exacting work," (*ibid*, 1995). Furthermore, there are contradictory views expressed in the culture. Although the emotional burden associated with handling the grieving has been claimed to be too much for women to bear, it has⁵⁴ been argued by Runblad (1995) that they are probably better suited for the handling of the bereaved than are men because of their "caring, empathetic, and nurturing ways". One female director and funeral home owner commented in a newspaper article that women are "naturally better at being funeral directors than men are," because they are "not ashamed or afraid of expressing {their} feelings," (Goldman, 1993). The essentialist reduction of women as "more caring" than men is a prevailing attitude in society as well as in the funeral service and, although regressive, has the unintended consequence of opening doors to women in some spheres. The

⁵³. In fact, Christian mythology claims that it was the Virgin Mary and Saint Veronica who removed the body of Jesus from the cross and prepared it for entombment. Although this contradicts the Jewish burial tradition of *kaddish* that demands the deceased be prepared by members of their same sex.

⁵⁴. Runblad (1995) suggests this emotional *gift* was used as a justification for women's sole occupation of the "shrouding" role in the premarket funeral service.

fact that it is expressed by a female funeral director suggests it is an attitude held not only by male participants but also internalized by women.

Perhaps a play on this theme of women's perceived inability to handle the baser aspects of life comes from a conversation in the breakroom of the funeral home where I observed. From a fieldnote entry:

"Michael turned to Rich and said, 'You're the miserable shit. What you need is a steady piece of ass.' At this point Rich reminded Michael that there was a *lady* (Betty) present and he should watch his mouth. Michael was extremely apologetic," (fieldnotes, 1993).

This comment is suggestive of the more general sexist climate of our culture and the fact that the gendered aspect of the funeral home is not found exclusively in work roles. Further evidence of this was the use of the term *girls* to describe the women who worked as receptionists at the funeral home.

Some client families feel that females in the funeral director's role are not as "strong or responsible" as a male director. One female respondent commented, "Sometimes females are bad for business. And when I pick up on that I don't get upset. And I tell the other females to look out for that." She goes on to describe how some families with traditional beliefs about male and female roles won't accept orders from a woman. In her words, "They don't want to see a female after a certain point. And that's fine. I have to do what's best for business," (L.V.H., Interview, 1993) and, in the

spirit of disruption prevention, she tells the male owner of the funeral home to take out the funeral. L.V.H. is suggesting her response to traditional attitudes toward women in male-dominated industries and chooses not to buck the tide despite her belief in their capabilities. In keeping with the "blended whiskey" role she is avoiding disruption at a cost to women's advancement in the service.

Other respondents suggested that, although some families have initial reservations about women handling their loved one's funeral, they are often pleased with the results and show their appreciation with calls, thank you notes, gifts, and future demands for their service. Maggie expresses this in the following comments:

"Here I was a nice Irish girl in a real Italian funeral home. So they knew that I kind of stuck out in the beginning. It was a very, very closed [client] community. And everybody knew everyone else. So you would see the same people all the time. After a while it got to the point where people would request me. Then the owner was getting a little annoyed. It turned out that he was mad because people weren't requesting him," (Maggie, Interview, 1993).

Within the M-S funeral home and those visited during my interviews the gendered boundaries of work were clear. Women handled the cleaning and nurturing work, while men handled the bodies and the work outside

of the funeral home.⁵⁵ Maureen talked about her place in the independent funeral home where she worked while in high school and college.

Although they gave her plenty of responsibility early and trusted her with important tasks, she felt being the only female was the hardest part of her job. First they were constantly testing her strength as a woman in a male-dominated occupation; in her words:

"...they placed a lot of responsibility on me very quickly. I mean, I was standing door duty with no one else there. Answering the phone, able to take first call information, and get enough so I don't sound like an idiot, and get the license (funeral director) on the phone...I was doing embalmings and making removals and, I did everything...they were pushing me to the limit, being the only female there. Well, you know, 'Let's see how much Maureen will do.' They would go out on the funerals, even the apprentice who was with me, their son."

Second, because they assigned her to gendered tasks:

"They would get to go out on the funerals and they would leave me back to vacuum. So that was definitely a sexist kind of thing. {laughs} I mean, like, anyone can run a vacuum, right? It's not very difficult."

⁵⁵. Although these represent limited examples, Stan, a funeral director at M-S, embalmed all the bodies for a female funeral home owner in the metropolitan area. Also, in the funeral home where L.V.H. worked, all the prep work was done by men.

'We'll leave Maureen back to do that.' And they'll go out and have the coffee and donuts and be, you know, having a good time. But I still got a lot of experience. I have no regrets. You know, putting up with the crap I put up with through those years," (Interview, 1992).

Other women I interviewed agreed that getting an apprenticeship at a funeral home was difficult. In one woman's words, "I had two strikes against me going in for a residency. One, that I was female and two that I had a funeral home (my father's) to go to after I got my residency done," (Maggie, Interview, 1993). Another respondent told me of a similar problem finding a residency following graduation from mortuary school. After nearly a year of searching she finally allowed her grandmother, a respected funeral home owner and operator, to call in some favors from metropolitan funeral homes and land her a placement. Mary Ellen, like Maggie had the second strike against her. Neither family had embalming facilities in their funeral homes, a requirement for hosting a resident, but both had openings for their children after they received their licenses. Part of the residency agreement involves the possibility of staying on after the year is up. So a funeral home may have reservations about investing in a resident who is likely to leave.

Maggie also talked about how beliefs about what women can do affect the pay discrepancy between male and female residents:

"As a female it was harder. The salary as a resident was not the greatest...Men had the opportunity to increase their salary because

they could do pallbearer work and I couldn't do that. I couldn't be an extra, quote, 'Man' on a house removal to make another couple of dollars. Then, that's why the salary is so low. You could always compensate by going out on calls and making the twenty eight dollars for a house call. Depending on the funeral home, some men have doubled their salaries. And at that point, it was all cash. So what did I make? A lousy hundred something dollars?," (Interview, 1993).

On the other hand, Mary Ellen, a corporate funeral director I interviewed, spoke with hope about the opportunities and improving conditions for women in the funeral service. She revealed:

"It's interesting being a woman in the funeral service today because there are a lot more opportunities like this. And I say to you, 'Well, why would you come to me, as opposed to my male associate who is in the room next door?' Many answer, 'We want a woman's perspective'. Oh, I guess it's chic to have a woman's perspective today. So I can't wait ten years from now to look back and say well, how did we fare? How did we do? I guess I'm optimistic," (Interview, 1993).

The next section describes the formal role and actual duties of a funeral director who works with a limited staff. It suggests how a small, family-business atmosphere informalizes role expectations and reinforces the

notion, that bureaucratic structure lends itself to more clearly defined role expectations.

Description of the Expanding Division of Labor

In the traditional, independent⁵⁶ funeral home the funeral director is the jack-of-all-trades. It is not unusual to see him/her mowing the lawn or tending to plants in front of the funeral home, then returning to the garage to service and wash the hearse and removal vehicle. A call on the phone will transform him/her to receptionist, taking the first call information from the family and arranging for the removal of the body. Following a change of clothes⁵⁷ from business casual to a suit, s/he drives to the home, nursing home, or hospital to remove the body. This may be done alone or more easily with a helper. The body is transported to the funeral home, and the work of preparation begins. Following the embalming and the conference with the family, s/he will make calls to the newspaper to file an obituary, to

⁵⁶. The term independent (Hast, 1998) is used to describe the 85% of U.S. funeral homes that have not been bought out by funeral conglomerates. Pine (1975) uses the term "community" to describe these types of homes and argues that they encourage and provide a more intimate "personal service model" to client families because the funeral director is involved in all aspects of the performance and has a long working and social relationship with the deceased and their families.

⁵⁷. A number of informants suggested that funeral directors must always be on their guard when they are on call. This precludes any afterwork cocktails which might give the "wrong" impression to a grieving family. As discussed in Bowman (1959b), the funeral director is subject to an *ultrarespectability* standard similar to clergy and much higher than the typical occupational group member.

the cemetery to open a grave, to the rectory to arrange a time for the church service, to the printer to order prayer cards, to various pallbearers to arrange a carry, and to the casket supplier to replenish his stock or to special order a container for the deceased. S/He calls or visits the deceased's insurance company to make claims, and a trip to the County Board of Health offices to file a death certificate rounds out his/her day.

S/He then readies the viewing chapel to accommodate visitors by setting the casket on a bier, surrounding it with floral arrangements and mass cards sent by mourners, and by grouping folded chairs in orderly rows in front of the deceased. S/He makes sure that the bathrooms are well-stocked with paper supplies and cleans them if necessary.

When the family and other mourners arrive, s/he directs them to the appropriate chapel in the funeral home, answers questions regarding the process, and then answers any incoming calls. When the family leaves following visiting hours, s/he again cleans the bathrooms, adds any floral arrangements that arrived during the viewing to the chapel, and makes final preparations for the funeral the next day (which s/he will take out with the help of a driver).

As the business grows, the director may enlist the help of others, both licensed and non-licensed, to complete the tasks described above. S/He may hire a porter to clean and maintain the physical plant; a housekeeper to dust, vacuum, and wash; another licensed funeral director

to do removals, prep bodies, and arrange funerals with families; and finally, a receptionist to cover the floor while s/he is out of the home or handling other calls. Tasks like snow removal and landscaping may be subbed out to contractors. Should the director choose to vacation or take the night off, s/he may hire a tradesman to cover and coordinate while s/he is away. My observation has been that many small funeral homes operate with the help of a "funeral attendant" whose responsibilities include:

"...a variety of tasks during the funeral: Places casket in parlor or chapel prior to wake or funeral service and arranges floral offerings and lights around casket, following instructions of director. Directs or escorts mourners to parlor or chapel in which wake or funeral is held. Assists director to close coffin. Carries flowers to hearse or limousine for transportation to place of internment. Assists mourners into and out of limousines. Issues and stores funeral equipment, such as casket lowering devices and grass mats used at place of internment. May carry casket," (U.S. Employment Service, 1991).

In corporate or cosmopolitan (Pine, 1975) funeral homes where the logic of efficiency, economies of scale, an accountable and top-down hierarchy, written rules, communications, and records, and impersonality dominate, a complex and formal division of labor comes into existence (Weber in Gerth and Mills, 1946). The building is maintained by subcontractors; removals are done by removal men; bodies are prepped by embalmers; families

meet with arrangers who are responsible for completing paperwork, making sales, and phone calls; the floor is covered by receptionists and coordinated by managers. Funerals are taken out by funeral directors and the casket is carried by professional pallbearers. Therefore, a lot less, if any flexibility in the director's role is apparent.

Because of the volume of business (500-2000 calls per year compared to 30-250 in small independent homes), the corporate funeral home must create and maintain a bureaucratic structure to deal with all of the details of the funeral performance and avoid any disruption in the normal flow of events. Pine suggests that the "bureaucratic model" may get the job done but forgoes some of the intimacy and personal service found in the independents. The goal for both organizations remains the same with regard to the families served: provide a trouble-free funeral performance and make a sale.

Chapter 5-Role Constraint and *Ad Hocing* : The Organizational Methodology of Funeral Homes.

The proceeding chapter described the structural roles in a funeral home, how they operate, and how they condition the normal American funeral. This chapter shows the common sensical/innovative aspects of doing funeral work and how they are an adaptation to disruptions in the normal American funeral. In slow times the funeral home functions as if it were an organization with structured and differentiated roles and tasks. Under busy circumstances it functions more like a family in crisis, where the normal boundaries and routines and expectations break down or are abandoned, and everyone is expected to do everything. As I discussed the director's work during slow times in the last chapter, I will discuss his/her work during busy times in this chapter.

As suggested elsewhere, the goal of the funeral director and their staff is to perform a complete and trouble-free funeral for the bereaved. Preventing disruptive behaviors on the part of the bereaved will help move the family through the grief ritual. Disruptions in the funeral service are viewed as reminders of the loss of the deceased, and, as stated earlier, have a particular weight to them given the grief emotions associated with death. *Ad hocing* decreases the possibility of sabotage and/or disruption. When employees move from one set of tasks to another very easily the opportunity for disruption and the need to correct are decreased and the

funeral runs smoothly.

The average funeral home in the United States does one hundred fifty funeral calls a year. With three hundred sixty five days in a year and assuming the calls occur at a pace of one every two plus days, there is a lot of "down time" in the funeral home⁵⁸. It is impossible to predict when a call will come in, but bills and salaries must still be paid. Therefore, the average independent funeral home must maintain a small yet competent and flexible staff to handle the funeral. Peak times, on the other hand, include those times when the funeral home is overbooked and understaffed. At these times the *ad hoc* principle applies. The clean up work of the porter and housekeeper is replaced by set up work in preparation for the funeral, and they may be called upon to assist the director in the prep room, assist on a house removal, sit with a family, or carry out a casket. The demands of funeral work require that some of the boundaries established by standard roles in the organizational division of labor must be crossed to carry out an uninterrupted performance of the NAF. This crossing of normal boundaries is not adequately explained by classical role theory or role flexibility.

Critique of Role Theory

According to the Structural Functionalist School associated with

⁵⁸. M-S Funeral Home did an average of 220 funeral calls in the years 1983-1993 as indicated by records kept by the firm.

Robert Merton and Talcott Parsons, society shapes and guides individual conduct through networks of interrelated role sets which distinguish appropriate behavior for given statuses and maintain proper behavior through expectations and sanctions. Actors are expected to follow norms to keep society functioning. The social world is viewed by structural functionalists as a network of interrelated positions or statuses within which individuals enact roles. Parsons defines a role as "the collection of culturally-defined rights, obligations, and expectations that accompany a status in a social system", (1951). A status in this model is a position an individual occupies in society. It is institutionalized and tells where the individual fits, letting him/her know how to behave toward others. The social system is ultimately organized around various networks of statuses and expectations understood and learned through the socialization process. According to Jonathan Turner, "The potential utility of role theory derives from its concern with the complex interrelations among the expectations derived from social structure, the mediation of these expectations through self-conceptions, the role playing capacities of actors in statuses, and the resulting enactment of role behaviors," (1982).

"The sociological significance of roles," according to Henslin, "is that they lay out what is expected of people. As individuals throughout society perform their roles, those roles mesh together to form this thing called society," (1997). In fulfilling these expectations actors serve their functions

in institutions, which in turn, serve to maintain society as a whole. This theory specifies the norms that actors *will* follow. Not enough is said however, about improvisation or the possibility of passing on rather than conforming to a role. The traditional model is sufficient to explain funeral work and role performance during slow times at the funeral home; however, it does not sufficiently explain task allocation in busy times. Durkheim describes death-related mourning as a time when "the ordinary occupations of life are suspended," (p. 435, 1915). While role boundaries shift during busy times, there are still role expectations, but these are more expansive than during slow times. Even though the receptionist's job description may not include dressing the body, it is understood that this role will be taken on during peak times.

In his critique Hilbert characterizes structural functionalist role theory as "cultural prescription", suggesting the culture or structure of a society prescribes or dictates a set of behaviors that an actor will perform according to their status or place in society. In further challenge to the limitations of traditional role theory views, Ralph Turner (1962) calls this role taking and distinguishes it from role making where the actor acts "as if" there were concrete rules. "Roles exist in various degrees and consistency," according to Turner, "while the individual confidently frames his behavior as if they had unequivocal existence and clarity," (*ibid*, p. 22). In attempting from time to time to make aspects of the roles explicit, the

actor is "creating and modifying roles as well as merely bringing them to light; the process is not only role taking but role making," (*ibid*) Turner suggests, "The idea of role taking shifts emphasis away from the simple process of enacting a prescribed role to devising a performance on the basis of an imputed other-role," (*ibid*).

Notes on Traditional Organizational Theory

In the "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality" section of *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), Merton explains how roles are organized and enforced within bureaucratic organizations,

"A formal, rationally organized social structure involves clearly defined patterns of activity in which, ideally, every series of actions is functionally related to the purpose of the organization. In such an organization there is integrated a series of offices, of hierarchical statuses, in which inhere a number of obligations and privileges closely defined by limited and specific rules. Each of these offices contains an area of imputed competence and responsibility...Official action ordinarily occurs within the framework of preexisting rules of the organization. The system of prescribed relations between various offices involves a considerable degree of formality and clearly defined social distance between the occupants of these positions," (p. 249).

Much of this seems to echo Weber's ideal type description of formal

bureaucracy. This may be questioned. As suggested below, traditional role theory, which emphasizes structural forces over *ad hoc* forces in the organization and enactment of behavior, fails to properly explain work under non-normal circumstances.

In the section of *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), "The Dysfunctions of Bureaucracy"⁵⁹ Merton introduces some explanation of the informal aspects of bureaucracy including the term "trained incapacity" which refers to how one's abilities function in the face of inadequacies or blind spots. Actions based upon training and skills which have been successfully applied in the past may result in inappropriate responses under changed conditions. An inadequate flexibility in the application of skills⁶⁰, will, in a changing milieu (ie., peak times), result in more or less serious maladjustments. In general, one adopts measures in keeping with one's past training, under new conditions which are not recognized as significantly different, the "very soundness of this training may lead to the adoption of the wrong procedures," (1968, p. 252), suggesting *overconformity* to the role. In fact, "keeping with one's past training" may be the only thing that holds the scene together as the bureaucrat or the

⁵⁹. The use of the term "dysfunction" to describe informal aspects of organizational behavior suggests the structural functionalist view that behavior other than that prescribed by organizational rules can be viewed as deviant and perhaps detrimental to the stability of the organization. I would suggest these behaviors are necessary.

⁶⁰. What Merton refers to elsewhere as "ritualism", (1968).

funeral worker relies upon their common sensical knowledge of the situation to guide them through uncertain waters (See Garfinkel's research on record keeping, 1967, Chapter 6) and make practical sense of the situation.

This is as an example of the need for improvisational skills discussed under the heading of *ad hocing* (Garfinkel, 1967, pp. 21-24). In other words, rules for operating a funeral home and obligations and tasks associated with certain roles in the funeral home are inadequate to explain action during peak times or what Merton refers to as "under new conditions".

Merton goes on (1968, pp. 252-256) to discuss the oversocialized/formalized/bureaucratized individual and the "structural sources of overconformity". This presents me with an interesting and grounded starting point for a discussion of passing as opposed to rigid conformity to a role.

Merton introduces the concept of "emotionalized disapproval" as a "functionally significant defence against tendencies which jeopardize the performance of socially necessary activities," (read disruptions) and "may be described as the intrusion of primary group attitudes when secondary group attitudes are institutionally demanded," (p. 259). Merton also notes "community disapproval of many forms of behavior may be in terms of one or the other of these patterns of substitution of culturally inappropriate types

of relationship. Thus prostitution constitutes a type-case where coitus, a form of intimacy which is institutionally defined as symbolic of the most sacred primary group relationship, is placed in a contractual context, symbolized by the exchange of that most impersonal of symbols, money," (p. 259).

Stigma⁶¹ for funeral workers is associated with both death and money. Like sex, the handling of the dead is a sacred and, historically/traditional, primary group function which is now performed by institutions, including the hospital, nursing home, and funeral home. Some of the resentment and aversion the public feels toward the death worker may be related to their association with the dead and with the objective stance (as indicated in the application of pricing and other monetary factors) they take to the body.

Peak work and the *Ad hoc* Role

Some features of the funeral home workplace are not sufficiently explained by traditional role theory such as Merton's. An alternative theory of role relations and task completion must be used to explain the improvisational nature of funeral home activity. Due to the episodic nature of death, funerals must adhere to a rigid schedule of events but only over a short period of time (typically three days from first call to final payment). Arguably, routinization/rationalization is a response to disruption. A theory

⁶¹. Merton (1968) refers to Kingsley Davis' article "The Sociology of Prostitution", (1937).

of the *ad hoc* role best explains the unique delegation of work responsibilities in a funeral home. If roles are defined as a collection of expectations and tasks related to a particular status in an organization or institution, then traditional role theory has limitations.

Timing and workload are important variables in explaining when and if classical models of role relations can be used to understand funeral home organization and work. During slow times, work roles may be enforced, as the workload is moderate and time permits satisfactory completion of tasks. However, during peak times the funeral home may be overbooked and understaffed, and the expectation is that all employees will drop whatever they are doing and *lend a hand* in accomplishing the funeral. Classical role theory may be too rigid to explain what happens when there is a work overload. Peak times require flexibility on the part of the work force. Roles, as concretely designated in the organizational sense cannot adequately explain all situations.

Like flower shops, funeral homes work under enormous pressures but only during certain times. Unlike flower shops, funeral homes cannot predict when and if the peak times will occur. Death may occur every day and during all times of the day. Yet, an individual funeral home may not get a call for weeks at a time. Therefore, it cannot control the amount of work that comes in. So it must maintain a ready staff of employees that can complete a multitude of tasks competently in peak times. Because the

funeral business works on a feast or famine principle, the funeral home *must* fit calls in. A funeral director never turns business away, and therefore, as with the organizational structure, the physical structure of the funeral home must be flexible. Rooms in the funeral home function like a stage set and they are designed with a multipurpose intent. Non-public areas like the prep room and garage can always be used for storage, and casket display rooms can be transformed into viewing chapels. These conditions also demand flexibility on the part of workers to assume tasks normally accomplished by individuals occupying an organizational role. According to Pine, "because bereaved people tend to behave erratically and often unpredictably, the funeral director must react quickly to any change...he must be able to modify his task orientation and role behavior as the situation necessitates," (p. 145, 1975). Corporations which may follow a more traditional/formal division of labor represented in the organizational chart can do so because they have a *deep bench*⁶², and as depicted in Evelyn Waugh's fictional account of a corporate funeral home, corporations have more control over the situation, (1948). In small organizations like the one I observed a couple of *utility players* is all that is needed to pick up the pieces during peak times.

There is no expectation that a receptionist will complete an entire

⁶². For non-sports fans this metaphor, as well as "utility player", describes a wide and competent reserve of players, and a player who can field many positions, respectively.

embalming but he or she may be expected to help dress and casket a body or lend a hand in some other aspect of the funeral process not assigned to their role. Not all tasks can be delegated at all times.

Making funeral arrangements and doing arterial embalming require formal learning, practice, and licensing. For the funeral home employee learning to *ad hoc* occurs on the job. However, some background knowledge of the American way of death is expected to accomplish this. Funeral homes seek employees who are not uncomfortable with death and its consequences. They should be competent members of the common culture, capable of assuming many tasks at a moment's notice, and comfortable with the expectation that they will know what to do without being told. As noted earlier, during my first week of work at the funeral home, I was asked on several occasions by various employees if I was "squeamish" about bodies. Towards the end of my stay at the funeral home a receptionist's position opened up. There was discussion about the qualifications of applicants. First and foremost, could they "handle", both figuratively and literally, dead bodies. Finally, I noticed over the two year period in which I conducted interviews with funeral directors that when I explained that I worked in a funeral home I was much more likely to be given a full tour (including embalming facilities) of the funeral home than when I did not. I attribute this to my acceptance as a member of the collectivity of death workers who share a moral order (a common set of

background assumptions held in place by affectual responses to disruptions in the routine) which includes the technical handling of the dead.

Challenges to Normal Roles

How do funeral workers deal with conflicts that may arise around who is to perform which tasks during off-peak times? My observations suggest that the role expectations are much more rigid in slow times than in peak times. Conflicts are sublimated or cast aside for the good of the mission during peak times. Should an employee walk out in the middle of funeral preparations, then it is assumed that someone else must fill in to complete the funeral. In addition, the reduction of differences between levels of employees permits a friendly, easily-maneuvered organization. A small, family-business atmosphere may lend itself to inter-role flexibility, but the non-normal demands of peak times require intra-role flexibility, even in corporate homes.

Ad hocing in Practice

Earlier I provided a description of the Normal American Funeral based on data gathered from the field and in depth interviews. What follows is a description of disruptions in the routine/standardized model and the methods used by funeral workers to respond to these *role challenging* events.

Disruptions in the Normal American Funeral

The normal American funeral discussed earlier provides an ideal type

description of the events and role performances which make up the set of expectations surrounding a funeral. Even though role flexibility is part of the normal performance, there is always a tension between the ideal version and real events on the ground. Every one of the events may face contingencies that must be handled *in situ* by the funeral director and staff, in order to successfully complete the performance. In Van Pine's words, "Being a good director means you move people smoothly along. So when you're all done there was never a point at which you were obvious. The goal in most of their dealings is to play that 'blended whiskey' role," (Personal Communication, 1992). In other words, the "good" funeral director is one who is able to prevent and correct contingencies and, when this is not possible, to try to conceal them from mourners. The idea is to protect the families, who are weighted by grief, from the additional burden of disruptions in the funeral service and to pass them routinely through the events.⁶³ The successful funeral occurs when the director completes his/her work without a hitch, and the family can begin the grief process without painful memories of the funeral. The achievement of this success on the

⁶³. It is part of the background expectancies of the set of practices called "a funeral" in the United States, and elsewhere, that this is an appropriate and necessary way to deal with the grief associated with the death of a loved one. The funeral is seen as an important first step in coming to terms with the loss of some one dear to us by grief specialists (as keenly exemplified in the work and popularity of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross), educators, and practitioners in the funeral trade, and by mourners (in the fact that very few people choose alternatives to the "normal American" version of the funeral despite their availability {Carlson, 1987}).

part of the funeral director is possible only if s/he is able to "head off at the pass" (prevent) and/or "render normal" (correct) disruptions which inevitably occur during the funeral.

Funeral workers engage in "preventative" and "corrective" practices to avoid disruption in the smooth routine of the NAF with the intention of avoiding emotional outbursts. I call this cotton-wooling and it includes exacting a large measure of control over the funeral process. For various reasons the consequences of mistakes and disruptions in the funeral are more severe than those which arise in other everyday social situations. These reasons include: 1) the fact that the funeral is a relatively brief but intense encounter for both the director and the bereaved, and 2) the combination of volatile emotions and economic gain on the part of the director make for a touchy social situation, 3) the assumption that the bereaved member is an emotional time bomb and a naive participant in the process, unlike the director who is an expert strategically involved in the services and not in the grieving. The routinized nature of their work and their familiarity with grief and the more horrible aspects of death, allows them to smoothly lead the bereaved through the performance and maintain a measure of social control in an otherwise unfamiliar situation. In dealing with families through the course of the funeral the central problem for the funeral director is control. The bereaved is assumed to be an out-of-control person set in new surroundings under intense emotional conditions and

under scrutiny. As a result, one of the bereaved's features may be dependence, a kind of freezing of their will. Or a freezing of their ability to take action and therefore, a dependence upon others. Barley (1983a) speaks of handling the situation by managing the naturalness of the scene. He talks about the uneventful removal of the body from the place of death, the presentation of the body, and handling the details of the funeral home layout.

The arrangement sheet becomes a control device. There is little adlibbing with the bereaved, certain questions have to be asked in a certain order. The ordering has a calming effect to it. This is one of the techniques by which a director gains control of the bereaved and thus prevents a disruptive funeral. As one funeral director responded, "I get all the ammunition together so when the family comes in I just say...and the bereaved is taken care of" (Frank, Interview, 1991) The family faces a full set of preparations but is not asked to contribute a lot to the decision making. The director controls the emotional situation by controlling the decision making and the details of the funeral. The more the director prepares for and plans the arrangement conference, the easier it will be to obtain and maintain control.⁶⁴ So like any manager or coach, the director

⁶⁴. Funeral directors keep detailed files on each call. These files may be used when a family returns for services for another deceased member. Such things as casket type, number of days visitation, livery information, phone numbers, and details of the funeral service may be used to prepare the funeral director for the arrangement conference.

has a game plan. The plan should remain flexible and allow for improvisation. Part of dealing with the bereaved is to prevent the disruption possibilities, and the other is to correct the unpreventable. The director must realize that the bereaved can fly off the handle at any moment and s/he must act to limit and/or remedy these possibilities. The director has to gently lead the family through the necessary steps, indicating to them that all they have to do is follow. S/he formulates the conversation in such a way that the bereaved becomes a respondent, answering yes or no to formal questions. This wraps them in protective behavior to prevent the unpleasantness of death from upsetting them and moves them smoothly along.⁶⁵

Managing Physical Space in the Funeral Home

Not only is the emotional situation defined by the funeral director and staff, but so too is the physical layout of the funeral home. To counter claims that the funeral home is just like any other work place I will describe the separate spaces in a funeral home. Certainly the boundaries between public and private spaces are maintained in a variety of workplaces. Restaurants keep boundaries between the dining area and the kitchen to protect the public from the unsightly aspects of food preparation and to

⁶⁵. By now the reader is familiar with the euphemisms of the funeral trade. Death becomes passing or departing, a coffin is a casket or a burial container, embalming is preparation, wakes take place in slumber rooms or chapels and the body is the deceased or the loved one.

allow employees to "let down their guard" from the front stage performance they may be conducting with customers. The kitchen area gives them the chance to "curse out" impatient customers and joke with or reprimand co-workers. Medical facilities, similarly, separate the public from one another and from the private spaces of the physician by having a nurse or attendant lead patients from one space to another and by discouraging their free movement around the facility. Likewise, in the theater there is a separation of the public performance stage from the private back stage of the dressing room, although this boundary is frequently breached as members of the public are invited back stage for autographs and to meet performers. The funeral home differs from these other workspaces in that it very carefully and effectively maintains the separation between public and private spaces. Some are always private, Some are always public, and some are sometimes private and sometimes public (see map in Appendix 6).

In the funeral home where I worked and studied, as with others I visited during the course of my research, the preproom was always private and was always located in a part of the funeral home that was not accessible to the public. In the case of the M-S Funeral Home, the embalming facilities were below ground and were reached only through the garage or through a long, dark hallway. In order to reach this room one would have to walk down half a flight of stairs, remove a cordon from its posts, unlock a door, switch on a light, walk down the hallway, unlock

another door leading into an ante room, and open still another door. The probability that someone would make it this far without being detected was very slight. The outside garage door was operated by an electronic opener and remained locked at all times. It was kept closed unless someone had some immediate business between the garage and the parking lot. The prep room and the business office of M-S funeral home were places that always remained private.

The places that always remained public were the smoking lounge, bathrooms, and casket display rooms (although people were typically escorted here during the arrangement conference, they were sometimes left alone "to make their decision on their own") on the lower floor, the waiting area, receptionist's office, and arrangement conference room on the first floor.

The places with changing characters were the chapels, which during visiting hours were open to the public, but were closed while the casket was being broken down and prepared for transport to the church, cemetery, crematory or when a problem had arisen with a body and the embalmer would have to come up with a solution. Typically, everyone would be asked to leave the room and the embalmer would go to work applying make up, removing a stain, or making adjustments to the casket. During peak times the casket display rooms could be transformed into chapels and their public/private character shifted accordingly.

Located in the business office was a television screen which monitored the entrance and exit of people from the front and back doors. Each time one of these doors was opened a door bell sounded to alert staff on any floor that someone had entered the building and that public performance was about to begin. During lunch hours someone sitting in the kitchen would face the screen and be able to determine whether or not they would have to go downstairs and greet a member of the public or yell down the steps to advise a friend of the funeral home to come upstairs.

Funeral workers carefully guard the private spaces in the funeral home to protect the public from the profane details of death handling and from what may be viewed as painful disruptions in the grief process.

Another interesting aspect of front and back regions in a funeral home is evident in the changing character of some spaces. There are two large rooms used for wakes at M-S funeral home and, like other funeral homes, they can be arranged to accommodate large or small funerals. They are called "A" room and "B" room respectively. When both are occupied, the arrangement room is transformed to "C" room and in the rare case of a fourth funeral, one of the casket display rooms is cleared (inventory is moved to the garage and to the other display room) and changed to "D" room. Some directors I interviewed said they rent space in other funeral homes if there is an overflow, and I suppose M-S would do the same if a fifth funeral was to go out simultaneously. While the arrangement

room is occupied, meetings with families take place in the receptionist's office or in the business office on the third floor.

Description of Disruptions in the Normal American Funeral

A number of things can go wrong during the "normal American funeral". The following description differs from the earlier ideal typical description in that it relies on actual cases I garnered and chronicles the events of one "difficult call". However, in order to maintain a more general sense of what could go wrong, I will also provide examples of disruptions from other cases. Disruptions, once again, are the breaks in the routine set of practices which make up everyday life. They may result from actions of the bereaved, complications with the body, or other breaches in standard procedure. Some examples are provided below.

Day One-The First call, The Removal, The Arrangement Conference, The Embalming, The Evening Visiting Hours.

It was learned through this call that Mr. Cooper had drowned off the coast and his body was being kept, following an autopsy, at the county coroner's office in a nearby state. Because there were two funerals "going out" on that day and all three directors were busy with other work, a trade man, Stuart was called to get the body from the morgue. He arrived with the body around 12:30, just about the time the family was scheduled to appear for the arrangement conference. So it was rush, rush, rush to get the body out of the hearse, through the garage, and into the prep room. I

helped Stuart with these tasks. There was also the need to get the body off Stu's gurney and on to the prep table. This was work for three people as the body weighed over 250 pounds, but with careful handling and fancy sheetwork Stu and I got it done. We left it still wrapped in a body bag in the prep room until one of the directors could come down and embalm it.

Meanwhile, Stan, the funeral director was upstairs making arrangements with the family, including selling them a casket. He said this about the deceased's brother later, "That guy didn't forget a thing from the father's funeral" (He had been buried out of the funeral home the previous year). This threw Stan off a bit because the guy was asking a lot of questions and was much more knowledgeable about funeral home practices than Stan expected. As I suggested earlier, funeral directors, as experts in funerary matters, expect to have the upper hand in funeral arrangements, including having a compliant listener and following through the steps of the funeral. Mr. Cooper's brother did not follow these expectations and represented a disruption in the routine..

I've heard other stories of families having heated arguments, with one another and with the director, in the office and in the casket display room over prices and other details of the funeral, as well as over their relationships to the deceased (ie., "Mommy loved me more than you and she would have wanted me to make these decisions."). When appropriate, the funeral director merely stands back and lets the fur fly until s/he can

return family members to the tasks at hand. The following account comes from fieldnotes and involved a difficult case of arranging:

"When I arrived this morning Stan was on the phone in the arrangement room talking to a client. A little later he told us that the woman had been very rude to him, as she had been on Saturday. She is a friend of the deceased's and was charged with selecting the casket and other minor details of this prearranged funeral service. She had insisted that she speak to Michael. When Stan told her that he was unavailable she became very indignant and threatened to go to another funeral home. Stan claims that he politely told her that would be her choice but that there would be a charge for his and the funeral home's services to this point. She became more irritated and Stan stood by and let her fume. Finally, after she had made the casket selection Stan led her and her companion upstairs to finalize the arrangements and she continued to rant. At this point, according to Stan, he told her off, 'The name of the game is dollars and cents. We're here to make a profit. We're not in the charity business.' To which the woman responded 'You think this is a game? This is a funeral.' He then left the room and called the other funeral director, Michael, at home. Michael understood and told Stan to deal with it the best he could and to get her on her way.", (fieldnotes, 1993).

Stan handled this woman's disruptive behavior by continuing to treat her

with respect up to a point. He could no longer deal with her sarcasm and decided that her business was not so important to him or to the funeral home that he should willingly accept her verbal harassment. Even in his rebuttal, Stan was a "gentleman" and tried to remain within professional boundaries. But he let it be known that he would not be abused. The general feeling among the staff was that this woman was acting out of line, due to the fact that she was a family friend and not a member, who had been charged with tying up loose ends. Stan warned Rich that he would have to deal with her during the viewing hours on Wednesday. Rich said he shouldn't be put on the call because he'll "tell her to go fuck herself right to her face."

By the time Rich went into the prep room to embalm Mr. Cooper's body, funeral arrangements with the family were completed, and Stan was making calls from the business office, lining up details with the church, cemetery⁶⁶, newspapers, livery, and pallbearers.

Shortly after the family left, Stan warned all of us that the viewing would begin that night. This account describes the disruption in normal prep room practices caused by Mr. Cooper's drowned body:

⁶⁶. The director always faces the possibility that the church requested by the family is booked during the hours they hoped for and/or that the cemetery can't open the grave in the time needed before the planned burial. In these cases the director must call the family back and reschedule events.

I went down to see the body⁶⁷ and was immediately struck by the awful smell. When Rich removed the bodybag I saw the guy's swollen and discolored face. We had all figured he'd be a mess after being under water for a while. Rich called Stan down to help him with the preparation, saying "I'm not doing this alone. I want Stan to share the fun." (Which is atypical as most bodies can be handled by one embalmer unless they are working against the clock).

Throughout the embalming they both complained about the smell and about the amount of work it would take to get him to look normal.⁶⁸

According to Stan "He's got to be done [embalmed] thoroughly."

They had both met the guy before at his father's funeral a year earlier and remembered him. Once Rich had removed all of the sheets, and body bag, and taken the guy's shirt off, and began to rinse him Stan asked "Can I start shooting this guy?" Then he told Rich "You get the face, I'll find the artery." At first, he wasn't taking the fluid. Stan

⁶⁷. As so often occurred, I found ways, within the demands of my job, to be nearby to observe the action. Similarly, Betty the housekeeper used her carpet sweeper as a device for being where she wasn't necessarily welcomed or needed.

⁶⁸. According to Frederick and Strub (1986), "Among the most troublesome of the embalmers many summer problems are those created by drowning. Under even the most favorable conditions, however, the removal of discolorations may be difficult and the preservation demand increased to a marked degree. In the more extreme cases the embalmer is confronted by one of the most thoroughly disagreeable tasks imaginable," (p. 516). This may explain Rich's lack of enthusiasm in dealing with this case and the amount of tension in the preproom during the embalming.

checked the hands and feet and saw that they weren't filling, "This hand's not getting it." I commented that the stomach appeared to be growing. They were both dealing with problems with this body. "He's not gonna look too good, he's all swollen." In their terms this was a "tough one", "a bitch". I noticed some tension early on as Stan asked Rich if he could proceed here or there and "Have you done his mouth yet?" as he finished injecting the embalming fluid. Rich returned anxiously "No, I'm trying to get his stomach down." At this point I heard a weird sucking noise and Stan said "Oh, you got a good one there!" probably referring to a big gob of something draining from the trocar and into the sink. Shortly afterwards, Rich got the stomach to come down. I noticed the tension decline after this and heard Stan singing.

This was really the first time (but not the last) I was able to overhear two embalmers working together. At one point Stan asked Rich "How do you think the face is?" Rich responded "Big!" Stan then asked "Do you think you can normalize the face?" To which Rich confidently responded "Yeah." In this situation the return to routine was an active effort on the parts of Stan and Rich. Faced with a disruptive body, they applied what they knew to the scenario with a measure of uncertainty. Through their interaction they were able to negotiate a remedy to the breach and normalize the disruption.

I did hear Stan ask Rich at one point "Are you good with the heart

tap?" and Rich answered "You're doing it." and Stan said "No I'm not." to which Rich answered "Yes you are." I looked up 'heart tap' in *The Principles and Practice of Embalming* and found the following:

"Heart tapping...This is a procedure of blood removal accomplished by inserting a trocar directly into the right atrium of the heart. Although employed with some degree of success by a few operators, this method has far too many disadvantages to make it practical as a routine procedure. There are few embalmers with sufficient knowledge of visceral anatomy to enable them to strike a target as small and variable as the right atrium of the heart without the danger of piercing the aorta or other major arteries," (1986, p. 321).

This excerpt suggests this was an uncommon procedure that neither Rich nor Stan was comfortable performing. I don't know why Stan thought it necessary. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that the body was not taking the fluid normally, and I don't know if they tapped the heart. The drowning victim falls outside of the normal run of calls and requires greater effort and skill on the part of the practitioner. It also presents some of the more unpleasant aspects of dealing with the dead including disfigurement and putrefaction. In all drowning cases "early and usually thorough treatment will be necessary. Decomposition is so rapid after the body is brought into contact with the air that any delay is certain to result in the establishment of additional complications," (p. 518, *ibid*). So as indicated

by the passages from the book and by the abnormal tension in the prep room this seemed to be a special case requiring special attention.

Rich covered the body with a sheet to let it dry while we went upstairs for coffee. Later we dressed and casketed the body and moved it upstairs to the chapel. There were two other viewings going on that night. Stan had the next day off but was coming in to take out the Cooper funeral, to maintain continuity with the family and make some money on the side. Since Michael was out of town and Rich was busy with another family, he called Wilson's to take out the first funeral the next day. Jamie Wilson, like his brother, Steven, and his father, is a "traderman". These licensed directors are contracted by funeral homes to do removals, embalming, and conduct funerals when regular staff are not available. The place where I worked used them only in a pinch because they added costs to the funeral and because, it was felt, they took away some of the personal service and continuity sought by the owner.

While we were in the prep room, Betty was upstairs preparing the chapel for the evening hours. Before he left for the day and the family arrived for evening viewing hours, Rich went into the chapel to check the make up on the "drowning victim". He criticized the housekeeper Betty for not setting up all the folding chairs. He said, "She doesn't set up the chairs because she knows she has to take them down." Rich told her to put more chairs in the room before the family arrived. Here, Rich was attempting to

prevent a potentially disruptive situation where chairs would have to be moved into the chapel during the wake or services.

As part of "setting up" the chapel, flowers are arranged around the casket, a name plate is placed above the chapel door to direct the family to the correct viewing, and a reception book is placed on a stand near the chapel entrance. I was covering the floor one time and the daughter of the deceased asked for a register book. She apologized for not ordering it during the arrangement conference, "But I didn't think it was necessary." I was in the office with Rich when she asked and he helped me locate a book. He first pulled out a "cheap" one and said, "Fuck it, give 'em this." He then said, "No, Michael will have a fit," but couldn't find a better one. I set it up on the stand at the door of the viewing room. In one way Rich was punishing the woman for not following the arrangement procedure and ordering the book ahead of time. In another way, he was conscious, via Michael, of the need to placate the customer and not disrupt the routine. Despite his misgivings it was not worth arguing with the client over an inexpensive item.

Day Two-The Afternoon and Evening Visiting Hours.

Before Jamie Wilson took out his funeral, Rich handed him an envelope full of money to pay the pallbearers, the folks at the cemetery, and other expenses and a list of what was to go where. He added a warning to Jamie to "Watch the pallbearers when they go to get coffee and

keep on them if they complain or slouch." Jamie asked how the casket should be carried out, "Shouldered"⁶⁹ or by the handles? To which Rich responded, "Shoulder it in and shoulder it out." A few months after I began working in this funeral home, I was approached in the hallway by the owner of the livery service. He asked if I had a suit. I said yes and he told me to put it on. "Vincent (one of the pallbearers) didn't show up and we need you to carry right now," (The mourners were headed for their cars.). I ran upstairs and put on my suit, checking my hair in the mirror on my way out of the bathroom. The following excerpt from field notes tells what happened next:

I was fortunate to have a good bunch of guys on the carry and was getting verbal signals from the guy behind me. He said "Left foot first" as we shouldered the casket at the foot of the funeral home steps. Then "Step, rock, let the casket rock." We made the turn at the end of the awning and it felt like the entire weight of the casket was on my shoulder. As we stepped off the curb and into the street behind the hearse I thought I was going to lose the casket so I put a hand up. At that point the man in front of me told me to step back as we lowered the casket and slid it into the hearse. My shoulder still

⁶⁹. This is a method of "carrying" where the casket is rested on the shoulders of six to eight pallbearers. Their hands are kept at their sides and disaster is avoided through a careful cadence of steps through corridors and down steps. It is less common than carrying by the handles.

hurts and I think I pulled a muscle in my arm. Michael spoke to me as I walked back into the funeral home, "Why didn't I know you were going to be carrying?" I said, "It all happened so fast."

This describes my *ad hoc* response to a disruption in routine procedure. At all times I was expected to jump from one role to another in order to avoid a delay in proceedings. I kept a suit in the funeral home to facilitate this transition. I kept my hair short and arrived each morning with a clean shaven face. I provided a presentable public face.

Day Three-The Funeral Service, The Burial, The Final Payment.

After a coffee break I went downstairs and asked Rich if he needed some help. He told me that I should put on a suit so I could help him cover the floor while he took the second funeral out. About this time the livery men were coming in the building sharing jokes and greetings with me and the directors (Stan had arrived by this time to take out the second funeral). Some laughing took place and quite a few profanities were thrown around all within earshot of the family viewing the body. Betty later told me a story about the livery owner's father and how he "always used to get in trouble" at the funeral home because he was so loud. They would have to close the office door to keep his voice from carrying into the viewing rooms.

I was in the office with Stan during Mr. Cooper's service and the limo driver was telling Stan about some business dealings he'd had with the deceased. He said, "I'm glad that fucking prick is dead. He ripped me off

on a job and he deserved to die." I was somewhat shocked at the boldness of the driver especially in such close proximity to the family. Stan put his finger to his lips suggesting the driver lower his voice. He also asked the driver if he wanted to close the casket and joked, "get some revenge", for the slight the deceased had shown him. This is an obvious violation of norms showing respect for the dead, but because it was among collectivity members, it was discouraged rather than punished.

When the service was over, the mourners were led to their cars, the casket was closed and placed on a church truck. Because of the excessive weight, Mr. Cooper and his casket would have to be carried by the handles rather than shouldered. As the casket was wheeled to the front of the funeral home, a UPS delivery man appeared in the doorway carrying two big boxes. Stan caught him by the arm and pulled him aside. When the casket was in the hearse and I signed for the packages, I told the UPS guy to "Next time drive around the block when you see a funeral going out." Stan was pissed that this guy had ruined the effect he was trying to achieve (the pomp and circumstance of the procession that Stan so loves). He said later "What a fucking ignoramus. That is the epitome of ignorance." It's hard for me to say if the family was affected by the appearance of the delivery man at that moment, but I do know such contingencies are frowned upon by the directors because they are thought to be disruptive.

While a funeral home employee, I never went to the church or

cemetery with the calls, as there was no reason within my job description. Cooper's funeral was no different. There was a case, however, when Rich was having difficulty obtaining a burial permit from the Department of Health. All of the metropolitan cemeteries require this permit⁷⁰ before they will inter a body. Rich had spent a good deal of time the previous day on the phone and had little success. "Drop by in the morning" is all they could offer him. He had to take the funeral out at ten and be at the cemetery by eleven. He sent Betty and me to the county office, while he tried to stall things at the church. I waited in the van while Betty went inside. She came out once to make a phone call back to the funeral home and another time to tell me to ride around the block. Once she got the permit, we rushed it to the church and gave it to the limo driver. As Rich led the casket out of the church we saw the driver slip him the permit. Another disruption in the routine is avoided. What's interesting is these actions take place outside the view and knowledge of the living. Funeral staff want to maintain the appearance of a smooth performance despite contingencies.

⁷⁰. According to Lisa Carlson (1987), "This permit may indicate that the death has been investigated by a medical examiner or does not need to be; it is also a way for the state to record when and where final disposition takes place," (p. 339). In Britain, the permit is an important document and must be signed by at least two physicians including the local coroner. This practice began following a rash of "live" burials in the late 19th century. During a time when cemeteries were being moved to make space for commercial and residential development, scratch marks were discovered on the insides of some disinterred caskets. It was guessed that those buried alive attempted to escape. Laws requiring the signature of two physicians on the burial permit followed.

Before the Cooper funeral went out, it was agreed that Mr. Cooper's son would make the final payment when he received a check from the insurance company. Mr. Cooper's brother assured Stan that "Everything [would] be taken care of." When the young man left the room the uncle said to Stan "If you don't hear from him in a few weeks, call me."

Less than a week after the funeral went out a problem with the deceased's brother arose. It is described below:

Stan had just arrived and he and Betty and I were talking outside of "A" room. The doorbell rang and the brother of the "drowning victim" came up the back stairs. Stan met him before he reached the entrance to the small office and Betty and I made ourselves scarce until they sat down. When I returned, Betty was standing outside of "A" room apparently listening to the conversation between Stan and the man. She told me in a hushed voice that it was interesting to listen to Stan deal with families. I listened for about five minutes as Stan handled the man very diplomatically. It seems that "R" had visited his brother's grave on Easter Sunday to deliver some flowers. When he arrived, he found the soil to have been recently moved and he found an open grave. He had assumed that it was the grave in which his brother was buried the previous week and was alarmed that it was empty. He insisted over and over that he was not mistaken as to the location and wanted an explanation from Stan as to

why the remains were missing. Stan explained that there must have been another burial in the same line of graves recently, and the marker for Cooper's grave had probably been covered by soil. He also explained that permanent markers are not placed on the graves until a row is filled. Then the cemetarians measure the row and determine where each grave should be based on the standard distance between them. Stan continued to assure the man that his brother's remains were in the grave where he had been placed. Before the man left, Stan told him to call anytime if there were any more questions or problems. Once the man left the building, Stan returned to continue his description of Easter Sunday services at his church. He also commented that "R" was nuts. Later, when Rich came in, he went on to say what "a pain in the ass" the family had been throughout the course of the arrangements and after. Rich knew what he was talking about because he had dealt with the family a year before when the father had died.

A month after the Cooper funeral went out, the brother returned to the funeral home, this time prompted by a call from Stan. I learned later that the son had skipped off to Florida with the insurance money, not bothering to make the final payment on his father's funeral bill. The uncle came with many apologies and a check in hand saying "I'll take care of him."

This description represents but a small sample of the potential

disruptions faced by the funeral home staff. As suggested earlier, funeral directors work hard to avoid these disruptions by employing preventive practices and compensate for disruptions that do occur through the use of corrective practices.

No ordinary table of organizational theory can work in the sociology of the funeral home because the lived order of the organization is already in the common sense hands of its members. They understand the table of organization and use it in slow times. But, they improvise in peak times, using cultural background expectancies to maintain the NAF. In a sense, the organizational methodology of the funeral home is a structure with a switch. The everyday sense of the known-in-common world allows funeral workers to make the switch.

Funeral directors and their staff operate under a set of known-in-common, taken-for-granted assumptions institutionalized in the NAF. Changing cultural and social conditions and their effects on the NAF will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6-The Changing Context of the Normal American Funeral

The funeral, normal American or otherwise, serves three important social functions according to Moller (1996). As with other forms of ritual, the funeral brings people together to share their feelings and experiences with one another. Secondly, the funeral allows expression of grief and contributes to a sense of well-being. Finally, funerals, like other rituals, legitimate cultural beliefs by reinforcing their practice. In this case, beliefs about death and its proper treatment. But the American funeral has also been criticized, by users and by the clergy, for its high cost, superficiality, and for the monopoly that directors have over the event.

I believe the primary reason Americans *choose* the standard funeral model is because they are too afraid of death to consider other options. It may be true that funeral directors have a monopoly on the handling of dead bodies, but this is because few people are willing to challenge their corner on the market. They are also unwilling to handle the bodies themselves. I admit this is changing with the onslaught of unexpected deaths from A.I.D.S. and cancer. The corresponding growth of the hospice movement has encouraged the dying and their families to embrace death and treat it as any other social rite of passage. But in general, Americans are uncomfortable with death and grief and choose to pass them off on professionals. The traditional practice of funerals has become a normal part of the American landscape because few people challenge it. Those who do

are handled as deviants by members of the funeral team.

Another reason why the American funeral model remains unchallenged is the strength of the funeral profession in the U.S. With over 22,500 homes and an effective professionalization project, the American funeral service has the political and economic power to set the standard for handling the dead. It has the support of public opinion. It has the support of the state. It has exclusive control over the conditions of its work and the certification of its workers. It has created legal, cultural, and educational barriers to interlopers on its jurisdiction. It also has a powerful lobbying organization in the National Funeral Directors Association. In a nutshell, it nearly monopolizes funeral service practice in the United States.

Still another reason for the exclusivity of the American funeral model is the institutionalization of funeral practices on a microsociological level. Most funeral homes, whether privately owned or corporately organized, maintain a division of labor between employees that establishes role expectations for the routine practice of the funeral. In independent funeral homes these role associated tasks may be completed by a small cadre of multidimensional employees. In corporate settings there is a more distinct, bureaucratized division of labor. But in all funeral homes there is a subculture of secrecy and stigma that unites workers against the bereaved in a conspiracy that maintains control of the funeral in the hands of the staff.

The Future of the Funeral Service: Corporatization and other

Alternatives.

This section will discuss the effects of corporate buyouts and bureaucratization on the normal American funeral (NAF). Since the 1970's, a growing number of independent funeral homes have been purchased by large multinational corporations in an effort to consolidate tasks and increase profits. This model of organization and management will probably affect the standard adult funeral. There are also alternatives to the traditional funeral home service, such as funeral cooperatives and memorial societies.

Tradition meets the Market

With the death rate in the US increasing at about 1% per year as baby boomers grow older, the demand for funeral services has increased. According to one investment analyst, Wall Street loves the funeral service because, "It's not cyclical, there's no seasonability, and there is an assured customer base," (Tomsho, 1996). Plus there is a lot of money to be made—\$10 billion/22,500 firms or an average of \$1.8 million/facility, excluding overhead costs, which are high. About 85% of the 22,500 (averaging 153 calls per year at \$4624.00 per call) funeral homes nationwide are independently owned and operated. However, a rapidly growing number are being bought out by investor-owned chains (ie. Service Corporation International, Stewart Enterprises, and The Loewen Group) and consolidated. According to Tomsho (1996), one of the reasons for the

transition is that fewer children of funeral directors are taking over family businesses. The promise of low wages and high costs, as well as long and erratic work hours, makes funeral service less attractive than other higher prestige occupations. Along with this is the stigma associated with doing deathwork. Children of funeral directors are choosing not to bear this burden along with the others.

Another reason for the corporatization of the funeral service might be the growth possibilities for rationalizing the production of the NAF. Corporations can absorb the high costs of maintaining funeral homes and meeting OSHA, ADA, and other government regulations, as well as, provide adequate service through economies of scale. They can consolidate embalming and transportation services in one location and conduct funerals from various satellites. Bodies are delivered to the embalming facility and transported to the visitation chapels for viewing. The costs of maintaining OSHA compliant prep rooms is high and growing, so it makes sense to keep only one site. Independents have been struggling to comply as many occupy old buildings that are not handicap-accessible. Corporate funeral homes can buy caskets and embalming supplies in mass quantities which allows them to enjoy discount prices.

According to an article in *US News and World Report* (3/23/98), corporatization is having profound effects on "The Death Care Business", although not so much so on the normal American funeral. The article claims

that cremations are on the increase (21% nationwide, 80% in San Francisco) while at the same time large corporate funeral providers like Service Corporation International and The Loewen Group are targeting Catholic and ethnic markets that prefer a more traditional treatment of the dead. In fact, the article begins with a report on the deal signed between the Catholic archdiocese of Los Angeles (with 4 million dioscens) and Stewart Enterprises. "{T}he church will get an undisclosed percentage of the proceeds from each funeral Stewart performs" at a Catholic cemetery. This arrangement smacks of an earlier one (later nullified because the head of the Convention was arrested on fraud and extortion charges) between the National Baptist Convention and Loewen. Two "death-care providers" were to be selected from each congregation and provided with a ten percent commission on every funeral they steered to the company. Local ministers were to receive a six percent commission while the National Convention was to enjoy five percent.

Part of the strategy of corporate buyers involves maintaining the appearance that the newly acquired family funeral home is operating as it always has, with the old business name and key employees in place. According to James P. Hunter III, Chief Executive of Equity Corp. International, "We want the public to come in (the funeral home) and not

have any perception of negative change," (Tomsho, 1996)⁷¹. This intersects with earlier comments on the denial of death and on funeral directors attempts to avoid disruptions in the funeral routine through the use of preventive and corrective practices.

How do I account for the rise in corporatization in the funeral service?

First, I point to the general trend in corporate buyouts. Secondly, the increasing mobility of the population brings demands for standardized service providers. Thirdly, the costs of maintaining funeral homes according to OSHA and other government regulations are prohibitive to independents. Corporations can more readily absorb these costs of doing business.

Informal conversation with two funeral directors.

What follows is an account of the effects of corporatization on the normal American funeral service according to two former employees of large corporations.

Bud comes from four generations of directors. Although he is not licensed he has over ten years experience in the business. His father sold the family's holdings in three funeral homes in 1994. He left the management team immediately to retire and care for his ailing wife. Bud

⁷¹. The article also noted (and is confirmed elsewhere, Feuer, 1999) that as corporations buy out independents, leaving the family name and often the owner in place as manager to make it appear that the home is still locally owned, they often raise the prices of funerals as much as 17 percent above independents (Tomsho, 1996) and no longer provide charity funerals.

stayed on as an attendant. His older brother had left the business about a year prior to the takeover and is now a fireman. Bud is waiting to start a job with the county and to receive a severance package from Loewen.

When Bud greeted me I asked him how he was doing and mentioned that I had driven past the new funeral home on my way over. He said he was suing Loewen Group because they had terminated his contract and let him go 8 months before the end of it. He went on to tell me how "heartless" the company was in the way they treated employees and client families, "Shortly after they take over, prices shoot way up!". He went on to say that the firm does not want to "help families out" and "would rather do 200 small but expensive funerals than 300 or 400 moderately priced ones". I asked him whether the corporate model changes the nature of the NAF and he claims it doesn't, "They do the service pretty much the way we did it when my father was running things. Of course it costs more and it's not as one-on-one, you know, personal, but it's the same."

The differences seem to be in the way the work is divided among workers in the funeral home. One of the benefits of corporatization is that it promises a 40 hour work week to most employees. So the calls in the middle of the night come rarely, if ever. Instead, an employee works nine to five and completes certain specialized tasks like embalming or arranging rather than being responsible for all steps in the NAF.

Lou inherited his family business in Manhattan from his father and,

despite the fact that his traditional Italian clientele has moved out of the neighborhood, has invested close to a quarter million dollars in restorations to the building. He also has a home in Yonkers and claims that most of the "old" calls go out of there. He serves a new clientele of "hispanics, blacks, Mexicans" in his Manhattan parlor. Lou also worked in a corporate firm and was commenting on how Bud was "screwed". "Yeah, they don't treat people right over there (he worked for SCI). It's a 40 hour week where I work twenty four and seven. I've always got a beeper on or this phone (pulls a cell phone from his suit jacket pocket)."

With regard to funeral arrangements, casket sales, a corporate differences, Lou said: "I do a lot of people favors, and they do favors for me. My father was that way. He knew he had to bury these people and didn't worry about getting paid by the individual funeral. He knew things would work out. These companies want full payment on the day of the funeral. If you don't pay them they make a stink, threaten you and all. I give my people sixty days, ninety if I have to. Yeah, I get burned sometimes, but people keep coming back to me. That's my business." As with other corporate entities bureaucratic policies control people, people don't interpret policies to serve people.

Another difference between corporate and independent homes, according to Lou, is, "they break up the work so that when you go in to make an arrangement you talk to one guy, the body is picked up by

another, then prepped by someone else. The day of the funeral someone you never met before is there to take it out. In my place, I do everything, make arrangements, remove and prep the body. I am around during calling hours and I do all the paper work. People call, they want to know they're dealing with family. They still ask for my father (who is dead). I don't think they would have a reason to use us if I wasn't running the show. Most of them are out of the city now."

Lou contrasts this to his work experience at a corporate funeral home. "When I worked at Homestead guys would leave a body in the prep room at the end of a shift. Just get up and leave it for the next guy. The way I do business, I deal with a lot of Italians and they expect this, I go to their house for the arrangements and pick them up the day of the funeral. I do everything, or my guy does, from the beginning to the end. You give more personal service that way." This type of personal service, from start to finish, is unlikely in a corporate setting as role related tasks are more clearly and institutionally defined.

Both Bud and Lou agree that the nature of the NAF, the routine set of steps from first call to final payment changes little from independents to corporations. But what does change, according to these accounts and others, is the personal level of service that has so long been a part of the funeral tradition.

Taking care of our own dead.

An alternative to the traditional conduct of the NAF is growth in funeral cooperatives which offer lower costs and more customized services to consumers. In response to rising costs, funeral cooperatives have cropped up in Canada, Europe, and to a small extent in the US. These nascent organizations are run by volunteers who hire the services of a licensed embalmer, sell low cost particle board burial containers, and rent space in churches and community halls. They are able to reduce the costs of funerals by as much as half those of independent and corporate funeral homes. Obviously, these co-ops are being met with some resistance from traditional funeral homes and funeral director's associations. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that co-ops in PEI, Canada were denied membership in local funeral directors' associations, threatened with criminal charges for improperly licensed embalming facilities (one co-op was using a church basement) and practices⁷², and threatened with legislation pushed by conglomerate funeral homes requiring all practitioners be licensed (*The Wall Street Journal*, 11/12/96).

Although described by one corporate funeral director as "a minor nuisance," (*ibid*, p. A1) co-ops in PEI represent 17% of market share.

64. The entire co-op movement on PEI was dependent on one embalmer for a while so they began their own apprenticeship program. This was challenged in a lawsuit brought by "traditional funeral homes. A provincial judge threw out the charges and permitted the co-ops to train their own embalmers. The corporate funeral homes on the island are now pushing legislation that requires that all funeral directors be licensed by the province. A practice which is law in every American state but Colorado.

Further along in Canada, alternative funeral movements are growing in the U.S. and Europe. It is argued that public resistance comes in the form of "uneasiness with handling dead bodies" and uncertainty with the details of conducting a funeral (A5, *ibid*).

Interestingly, the co-op movement is often run by parishioners at local churches. Some of the animosity typical between funeral directors and clerics was obvious in the language used in the article. Referring to rising funeral costs one Catholic priest, Rev. Henry Wasielweski (a Phoenix, Arizona priest who tracks costs in the funeral industry), claims, "if you just keep putting those prices out there, that is what people start to think funerals are supposed to cost, (*ibid*, p. A1). Along similar lines, when Father Eloi Arsenault, a Catholic priest in an economically depressed parish on Canada's Prince Edward Island was shown a C\$5,800 casket and told by the funeral director that it featured a mattress with springs he was "boiling inside" and went to his parishioners and recommended they form "the island's first co-op". When other co-ops formed on the island funeral directors fought back by asking the local bishop to transfer Father Arsenault and pressure casket companies to refuse sale of merchandise to cooperatives. However, this practice was challenged in court.

On a related issue: According to the minutes of the Maryland State Task Force..., "The Memorial Society of Maryland and Environs (a-not-for-profit burial society) does comparative shopping for consumers which

consumers (currently) can't do, and gives people information about organ transplant and cremation," (12/2/96). They also let people know the cost of cremation, and inform them that cremation does not require cosmetic preparation or embalming (*ibid*, p. 8).

Obviously more can be said about the perceived challenges of co-ops and other alternatives to the funeral service profession. The effect of corporations according to one informant, has been to "dumb-down" the workforce and threaten the prestige of funeral directors by segmenting tasks. However, the market gains of the corporations have diminished recently as the public grows weary of the *McDonaldization* of the funeral service and independent funeral homes are challenging hostile takeovers in court. But the jury is still out on these issues and only time will tell the effects of corporatization and burial societies on the American funeral service practice.

Chapter 7-Conclusion and Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings

Throughout this study I have proposed that there are a standard set of practices which constitute the normal American funeral. These steps include; the first call to the funeral home to report a death, removal of the body, planning of the funeral through an arrangement conference, preparation of the body, visitation (where appropriate), a funeral service, and final payment. I have argued that despite class, race, ethnicity, religion, and region there is very little variation in the way these steps are carried out by funeral workers in the United States. It is my contention that this set of funeral practices is held in place and sustained through conditions both external to and internalized in the lived order of the funeral service.

Death as a disruption in everyday life is met by the orderliness of a NAF as set by the funeral profession. Americans view death and dead bodies with disdain and pass this aversion on to the funeral director. As manager of the funeral performance s/he guides the family through the NAF while protecting them from the profane aspects of the process.

My description of role relations in the funeral home shows how the organization of work sustains the NAF through institutional roles and rules for appropriate treatment of the living and the dead. Conflicts arise between players of various roles but they are subsumed for the cause of an

orderly performance.

Disruption seems to be an inevitable aspect of everyday life and one that is met with normalizing procedures (*ad hocing*). Such innovations of normal role behavior prevent and correct potentially harmful breaches in the funeral routine. I argue that due to the emotional content of death and funerals, funeral workers are especially keen at normalizing and avoiding disruptions in the NAF.

The efforts of the funeral director to professionalize have three purposes according to my findings. First, through professional socialization in the mortuary school and in the funeral home, funeral directors adopt the NAF model, implementing it and transmitting it to their staff and client families. Secondly, funeral directors as a group are engaged in a professionalization project to protect and expand their occupational jurisdiction over caring for the dead. Finally, funeral directors suffer from occupational stigma related to both their handling of the dead and their handling of money for handling the dead. I argue that the professionalization project of funeral directors is also aimed at increasing their social status and decreasing the stigma associated with their work. Over the past 100 years funeral directors, in conjunction with the National Funeral Director's Association, and the mortuary school movement have been working to improve their occupational status. They have gone from undertakers to morticians to funeral directors, to funeral service

professionals in an effort to feel good about themselves and have the public look more favorably upon them.

The NAF has been resistant to change. In the past twenty years it has met challenges from corporate buyouts of independent firms, the memorial society movement, and a reevaluation of its usefulness in easing families through grief. It has withstood these challenges.

The Future of the Normal American Funeral

Entering the Twenty-First Century, the funeral service faces increasing death and cremation rates, competition from on-line sellers of funerary merchandise, direct burial and cremation, and a general decline in demand for its services. How will the funeral profession and the Normal American Funeral fare in coming decades? Many have speculated that this is a time of significant change for the industry, that funeral directors are in for a reduction in profits and demand. However, the fact remains that people die and their bodies must be disposed of. Funeral directors, since the end of the 19th Century, have been the occupational group charged with resolving this problem of everyday life. Arguably, because of their involvement with the dead and the aversion to death in American culture and society, few other occupational groups have challenged or trespassed on funeral directors hold on death work. To modify an American saying, "It's tough work, and nobody wants to do it." Along this line is the fact that most Americans want nothing to do with death or dead bodies and are

willing to give this work over to professionals, even at higher costs.

Because of this funeral directors will remain the most likely providers of death care services and the normal American funeral will continue to be the model for handling death and dead bodies.

Appendix 1a

FIRST CALL INFORMATION

Name of Deceased _____

Place of Death _____

Age _____

Name of Person Calling _____

Next of Kin & Relationship _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

If person died at home, has the doctor been there? Yes No

Did Doctor leave a Death Certificate? _____

Doctor's Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Appendix 1b

FUNERAL CALL

Deceased_____

Informant_____

Relationship_____

Telephone #_____

Hospital_____

House Removal_____

Appendix 2

THIS CERTIFICATE NOT VALID UNLESS FILED IN THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT

- 1. Typewrite or print only with black ink
- 2. Certificates containing alterations or omissions are unacceptable
- 3. Items "Date filed," "Certificate No.," and this space, reserved for Health Department use only

		DATE FILED	CERTIFICATE OF DEATH				
			Certificate No. _____				
INSTITUTION		1. NAME OF DECEASED					
RESIDENCE		(Type or Print) _____ (First Name) _____ (Middle Name) _____ (Last Name)					
MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH (To be filled in by the Physician)							
DCC	L	2. PLACE OF DEATH	NEW YORK CITY 2a. BOROUGH _____	2b. Name of hospital or other facility if not facility, street address _____	2c. If in Hospital or Other Facility (Check) 1 <input type="checkbox"/> DOA 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Outpatient 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Emerg. 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Inpatient	2d. If inpatient, date of current admission Month _____ Day _____ Year _____	
SP		3a. Date and Hour (Month) (Day) (Year) of Death	3b. HOUR	<input type="checkbox"/> AM <input type="checkbox"/> PM	4. SEX	5. APPROXIMATE AGE	
CEM	A	6. I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT: (Check One)					
ANC		<input type="checkbox"/> I attended the deceased <input type="checkbox"/> A staff physician of this institution attended the deceased <input type="checkbox"/> Dr. _____ attended the deceased					
AUT		from _____ 19____ to _____ 19____ and last saw h_____ alive at _____ M on _____ 19____. I further certify that traumatic injury or poisoning DID NOT play any part in causing death, and that death did not occur in any unusual manner and was due entirely to NATURAL CAUSES.					
CAUSE		*See first instruction on reverse of certificate. Witness my hand this _____ day of _____ 19____ Signature _____ D.O. Name of Physician _____ Address _____ M.D.					
PERSONAL PARTICULARS (To be filled in by Funeral Director)							
OP	N	7. Usual Residence a. State	7b. County	7c. City, Town, or Location	7d. Street & House No.	7e. inside City Limits of 7c <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
M	SPEC	8. Served in U.S. Armed Forces No Yes Specify years 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> From To		9. Marital Status (Check One) 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never Married 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Married or separated 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced		10. Name of Surviving Spouse (If wife, give maiden name)	
ACC	TYPE	11. Date of birth (Month) (Day) (Year) of Decedent			12. Age at last birthday		
ACC	O	14a. Usual Occupation (Kind of work done during most of working lifetime, do not enter retired)			14b. Kind of Business		
ACC	O	15. Birthplace (City & State or Foreign Country)		16. Education (Check only one) 0-11 12 13-15 16 17+ <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5			
ACC	O	17. Other names by which decedent was known			18. NAME OF FATHER OF DECEDENT		
ACC	O	19. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER OF DECEDENT			20a. NAME OF INFORMANT		
ACC	O	20b. RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED			20c. ADDRESS (City) (State) (Zip)		
ACC	O	21a. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY		21b. LOCATION (City, Town, State and Country)			
ACC	O	22a. FUNERAL DIRECTOR		21c. DATE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION			
ACC	O	22b. ADDRESS					

BUREAU OF VITAL RECORDS
VR16 (1/68)

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appendix 3
ARRANGEMENT FORM

Funeral # _____ # of CCs _____ rem _____ emb _____ d/c _____ Name _____ Maiden Name _____ AKA _____ Residence _____ City _____ State _____ County _____ Zip Code _____ How Long in City _____ Former Address _____ Date of Death _____ Doctor _____ Phone _____ Place of Death _____ County _____ Date of Birth _____ Age _____ Citizen of _____ Birthplace _____ Origin _____ Race _____ S M/S W D Spouse (maiden name) _____ Soc. Sec. # _____ Educational Level _____ Veteran (Y) (N) Branch of Service _____ Service # _____ Date of Enlistment _____ Date of Discharge _____ Fathers Name _____ Mothers Maiden Name _____ Occupation _____ Profession _____ Name and Address of Employer _____ _____ Year of Retirement _____ Years of Service _____ Informant _____ Relationship _____ Address _____ _____ Telephone 1st # _____ 2nd # _____ Informants SS # _____ Date of Birth _____ Date of Funeral/Burial _____ Name of Cemetery _____ Location of Cemetery _____ Grave Location _____ Leaving Funeral Home at _____ M For Service/Mass at _____ M Service Held at _____ Time _____ Clergy _____ Phone _____ Visiting Hours _____ _____ Special Requests _____ _____	Chapel Used _____ Permit # _____ Cremation OK _____ ME # _____ ME Name _____
--	---

Appendix 4

		Number
		Date
<hr/>		
Name of Deceased		
<hr/>		
Date of Death	Place of Death	
<hr/>		

ITEMIZATION OF FUNERAL SERVICES AND MERCHANDISE SELECTED

The following are the charges for the services, merchandise, and livery you have selected. You will not be charged for any item you do not choose unless it is necessary because of other selections you have made. Any such charges are explained below.

I. FUNERAL HOME CHARGES

(Indicate N/A for items of service and/or merchandise that are not provided.)

A. Alternative Services

- 1. Direct Cremation \$
- 2. Direct Burial \$

B. Transfer of remains to the funeral establishment including personnel, equipment and vehicle. \$

C. Preparation of Remains

- 1. Embalming (including use of preparation room). \$

If you select a funeral for which this firm requires embalming such as a funeral with viewing, you may have to pay for embalming. You do not have to pay for embalming you do not approve if you select arrangements such as direct cremation or direct burial. If we charge for embalming, we will explain why below.

- 2. Other Preparation (including use of preparation room but excluding embalming)
 - a. Topical Disinfection \$
 - b. Custodial Care \$
 - c. Dressing/Casketing \$
 - d. Cosmetology \$
 - e. Restoration \$
 - f. Other (specify) _____ \$

D. Arrangements

Basic arrangements: including funeral director, other staff, equipment and facilities to respond to initial request for service, the arrangement conference, securing of necessary authorizations and coordination of service plans with parties involved in the final disposition of the deceased. \$

E. Supervision (funeral director and staff)

- 1. Supervision for visitation \$
- 2. Supervision for funeral service \$
- 3. Other supervision (specify) _____ \$

F. Use of the facilities

- 1. Use of the facilities for visitation \$
- 2. Use of facilities for funeral service \$
- 3. Other use of facilities (specify) _____ \$

G. Livery

- 1. a. Hearse or \$
- b. Alternative vehicle \$
- (Specify type: _____)
- 2. Flower vehicle \$
- 3. Limousine(s) \$
- (Specify number: _____ @ \$ _____/limousine)
- 4. Passenger car(s) \$
- (Specify number: _____ @ \$ _____/car)

H. Merchandise

- 1. Casket or alternative container \$
- a. Supplier _____
- b. Model name or number _____
- c. Material: Species of wood _____
- or kind of metal _____ weight or gauge _____
- or alternative container (describe) _____
- d. Interior _____
- 2. Outer Interment Receptacle \$
- a. Supplier _____
- b. Model name or number _____
- c. Material _____

I. Additional Services and Merchandise Selected (Describe and show price)

- 1. Memorial Cards \$
- 2. Acknowledgement Cards \$
- 3. Casket Plate \$
- 4. Crucifix/Cross \$
- 5. Hairdressing \$
- 6. Flowers \$
- 7. Clothing or Burial Garments \$
- 8. Register Book \$
- 9. Death Notices \$
- 10. \$
- 11. \$
- 12. \$

J. Limited Services

- 1. Forwarding remains to _____ \$
- 2. Receiving remains from _____ \$

TOTAL OF FUNERAL HOME CHARGES \$

II. CASH ADVANCES

These are estimated charges for items to be paid to others. We will charge you no more for these items than is actually paid the third parties. (Describe and show estimated charges.)

- 1. Cemetery or Crematory
- 2. Clergy Honoraria
- 3. Death Certificate Transcripts
- 4. Livery
- 5. Pallbearers
- 6. Public Transportation
- 7. Gratuities
- 8. Bridge & Road Tolls
- 9. Telephone & Telegraph Charges
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

ESTIMATED TOTAL OF CASH ADVANCES \$

III. SUMMARY OF CHARGES

- 1. Funeral Home Charges
- 2. Cash Advances

TOTAL FUNERAL CHARGES \$

IV. EXPLANATION OF CHARGES

Explain charges for embalming and for any items that are not required by law but may be necessary because of cemetery requirements, crematory requirements or other selections made.

Signature of Licensed Funeral Director _____ Date _____

Printed or Typed Name of Funeral Director _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT

I have received this itemization of funeral services and merchandise selected.

Signature _____ Date _____

PUBLIC NOTICE

The New York State Department of Health is responsible for licensing and regulating New York State funeral directing under the Public Health Law. You may contact the Department at:

Bureau of Funeral Directing
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12237

EXCLUSION OF WARRANTY. The only warranties, express or implied, granted in connection with the goods sold with this funeral service are the express written warranties, if any, extended by the manufacturers thereof. No other warranties and no warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose are extended by the funeral director.

STATEMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES SELECTED

INVOICE TO _____

The undersigned hereby authorizes the above funeral establishment or its representatives to obtain custody of the remains of _____

Initial and state your relation to deceased _____

The undersigned hereby authorizes the above funeral establishment or its representatives to embalm not to embalm the remains of _____

Initial and state your relation to deceased _____

Other Authorization by _____

"Charges are only for those items that are used. If we are required by law to use any items, we will explain the reasons in writing below."

TOTAL FUNERAL CHARGES \$

Date: 19.....

The foregoing statement has been read by (to) me and I hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of same and agree to pay the above funeral account and for such additional services and materials as are ordered by me, on or before 19..... In the event that this account is not paid in accordance with the terms of this agreement, the undersigned hereby agrees to pay any and all costs and attorney's fees incurred in connection with the collection of this account.

Prior to the discussion of these funeral arrangements, I was presented with a copy of this funeral firm's "General Price List" for which I hereby acknowledge receipt, and have had an opportunity to review the firm's Casket Price List and Outer Interment Receptacle Price List.

TERMS: This account becomes due If bill remains unpaid beyond a late charge of% per month (annual rate%) may be added to the unpaid portion of the balance due.

The liability hereby assumed is in addition to the liability imposed by law upon the estate and others, and shall not constitute a release thereof.

Signature

Relation to Deceased

Signature

Relation to Deceased

By Print Name of Licensed Funeral Director

ADDITIONS OR ALTERATIONS OF SERVICES AND MERCHANDISE SELECTED. The following changes represent items of service and/or merchandise ordered or altered subsequent to the original funeral agreement.

AUTHORIZATION INITIAL

..... \$

..... \$

Total Adjustments to Funeral Charges \$

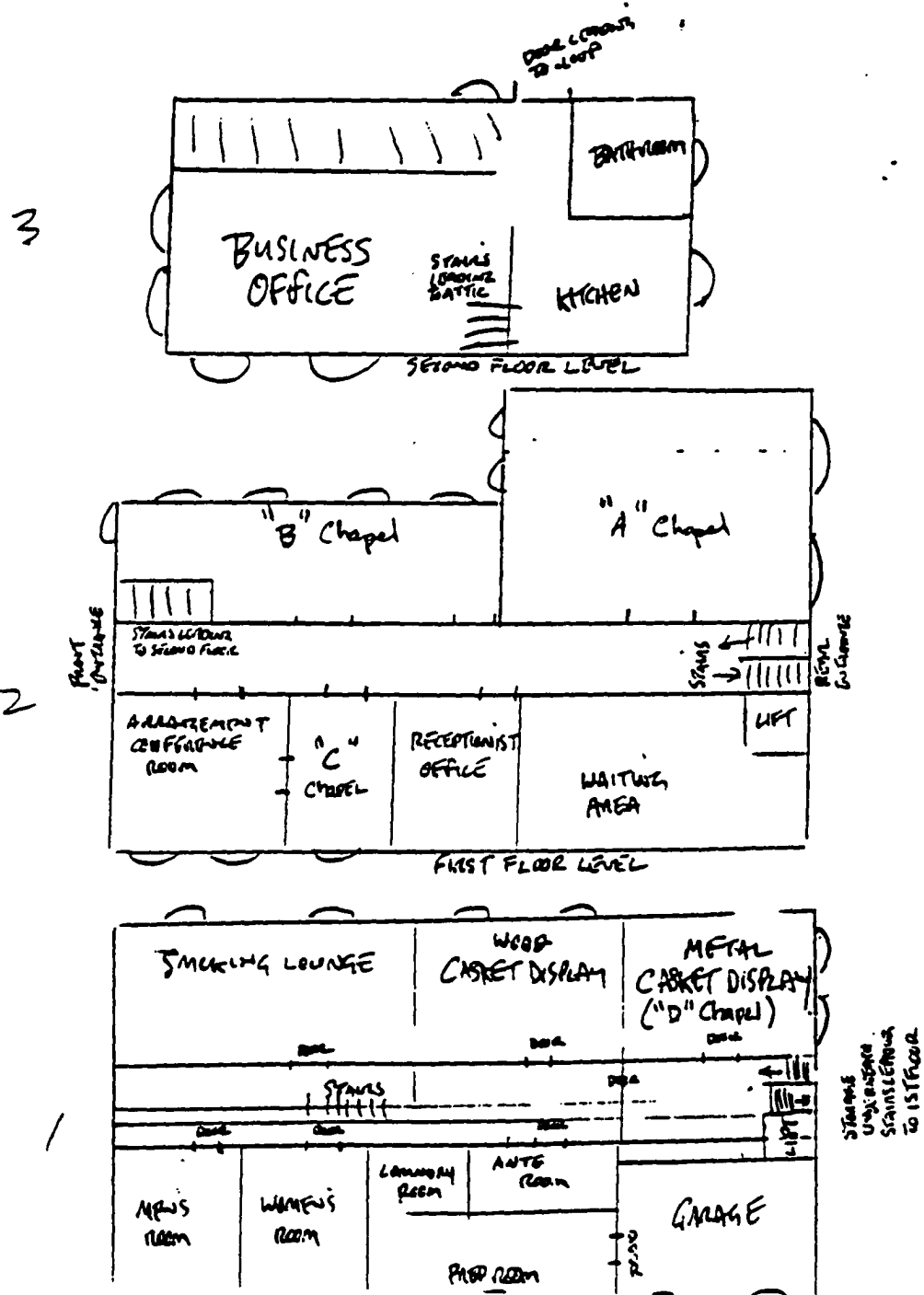
ADJUSTED TOTAL \$

Credit \$

BALANCE DUE \$

Appendix 6

MAP of M-S FUNERAL HOME
Metro Business



Appendix 7

Concepts for Professional Status

From a review of the sociological literature on the professions, I have developed a list of concepts that will guide my analysis of the social construction and constraint of the funeral profession. This list may not be exhaustive, but it does represent those characteristics most often mentioned and applied in the sociological study of professional occupations.

The characteristics of professions include:

- 1) Control over a specialized area of knowledge and with it, the ability to create the conditions and the reality of the occupational setting.
- 2) An extended period of formal training required for qualification.
- 3) A professional association which monitors members behavior and disciplines deviant practitioners according to an established code of ethics.
- 4) Support by the state through licensure and regulation of professional boundaries.
- 5) Recognition as a distinct social group, classified by the practitioners themselves and by the society in which they operate.
- 6) An orientation toward the service of the community. Professionals have the best interests of the recipient of their services in mind. They ideally put practice ahead of profit.

Appendix 8**Sample questions from the National Board Exam-ICFSEB, Inc (1999) V3
The Funeral Directing Subtest**

Under what conditions can a Veteran's Burial Benefit be paid directly to the funeral home?

- A. none
- B. for the funeral of persons who die on active duty
- C. when the veteran's body will be buried in a private cemetery
- D. if a funeral home can demonstrate that a veteran's funeral bill is unpaid

Answer: D

The Psychology Subtest

A person who expresses anxiety and discomfort while attending a visitation at a funeral home is most likely experiencing

- A. an inborn response
- B. a reaction displacement
- C. a conditioned response
- D. a delayed response

Answer: C

The Funeral Merchandising Subtest

The purchasing, pricing, display, and sale of the product is known as:

- A. re-sale
- B. selling only
- C. merchandising
- D. inventorying

Answer: C

The Embalming Subtest

Those changes occurring prior to somatic death is:

- A. intrinsic
- B. extrinsic
- C. postmortem
- D. antemortem

Answer: D

The Restorative Art Subtest

Which of the following is a bone of the face?

- A. parietal
- B. occipital
- C. temporal
- D. zygomatic

Answer: D

The Chemistry Subtest

One of a class of complex nitrogenous compounds that occur naturally in plants and animals and yield amino acids when hydrolyzed are the

- A. fats.
- B. waxes.
- C. protein.
- D. carbohydrates.

Answer: C

The Anatomy Subtest

Which of the following is NOT one of the derivatives of the integumentary system?

- A. Hair
- B. Nails
- C. Teeth
- D. Glands

Answer: C

Appendix 9**The Funeral Service Oath**

I do solemnly swear, by that which I hold most sacred:

**That I shall be loyal to the Funeral Service
Profession, and just and generous to its
members,**

**That I shall lead my life and practice my art in
uprightness and honor;**

**That into whatsoever house I shall enter, it
shall be for the benefit and comfort of those
bereaved;**

That I shall obey the civil laws;

**That I shall hold inviolate all professional
confidences;**

**And that I shall be faithful to those who place
their trust in me.**

**While I continue to keep this oath, may it be
granted to me to enjoy honor, in my life and
in my profession, and may I be respected by
all people for all time.**

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