USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
The Concept and Psychological Consequences of Symbolic Immortality.

Valerie A. Sturesteps.

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Science in the Department of Psychology Australian National University 1991.
Table of Contents

Declaration 1
Acknowledgements 2
Abstract 3
1. Symbolic Immortality. 5
   1.1. Drive Theory. 5
   1.2. Otto Rank and Anxiety. 6
   1.3. The Symbolic Immortality Modes of Rank. 8
      1.3.1. Biological Mode. 8
      1.3.2. Afterlife Mode. 8
      1.3.3. Creative Work Mode. 9
   1.4. The Symbolic Immortality Modes of Lifton. 9
      1.4.1. The Nature Mode. 9
      1.4.2. The Experiential Transcendence Mode. 10
   1.5. The Modes and Symbolism. 10
   1.6. The Expression of the Modes in Tribal and Ancient Peoples. 11
2. Tribal People. 12
   2.1. Archaeological Evidence. 12
   2.2. The !Kung Bushmen. 13
      2.2.1. The Biological Mode. 13
      2.2.2. The Afterlife Mode. 14
      2.2.3. The Creative Work Mode. 14
      2.2.4. The Nature Mode. 14
      2.2.5. The Experiential Transcendence Mode. 15
   2.3. The Mbuti Pygmies. 15
      2.3.1. The Biological Mode. 15
      2.3.2. The Afterlife Mode. 16
      2.3.3. The Creative Work Mode. 16
      2.3.4. The Nature Mode and the Experiential Transcendence Mode. 17
   2.4. Conclusion. 17
3. Two Early Civilisations. 20
   3.1. Early Hebrew Writings. 20
      3.1.1. The Biological Mode. 21
      3.1.2. The Afterlife Mode. 21
      3.1.3. The Creative Work Mode. 23
      3.1.4. The Nature Mode. 24
      3.1.5. The Experiential Transcendence Mode. 25
   3.2. The Ancient Greek Writings. 26
      3.2.1. The Biological Mode. 26
      3.2.2. The Afterlife Mode. 26
      3.2.3. The Creative Work Mode. 28
3.2.4. The Nature Mode. 29
3.2.5. The Experiential Transcendence Mode. 29
3.3. Influences on the Modes. 30

4. Contemporary People. 32
4.1. Death Concern Evidence. 32
4.1.1. Interest in Near Death Experiences. 32
4.1.2. The Popularity of Eastern Religions. 33
4.1.3. Attempts to Prolong Life. 33
4.2. Present Psychological concern and research. 34
4.2.1. The Symbolic Immortality Modes. 34
4.2.2. Research on the Individual Modes. 35
4.2.2.1. The Biological Mode. 36
4.2.2.2. The Afterlife Mode. 36
4.2.2.3. The Creative Work Mode. 37
4.2.2.4. The Experiential Transcendence Mode. 39
4.2.3. The Effects of Symbolic Immortality. 40
4.2.4. Measurement of the Symbolic Immortality Modes. 41
4.3. Research Issues 43

5. Research Method 45
5.1. Subjects 45
5.1.1. Description of the Subjects 45
5.2. Questionnaire Design. 46
5.3. Religion 47
5.3.1. Definition of Religion. 48
5.3.2. The Religiosity Scale (Questions 13-18). 50
5.3.3. Validation of the Religiosity Scale
5.3.3.1. Religiosity by Religious Affiliation 51
5.3.3.2. Acceptance of the Modes by Level of Religiosity 52
5.3.4. Total Availability Scale.
5.3.4.1. Measuring the Creative Work Mode. 56
5.3.4.2. Measuring the Nature Mode. 57
5.3.4.3. Scoring the Total Availability Scale 57
5.3.5. Measurement of Acceptance of the Symbolic Immortality Modes
5.3.6. The Death Anxiety Scale 58
5.3.7. The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire 59
5.3.7.1. Social Desirability 59
5.3.8. The Separation Anxiety Test 60
5.4. Statistical Analysis 61
5.4.1. Bonferroni Adjustment 62

6. Availability and Acceptance of the Modes. 63
6.1. Availability of the Modes. 63
6.1.1. Relationships between Availability and other variables 66
6.1.2. Biological Mode. 66
6.1.3. Afterlife Mode. 68
6.1.4. Creative Work Mode 69
6.1.5. Nature Mode 70
6.1.6. Experiential Transcendence 71
6.1.7. Total Availability 72
6.1.8. Comments 74
6.2. Acceptance of the Modes 75
6.2.1. Comments 76
6.3. Comments

7. Symbolic Immortality and Personality
   7.1. Regression Method.
   7.2. Death Anxiety
   7.3. Psychoticism
   7.4. Extraversion.
   7.5. Neuroticism.
   7.6. Comments

8. Acceptance of the Modes.
   8.1. Gender Differences.
   8.2. Age and Acceptance of the Modes
      8.2.1. Women and Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Age
      8.2.2. Men and Acceptance of the Modes by Age
      8.2.3. Comments
   8.3. Religion and Acceptance of the Modes.
      8.3.1. Comments

9. Influences on Acceptance of the Modes.
   9.1. Biological Mode.
   9.2. Afterlife Mode.
   9.3. Creative Work Mode.
   9.5. Experiential Transcendence Mode.
   9.7. Conclusions

10. Discussion.
    10.1. Differences in Expression of the Modes
      10.1.1. Biological Mode.
      10.1.2. Afterlife Mode.
      10.1.3. Creative Work Mode.
      10.1.5. Experiential Transcendence Mode.
    10.2. Research Questions
    10.3. Are there only five modes?
    10.4. Further Directions for Research

References
Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
1. Significant Correlations with Personality Variables.
2. Change of Religion Analysis
3. Being upset by a Death
List of Figures

Figure 5-1: Mean Religiosity Score by Religion. 52
Figure 5-2: Acceptance of the Symbolic Immortality Modes by Religiosity Score. 54
Figure 5-3: Acceptance of the Symbolic Immortality Modes by Religiosity Score (continued) 55
Figure 8-1: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Women 89
Figure 8-2: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Men 89
Figure 8-3: Acceptance of the Biological Mode by Age Group 91
Figure 8-4: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Group 1 Age Group 92
Figure 8-5: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Group 2 Age Group 92
Figure 8-6: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Group 5 Age Group 93
Figure 8-7: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Women in Group 1 94
Figure 8-8: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Women in Group 2 Age Group 95
Figure 8-9: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Women in Group 5 Age Group 95
Figure 8-10: Acceptance of the Biological Mode by Age Group for Women. 96
Figure 8-11: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Men in Group 5 Age Group 97
Figure 8-12: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Christians 99
Figure 8-13: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Yogis 100
Figure 8-14: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Spiritualists 100
Figure 8-15: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by No Religion 101
Figure 8-16: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Atheists 101
Figure 8-17: Acceptance of Biological Mode by Religious Affiliation 102
Figure 8-18: Acceptance of Afterlife Mode by Religious Affiliation 103
Figure 8-19: Acceptance of the Creative Work Mode by Religious Affiliation 103
Figure 8-20: Acceptance of the Nature Mode by Religious Affiliation 104
Figure 8-21: Acceptance of the Experiential Transcendence Mode by Religious Affiliation

Figure 8-22: Acceptance of Death as Finality by Religious Affiliation
List of Tables

Table 5-1: Numbers of Men and Women in each Religious Group 50
Table 5-2: Religiosity by Religious Affiliation. 51
Table 5-3: Acceptance of the Modes by Religiosity 53
Table 6-1: Availability of Modes and Total Availability by Gender 64
Table 6-2: Differences between Parents and Non-parents 67
Table 6-3: Correlations between Number of Children and Other Variables 67
Table 6-4: Differences between Believers in Life After Death and Non-Believers 68
Table 6-5: Differences between Creative and Not Creative People 69
Table 6-6: Correlations between Creativity and Other Variables. 69
Table 6-7: Differences between people with some Relationship with Nature and people who do not have a Relationship 70
Table 6-8: Correlations between Relationship with Nature and Other Variables. 71
Table 6-9: Differences between Experiential Transcendence Experiencers and Non-Experiencers 72
Table 6-10: Differences between people with High and Low Total Availability 73
Table 6-11: Correlations between Total Availability and other variables 73
Table 6-12: Correlations between Acceptance of the Modes, Death as Finality, and Total Acceptance with other variables 75
Table 6-13: Correlation Matrix. Symbolic Immortality Modes, Total Acceptance, Death as Finality and Total Availability 77
Table 7-1: Regression on Death Anxiety 82
Table 7-2: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Summary Table 82
Table 7-3: Regression on Psychoticism 83
Table 7-4: Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations Summary Table 83
Table 7-5: Regression on Extraversion 84
Table 7-6: Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations Summary Table 85
Table 7-7: Regression on Neuroticism. 86
Table 7-8: Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations Summary Table 86
Table 8-1: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Gender 88
Table 8-2: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Age 91
Table 8-3: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Age for Women.
Table 8-4: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Age Group for Men.
Table 8-5: Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality by Religious Group.
Table 9-1: Regression on Acceptance of the Biological Mode.
Table 9-2: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Summary Table.
Table 9-3: Regression on Acceptance of the Afterlife Mode.
Table 9-4: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Summary Table.
Table 9-5: Regression on Acceptance of the Creative Work Mode.
Table 9-6: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Summary Table.
Table 9-7: Regression on Acceptance of the Nature Mode.
Table 9-8: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Summary Table.
Table 9-9: Regression on Acceptance of the Experiential Transcendence Mode.
Table 9-10: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Summary Table.
Table 9-11: Regression on Acceptance of Death as a Finality Paragraph.
Table 9-12: Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations
Table 10-1: Availability of the Modes - Differences on Personality Characteristics
Table 10-2: Acceptance of the Modes - Correlations with Personality Characteristics
Table 1: Frequency of Responses to Religiosity Scale Items.
Table 1: ANOVA Table - Religiosity Scale by Religious Affiliation
Table 2: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Biological Mode by Religiosity Level
Table 3: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Afterlife Mode by Religiosity Level
Table 4: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Creative Work Mode by Religiosity Level
Table 5: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Experiential Transcendence Mode by Religiosity Level
Table 6: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Women
Table 7: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Men
Table 8: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of Biological Mode by Age Group
Table 9: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Women in Group 1 Age Group
Table 10: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Women in Group 2 Age Group
Table 11: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Women in Group 3 Age Group
Table 12: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Women in Group 4 Age Group

Table 13: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Women in Group 5 Age Group

Table 14: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Men in Group 1 Age Group

Table 15: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Men in Group 2 Age Group

Table 16: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Men in Group 3 Age Group

Table 17: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Men in Group 4 Age Group

Table 18: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Men in Group 5 Age Group

Table 19: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Christians

Table 20: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Yogis

Table 21: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Spiritualists

Table 22: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for No Religionists

Table 23: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of the Modes and Death as Finality for Atheists

Table 24: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of Biological Mode by Religion

Table 25: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of Afterlife Mode by Religion

Table 26: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of Creative Work Mode by Religion

Table 27: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of Nature Mode by Religion

Table 28: ANOVA Table - Acceptance of Experiential Transcendence Mode by Religion

Table 29: ANOVA Table - Death as Finality by Religion

Table 1: Correlations with Death Anxiety Scale.

Table 2: Correlations with Psychoticism.

Table 3: Correlations with Extraversion.

Table 4: Correlations with Neuroticism.

Table 5: Correlations with Lie Scale.

Table 6: Correlations with Individuation/Attachment Balance Score.

Table 7: Change of Religion

Table 8: Significant Correlations with Time since Joining a New Religion.

Table 9: Being Upset by a Death
Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work.

Valerie A. Sturesteps
January 1992
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. Jeremy Evans, who undertook my supervision in difficult circumstances, for his patient and thorough supervision. He has been a most thorough and conscientious supervisor.

Thanks also go to my advisers, the late Dr. Jacqui Holman of the ANU Psychology Department, and Mr. Robert W. Barnes, of the ANU Classics Department, for their encouragement and advice during the course of this work.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the following:

Mr. Ross Cunningham, Statistics Department, ANU, for his advice and help with the statistical analyses.

Dr. Julie Duck, Psychology Department, ANU, for reading the thesis and her very helpful advice.

My friends and the committees of the organisations, who agreed to distribute my questionnaires to their friends and members, for the time and effort they expended on my behalf.

Mrs. Tessa Durstein who spent many weeks helping to score the questionnaires.

Ms. Robin Osborne who willingly helped to check the data files.

The biggest word of thanks goes to my husband, Guy, for his unfailing good-humoured encouragement. Not only did he support me in many ways, he also spent many hours helping to check data files and in reading the manuscript. Without his help this thesis may not have been completed.
Abstract

The research study reported in this thesis examines Otto Rank's concept (1930) of Symbolic Immortality which proposes that people have a need to feel that they will transcend death in some way. Rank hypothesised that there are three ways, or modes, in which people can feel they have achieved Symbolic Immortality:

1. Having children - thus living on in the genes passed down to those subsequent generations (the Biological Mode)
2. Belief in life after death (the Afterlife Mode)
3. Performing some type of creative work or difficult task so they will be remembered after their death (the Creative Work Mode).

The later psycho-analyst, Robert J. Lifton (1973), added two more modes:

- The feeling that oneself may die but the rivers, mountains, etc. will still remain (the Nature Mode).
- Experiencing a feeling of mystical expansion of the self (the Experiential Transcendence Mode).

In this thesis it was suggested that if these modes fulfil a basic need then the modes will be expressed in ethnographies of tribal societies, and writings from ancient civilisations. An examination of both categories of literature revealed evidence that all five modes have been expressed in both societies. A review of published research revealed that the modes are also still being expressed in contemporary Western society.

There are two aspects of Symbolic Immortality, having the modes feature in one's life (Availability of the Modes) and feeling that one, or more, of the modes do enable one to feel that death will be transcended (Acceptance of the Modes). In this thesis three general research issues were examined: differences between people who have the modes available and people who do not have them available; which features of people's lives are associated with accepting particular modes; and, whether availability and/or acceptance of the modes, are associated with personality characteristics. If these two aspects are so associated, how strong are the associations, compared to associations with demographic and other personality characteristics, for predicting personality characteristics.

These issues were assessed by means of a questionnaire which contained the following sections:

- A demographic variables section, including age, sex and religion.
- The Templer/McMordie Death Anxiety Scale.
- An acceptance of the Symbolic Immortality Modes Scale.
• The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire.
• The Hansburg Separation Anxiety Test

Neuroticism, Death Anxiety and Gender differences were prime foci of the research because Rank believed that Death Anxiety and Neuroticism are associated with a failure to fulfill the immortality need, and that women and men express their immortality in different ways, women through childbirth and men through creative work. The Separation Anxiety Test was included because O'Dowd (1985) mentioned Rank's attitude that life was a series of unions and separations.

Rank's Afterlife Mode and Lifton's Experiential Transcendence Mode both have a religious connotation, so it was hypothesised in this thesis, that people affiliated with different religions would show different patterns of acceptance of the modes. Five different religious groups were used: Christianity, Yoga, Spiritualism, No Religion and Atheism.

In previous research, the relationship of Age with acceptance of the modes had only been tested on a restricted age range. So the present study used an extended age range of 18 to 88 years, and the respondents were grouped into five age groups for the statistical analyses. However, there was only one significant difference for age: Women aged forty years and over accepted the Biological Mode more highly than the two younger age groups. There were no significant differences on age for the male respondents.

Only slight support for Rank's theories was found in this research. The support that was found was ambiguous as some results were in the direction that Rank hypothesised, but others were in the opposite direction. Rank's three modes were found to be more important for the variables examined than Lifton's two modes.

Availability of four modes, Biological, Afterlife, Creative Work and Experiential Transcendence were associated with personality characteristics. The remaining mode, Nature, was not associated with personality characteristics at all.

The four features of people's lives that were most frequently associated with acceptance of the modes were: Actually having a mode available was significantly related to accepting that mode; Religious affiliation was a significant predictor of Acceptance for every mode, with Yoga and Spiritualism being the most frequent significant religious groups; Extraversion was the most frequent significant personality characteristic, but Neuroticism was not significant in this analysis; and Level of Education was negatively associated with acceptance.

The question of whether there are only five modes is discussed and it is suggested that the Creative Work Mode may be divided into two modes, Creativity and Notable Achievements, thus increasing the number of modes to six. As the form of expression of the modes has changed with time researchers should be sensitive to changes in society that may enable people to express symbolic immortality in new ways.