THE CHILD'S CONCEPT OF DEATH

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe ideas children have about death and to compare these ideas with regard to age and stage of development.

American children are assumed not to be able to comprehend or accept the idea of death because of its painfulness or unpleasantness. Children, in spite of our efforts to shield them, are exposed to death through means such as their own literature, television, and day to day contact with others. They do indeed have their own ideas regarding death, although their ideas are continually changing as the children grow. Adults could better help the child integrate the lessons of death into his life if they knew how much the child could understand of such a concept.

Greater understanding of the child's view of death is needed to contribute to and to improve patient-centered care of the dying child and his family.

The sample consisted of thirty-three children between four and ten years of age. The data were compared among three age groups within the sample and examined for relationships of such variables as previous experience.
with death, degree of religiosity in the home, and presence of older siblings.

This study seemed to support the belief that children do think of death differently at different ages and stages of development. Previous experience with death and the degree of religiosity in the home seemed to bear some relationship to the child's present understanding of death.

Several implications for nursing became clear, and several recommendations for further studies were made.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If death is a fact of life, when does the human mind begin to deal with this fact? There are as many answers to this question as there are cultures of mankind upon the face of the earth. In one culture, man must deal with the fact of death at a very early age because he lives with death daily; and yet in another culture, man may not have to deal with death until he has grown to adulthood.

The way in which a child learns about death depends upon the manner in which his culture handles the topic. Benedict states: "As all parents inevitably shape their child's emotional life, so all cultures are responsible for molding the individual and impressing upon him the community's ideals and ideologies (1967, p. 302)." In our present society, the topic of death for discussion with children is generally considered taboo and an improper subject for social conversation, similar to this society's former attitudes toward sex or religion. In the United States, a great emphasis is put on birth, health, marriage and success. Americans generally view the future as an
improvement over the present (Watt 1971). Death is usually not mentioned in this optimistic design, and there seems to be a general consensus that adults must protect children from undue psychological trauma caused by the topic of death. Since American children are shielded from conversation about death and are prohibited from viewing the remains of human or animal forms, they are at a disadvantage in coping with the reality of death and in accepting death as a part of life as compared to the children of less advanced societies (Mead 1928). Denial and ritual are often employed to distort death as a meaningful fact of life (Morrissey 1965).

American children are often assumed to be unable to comprehend or accept the idea of death because of its painfulness or unpleasantness (Rank 1967). Certainly, the adult feels that his own distress concerning the thoughts of death will be shared by the child who inquires about its meaning. One religious school teacher aptly stated: "Before I can teach children about death, someone has to straighten me out (Grollman 1967, p. 3)." Observation shows that often children do not share the adult's distress concerning the thoughts of death (Anthony 1967).

Children, in spite of our efforts to shield them, are exposed to death through means such as their own literature, television, conversations concerning world
affairs, and day to day contact with others. They do indeed have their own ideas regarding death, although their ideas are for the most part vague and continually changing. The child has no invincible body of knowledge nor a clearly defined attitude towards his environment, but he is continually experimenting, trying to find new solutions, and getting the "feel" of things in general (Griffiths 1949).

"The steps by which children come intellectually to the conception of laws of nature, and of causality operating in accordance with such laws, may be said to start from those reactions which lead them to the thought that all men are mortal (Anthony 1967, p. 327)." It seems that children begin to think of the mortality of man and perhaps of themselves when they begin to think in terms of "me" and "not me." Children build defenses to protect themselves from too much psychological pain, but they also want to know the truths of life. "The role of the adult is not to help erect these defenses through silence or untruth, but to recognize them (defenses) when the child uses them and to keep the bridge to reality open (Plank 1962, p. 32)." It is realistic to think that adults could better help the child integrate the lesson of death into his life if the adult knew how much the child could understand of such a concept. The way in which a young person integrates the idea of death into his personality may have far-reaching
implications for that person's mastery of the problems of later life (Feifel 1959).

**The Problem of this Study**

What ideas do children have about death? Is there a developmental progression in the growth of concepts of time, permanence, causation, and other death-related ideas? This study was an attempt to determine how children conceive death at different ages and stages of their development.

More specifically, this study sought to explore such questions as the following:

1. What is the relationship between the presence of older siblings in the home environment and the child's concept of death?

2. Is there a developmental progression of ideas about death through the years?

3. What is the relationship between religious beliefs practiced in the home and the child's concept of death?

4. What is the relationship between the child's past experience with death and the child's present concept of death?

**Assumptions of this Study**

The following assumptions regarding the child's concept of death form a foundation for this study:
1. That a child has ideas of death;
2. That these ideas are related to the child's cultural milieu and past experiences;
3. That the child's concept of death continually alters as he progresses in cognitive ability;
4. That these concepts may be symbolized verbally or pictorially or may be beyond his ability to represent.

**Importance of the Study**

The child's view of death in terms of developmental stages is important information for those who work with children. Parents often are confused as to the best manner in which to answer their children's questions regarding death because they do not know how much information the child can understand about death. Parents are also concerned about introducing the element of fear when speaking to the child about death and causing the child to worry unnecessarily.

If adults could better understand how the child might view death and what terms the child might use in referring to death, perhaps they might be better able to explain death in a manner which could be easily understood by children. An understanding of the child's view of death would also be helpful to nursing personnel in caring for and offering support to the dying child and his family. Explanations offered to the dying child might be
better expressed in terms which have meaning to that age and stage of cognitive development.

Research on the child's conceptual view of death could enhance our understanding of his behavior and yield insight into the culture of childhood.

**Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of terms were utilized:

**Child's concept of death:** The child's concept of death is the manner in which a child defines death and explains it to himself and to others.

**Concept:** A concept is a representation of a class of objects which is normally expressed by a word. It can be a mental image of a thing formed by generalizations (Beard 1969). Siegel states that "man uses concepts in terms of symbols or classes to organize relationships of the physical world . . . with those depicting natural phenomena (1964, p. 209)."

**Cognitive development:** Cognitive development refers to development or growth in terms of mental processes concerned with knowing, memory, imagery, and reasoning (Beard 1969).

**Culture:** A culture of a people can mean the way of life followed by that people. Valentine describes culture
to mean "a complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capability and habit acquired by man as a member of society (Valentine 1968, p. 3)."

**Culture of childhood:** The culture of childhood is a term which distinguishes childhood as a social-cultural system uniquely different from adulthood. The term implies that children's cognitive and social realms are uniquely their own.

**Conceptual Framework**

This comparative study was based on Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Mary Ellen Goodman's theory of the culture of childhood.

Piaget suggests that the child's conception of the world is built in the course of cognitive development and that the meaning of specific concepts are learned as a part of the enculturation process.

Mary Ellen Goodman (1970) describes childhood as a time uniquely different from adulthood with unique cognitive and social realms. Goodman believes that children have a culture of their own and that they learn many definitions for phenomena happening around them from each other (p. 10).

Children, like adults, must meet and deal with the world in conceptual terms, and their concepts must serve
as crucial links between the environment and the individual.

Piaget's research on child development emphasizes cognitive comprehension and highlights the fact that at each stage of development, the child has a characteristic way of viewing the world and explaining it to himself. In attempting to show how reality unfolds for the child, Piaget discusses development in stages of cognitive abilities with comprehension of such concepts as object concepts, spatial field (pertaining to positions of objects in space), causality, and the temporal field (pertaining to time concepts). This researcher believes that all of the above concepts bear some relationship to the meaning of death. It is Piaget's contention that comprehension of these concepts is hierarchical with acquisition of some or all of each concept occurring in the stages of development (Maier 1965, Baldwin 1968, and Piaget 1929).

The acquisition of language has a great deal to do with early conceptualization (Schachtel 1967), but there is often a discrepancy between language and comprehension. Piaget feels that conceptualization does not always begin with verbalization but begins when the child can classify objects or mental representations into groups of common characteristics (Baldwin 1968).
Most studies report on what adults see when they observe children rather than what the child sees when he observes the world. The latter point is described by Goodman to be the "child's eye-view" of life (1970, p. 2). How a person behaves in a situation depends upon what that situation means or signifies to him.

Social scientists agree that "meaning" is most elusive, whereas Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) felt that meaning was a nonmaterial variable which did not readily submit to measurement. Lindzey (1961) describes projective techniques as an unusually effective means of assessing the subject's perception of the environment, or as a means of assessing the subject's internal frame of reference. Edwards (1957), Griffiths (1949), and Lindzey (1961), and other social scientists agree that the projective method is a means to gain insight into the individual's private world of meanings, significances, and feelings.

Because of the nature of the subject, it was particularly difficult to gather information of how a child conceives death. An interview needed to be structured in such a manner that the parent would initially approve and in a manner that would not frighten the child. With these facts in mind, the works of Lindzey, Griffiths, and Edwards were particularly helpful in designing this study.
The review of literature regarding the manner in which a child learns about death, ideas which relate to the child's concept of death, and methods of data collecting are presented in Chapter II.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Information obtained from a review of the literature regarding how the child learns about death, ideas which relate to the child's concept of death, and methods of data collecting will be presented in this chapter.

How the Child Learns about Death

Vernon describes the human being as basically social in nature, with behavior patterns learned, maintained, or changed through interactions with others. The child learns the meaning of death as a part of his enculturation process when he is made aware of the presence of death by significant persons (Vernon 1970). Kastenbaum (1967) commented that a child must learn to define life before he can learn what death means and how he must respond to it. Mead, Wahl, and other social scientists (Mead 1934) have described a "looking glass process" in which the child sees himself as a reflection of significant others. Children learn to respond to situations in the same manner that significant persons respond.

In activities of daily living and exposure to newspapers, television, family and friends with emphasis
on topics such as war, crimes, poverty, disease, carcinogenic agents in our food and air, drugs, accidents, pollution, overpopulation, and entertainment, the child begins to define his concepts of death at a very early age.

Preschooler's Conception of Death

Although the main focus of this study is on children between the ages of four through ten years of age, much happens in the development of a child before the fourth year which contributes to conceptualization of death. Piaget divided child development of the preschool child into two main parts: (1) the sensorimotor stage which is characteristic of ages from birth to two years, and (2) the preoperational stage from two to seven years. Piaget further divides the preoperational stage to include the intuitive period from four to seven years of age.

"Toddlerhood" seems to be the beginning of death-related ideas. The toddler sees himself as a separate and unique person and begins to differentiate between "me" and "you." As he explores the significance of "me," "I," and "myself," thoughts of the reverse of "me" come forth. The ideas of "not me" or the cessation of "me" are basic rudiments of death definitions (Easson 1970, Robinson 1971).

Object Concept. It is also in the latter part of the sensorimotor stage and the beginning of the
preoperational stage that the child learns to operate as if the world were a permanent place and not a place whose existence is dependent on his perceiving it. Piaget describes this concept as "object concept" because the infant has learned that an object or person exists even though he is unable to see or touch it (Maier 1965, Baldwin 1968, Piaget 1929). When the child grasps this concept, it often colors his conception of death. He often awaits the return of a deceased pet or relative because things have disappeared and returned in his environment before (Rochelin 1967).

Causation. The child in the preoperational stage often explains events in terms of his own feelings or actions or in terms of other people near him. Because of this concept, children often think that the cause of death is related to people and their actions and thoughts. Children in this stage often believe they can cause a death by thinking about it (Smart and Smart 1967, Beard 1969). Anthony (1967) also states that children view death as "always accidental" rather than the inevitable end of us all.

Punishment as a Cause of Death. Death may have several varied meanings for the same child. "It may mean an absence, an injury, or being devoured by a wild animal (Griffiths 1949, p. 80)." As the child grows older and becomes more independent, he often rebels in order to test
his newly found independence. Often he will even become angry with his parents and think ideas which he has learned to classify as bad. Perhaps he will wish his father were "dead," or at least far away from the child's presence for the time being. He learns all too quickly that he will be punished for being bad and has a vague notion that death could be a punishment for bad thoughts or deeds (Easson 1970). Levinson and Kinney (1969) explain that this idea is particularly reinforced when a child has a pet who has died. The child has seen the animal defecate and mate in public, kill other animals, and commit other offensive crimes without punishment. The child is often convinced that the animal's death was a severe punishment for a lifetime of crime.

**Spatial Field Concepts.** Conception of space is closely tied to the child's own actions, and "space" words such as "up, down, all gone, far away, in, at" appear in the vocabulary at an early age (Smart and Smart 1967). Children often fall into obvious self-contradiction because their thinking is dominated by immediate perceptions. They are unable to make mental comparisons since they are often unable to keep in mind more than one relation at a time. Because of this manner of thinking, children are often confused when told that the dead go "to heaven or hell" and they see the body buried under the ground. The child under
five often asks what happens under the ground or where heaven and hell might be (Beard 1969).

Temporal Concepts. Earliest experiences of time are with bodily rhythm as the child responds physiologically to patterns of eating, sleeping, and excreting. In the preoperational stage, the child may use emotional experiences to divide spans of time such as birthdays or holidays because he is unable to integrate now from the past or future (Smart and Smart 1967). Mastery of time does not appear all at once; and although the child uses verbal indicators of time (now, today, "play after I have juice," lunch-time), he may not understand the tense of the indicator or the span of time to which the indicator refers (Goldstone and Goldfarb 1966). By four years, some children express time in broader concepts which seem to indicate an understanding of a sequence of events (next summer, next Christmas), but they have not defined "weeks, months, or years" for themselves (Smart and Smart 1967). "Children's time concepts proceed from the specific to the general or from the concrete to the abstract, with a general reduction in the frequency of inaccurate tenses and inappropriate temporal experiences (Goldstone and Goldfarb 1966, p. 455)." In understanding how a child would view the concept of death, one must remember that he may not understand the significance of words which are used to
describe death. The preschooler lives in a world of here and now and is often unable to conceive death as a "forever" concept (Furman 1964). They do not have a large span of memory of experiences in the past on which to integrate thoughts of the future (Schachtel 1967).

The Grade-School Child's Conception of Death

Piaget refers to the child who is of grade-school age as being included in the latter part of the preoperational and the concrete operations periods. Both Piaget and Easson acknowledge a transitional or analytical period beginning approximately at seven years of age. During this time, the child shows characteristics of both stages of cognitive understanding.

Intuitive Stage. Piaget defines the latter part of the preoperational period as the intuitive stage which is characteristic of the ages of four to seven years. During this time, the child is thought to go through a decentering process which allows him to perceive many viewpoints in all of the concepts previously explained. His concepts are still unorganized and his thinking is still inconsistent, but he is beginning to understand more of his world (Baldwin 1968). The intuitive stage is a link between the preoperational period and the concrete operations period with behaviors coming from both stages on many occasions.
While the child is growing, he is continually changing his understanding of the significance of his own death. Robinson (1971) states that the manner in which children respond to death will depend on their learned behaviors in past experiences. The school-aged child branches out from a solitary relationship with his parents to find importance in peer relationships. He is beginning to learn the rules of behavior through games, and associates with friends, teachers, and parents. The child is defining himself as a unique individual, but he has internalized identified behaviors and standards from his family. He also invests in one-to-one relationships with other children, and together they explore, fantasize, and dream the boundaries of the self (Easson 1970).

Easson also describes age seven as the beginning of the analytical period. Before seven, the child denies the permanency of death, but by six or seven the child is imagining the future and is formulating concepts of heaven, hell, and the continuation of a post-death self. The child is learning that his parents are fallible and he seeks an "infallible something" in which to believe. Because the grade-school child is a methodical organizer, every act receives a response of punishment or reward, and so it is with life and death to the child. Death always has a cause and never "just happens" in the child's mind. In the
post-death self-concept, heaven (reward) seems to be the best solution to death, but the child still has not stopped thinking of the actual process of death and dying as punishment (Easson 1970). Children of this age also concern themselves with what happens to the body after death.

**Concrete Operations Period.** The child is beginning to think operationally and is beginning to have related systems in his thought processes. The gradual decrease in egocentricism leads to less feeling of his own or his parents' omnipotence. This more objective viewpoint is accompanied by an increase in logical connections between things, an increase in thinking of causes as impersonal, and an increase in more socialized thinking (Baldwin 1968). Near the end of this period, the child is beginning to operate on the same basic assumptions about the concepts of space, causality, and time as the adult.

**Ideas about Death and the World of the Child**

Children tend to make generalizations from what is familiar to explain those concepts which are difficult for them. Happenings in the world which surround children are pieced together to help them define their concepts of death.

**The Culture of Childhood**

The child's concept of death is the manner in which a child conceptualizes death and explains it to
himself and others. Children are exposed to death in many ways, and their definitions of death continually change as they are exposed to various spectrums of their environment. Many of their definitions incorporate their understanding at specific ages of several conditions of life. Other factors which influence their definitions of death are shared by children alone and comprise a part of the culture of childhood.

Sleep and Death. Children have some awareness that life exists in several conditions such as sleep and wakefulness. When seeing a dead person or animal, the younger child will view death as analogous to sleep with an eventual awakening. This misconception also leads to childhood fears of sleeping lest the child or significant person never be awakened (Vernon 1970).

Animism and Death. Piaget (1929) found that children up to seven or eight years of age believed life and spontaneous movement to be the same; anything that did not move was dead. Children also regard inert or inanimate objects as alive with feeling. Piaget described this phenomenon when his daughter, Jacqueline, asked when they had missed their train: "Can't the train know when we aren't on it? (Beard 1969, p. 48)." Kastenbaum (1967) reports that children cannot define what is dead until they are able to define what is alive. Rochelin (1967) also found that
children believe that to be dead is to be motionless, but they are confused with statements such as "go to heaven." The child's religious enculturation greatly influences his ideas of animism, spirits, souls, etc.

**Belief in Fantasy and Magic.** The inability to distinguish fantasy and magic from reality is characteristic of the preoperational stage (from two to seven years of age). Children's literature also reinforces beliefs in fantasy, and they often believe that good people and beautiful princesses are awakened from death. Bad people and ugly witches remain dead as a form of punishment for wicked deeds.

The following quotation from José Ortega provides some insight into how children integrate fantasy in their view of death:

> Compared with grown-ups, children are heroic creators of legend. Everything they come in contact with is transformed . . . everything they see around them is the way it ought to be, and that which is not, they do not see . . . death for the children is a variation of hide-and-seek: man disappears only to reappear amid bustling funerals. Hence, in fairy tales death is regarded as an interlude prior to resurrection (1967, p. 56).

**Games and Literature.** Millicent Shinn (1900) drew attention to the nursery game of "peek-a-boo," which reinforces the repetition of seeing and not seeing, with the item still existing. She pointed out that the words "peek-a-boo" were derived from Old English words meaning "alive.
or dead." The idea of death being an irreversible state of being is not reinforced with children.

Children respond to television characters dying one week and reappearing the next week (Vernon 1970, Griffiths 1949). Children also test their ideas of death through play and games: "Bang, bang! You're dead! I shot you so you can't get up." It is not unusual either for children to hold mock funerals for one another or for pets or animals they have found dead (Easson 1970). Because the experiences from which they generalize do not reinforce death as permanent separation, children sometimes return to the grave of an animal to exhume the body to make sure it is still there (Levinson and Kinney 1969).

Piaget (1929) found that some children believe that the dead become little (perhaps due to shrinking as they generalize from wilting plants) and are born again. Von Hug-Hellmuth (1965) cited a case where the child was told on separate occasions that the dead become angels and that babies come from angels. The child then concluded that a new baby sibling was a death angel and feared for the life of his mother. Vernon (1970) points out that when a child has lost a loved one and death is explained as "going to be with God," the child may verbalize a hatred or fear of God, because He has caused this separation and the child wonders
when God will come and take him away from the world he knows and loves.

The repetitive saying of games coupled with hand clapping or jumping rope often exposes the child's developing attitudes toward death. Mitchell (1967) described the following chant:

Little Willie's dead,
Jam him in the coffin
For you don't get the chance
Of a funeral often.

Vernon (1970) comments that "with humor and games, death is less likely to be such a grave matter."

Jackson (1968) notes that pictures drawn by children of grade-school age often depict coffins, buried items, or underground animals such as ants and worms.

Ross (1967) observed that children's literature frequently deals with death, but it usually is a permanent end for wicked people (Hansel and Gretel, and Wizard of Oz) and a temporary sleep for the "good" characters (Tin Soldier and Snow White). Ross also comments that later childhood books deal with the reality of death, such as Louisa Mae Alcott's Little Women and Little Men, and Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl.

Children seem to accept the images in fairy stories because they are already familiar with many of the images in their own fantasies (Griffiths 1949). Silvia Anthony
stated: "In fairy stories death incidents often correspond to the early reactions of children to death (1967, p. 315)."

Prayers and Death. With new concepts of God, death, heaven, and hell, the child places great importance on prayers. Vernon (1970) states that to a child every cause of death has a motive, and often he will think that he has done something to cause the death of another. Children may have guilt feelings because they have forgotten to bless the deceased person in their prayers. Wahl (1958) states that children may try to counteract death with the saying of prayers, and perhaps the earliest symptom of the fear of death is an obsessive blessing of significant persons in their prayers. Silvia Anthony (1940) states that many children react in fear to a common childhood bedtime prayer and often ask their parents if the "Lord" will kill them in the night.

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
And if I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Personification of Death. Children will often exchange the abstractness of death for more concrete terms by making a person or thing represent death. Death has been described as having big eyes, white clothes, and long legs and arms. It has also been described as a creature of the night, images a child has seen elsewhere, skeletons, a black
shadow which is brooding and formless (Kastenbaum 1967),
the wax of a candle or a black form which rides in a black
 carriage (hearse) drawn by a team of spirited black steeds.
(Mitchell 1967). The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and other
childhood stories reinforce this change from abstractness
to concreteness.

The Dying Child

A dying child's level of understanding of his own
death may shift from time to time as he tries to cope with
the physiological and psychological changes occurring in
the process of dying (Jackson 1968). Easson states that if
a dying child sees a mutilated soldier or a dying cowboy on
television, he may worry about becoming mutilated when he
is dying. Although children may not verbalize their fears,
they may act them out as their pain and physiological stress
weaken their psychological control. They may withdraw into
a world of fantasy with an inevitable happy ending or be­
come loud, blaming those around them for their punishment.
The manner in which a child reacts to his own death is
related to the concepts he has defined for himself in terms
of self, cause and effect, object permanency, spatial con­
 cepts, fantasy versus reality, and concepts of time. Most
frequently, the child responds more to a feeling of antici­
pated separation from his parents than to an actual fear
of death (Easson 1970).
Methods of Data Collecting

The search for an instrument and a method of assessing how the child conceives death led to a review of literature regarding the use of interviewing and projective techniques in data collection.

Interviewing as a Method of Data Collecting

"If we want to know how people feel, what they experience and what they remember, what their emotions and motives are like, and the reasons for acting as they do, why not ask them (Selltiz et al. 1959, p. 236)?" Although the interview method offers great flexibility in data collection and is an appropriate technique in uncovering emotionally laden topics, many people are not only reluctant to report their beliefs openly but also unable to do so. Psychologists agree that many are unaware of some of their important convictions (Edwards 1957).

Projective Techniques as a Means of Data Collecting

In order to get around the limitations found in interviewing, techniques have been devised which attempt to be independent of the subject's willingness to reveal himself. Emphasis on the holistic approach often has influenced cultural anthropologists to use projective techniques. Projective techniques have often been shown
as an unusually effective means of assessing the subject's internal frame of reference (Lindzey 1961). Generally, the projective method is a means to gain insight into the individual's private world of meanings, significances, and feelings.

In a projective test, certain criteria must be met, and they are as follows: (1) there are no right or wrong answers; (2) the individual is not asked to talk about himself; (3) the nature of the questions and the manner in which they are presented do not clearly indicate the purpose of the test or the way in which the responses will be interpreted; and (4) a fantasy response without restrictions on reality is accepted (Lindzey 1961). The fourth criterion seemed particularly useful in this study with fantasy responses sanctioned, since children are often unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality in their definitions of death.

Blum (1949) encouraged the use of animals in projective techniques for children because he felt that animals facilitated freedom of expression without the inhibiting response of anxiety that human figures might provoke.

Summary

A summary of the review of literature which helped in planning, designing, and substantiating the findings
of this study by the researcher is presented in the following paragraph.

The literature reports that the child does have a conceptual view of death, but it is continually changing. At each stage of development, the child has a characteristic way of viewing the world and explaining it to himself. The child's understanding of the permanence of objects, causality, spatial relations, and the temporal field influences his ability to conceptualize death. Their definitions of death are also influenced by their culture as observed in their literature and games. The manner in which to design a tool for data collection was also reviewed.

Presented in the next chapter will be the design of the study, sources of data, and the questionnaire used for data collection.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

An explanation of the design of the study, methods of data collection, and selection and development of the tools for data collection are included in this chapter.

Design of the Study

A design was selected to compare how three groups of children aged four through five years, six through seven years, and eight through ten years conceive death. The age groups of the children were chosen by the researcher to be consistent with the stages of development outlined by Jean Piaget (Baldwin 1968). The four through five year olds (Group I) represented children of the preoperational-intuitive stage of development; the six through seven year olds (Group II) represented children in the transitional period of the preoperational and concrete operations stages of development; the eight through ten year olds (Group III) represented the concrete operations stage of development.

The Sample

The research study was conducted in a southwestern city in the United States. The study included both male
and female children between the ages of four and ten years of age who were referred to the researcher by parents or family friends. Thirty-three children were included in the study. The sample was limited to English-speaking families.

Sources of Data

The sources of data for this study were children and their parents. A structured interview questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed by the researcher for the parents to answer which gave the following information regarding the child:

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Number of children in the family
4. Child's rank in siblings
5. Religion and the extent that religion is practiced in the home
6. Extent that death, natural disasters, and crime or death oriented topics are discussed openly in the home
7. Experience with death of a friend, relative or pet.

Instrument for Data Collection

The researcher designed a set of five pictures which in totality depicted a story of a boy finding a dead bird (Appendix D).
A structured interview questionnaire was also designed to meet the guidelines of a projective test to fit the theme of the pictures (Appendix C). The questions tested the following death related topics in measuring the child's concept of death:

1. Immobility and death
2. Permanence or reversibility of death
3. Spatial concepts
4. Causes of death
5. Age as a factor causing death
6. The after-death state

Some of the questions checked the consistency of the child's answers by giving the same questions with a different picture.

The pictures were used mainly to focus the child to death-related thinking for the purpose of answering the blocks of structured questions. Live animals and plants were purposefully included in the design of the pictures for two reasons: (1) to help the child focus on the dead bird which was "different" from the live birds, and (2) to help the children refocus to a "life" theme at the end of the questioning. The researcher purposefully intended for the pictures to represent life and death in hopes of reducing the amount of anxiety caused by a "death theme."

The researcher also felt that parents would be less
reluctant to have their children answer questions about death if the questions were well integrated with pictures representing life as well as death. To complete the interview, the children were asked to focus on the live items in picture E. They were asked to name the live "things" and to tell the researcher what made them appear to be alive rather than dead.

This researcher felt it was also necessary to protect the child from unnecessary trauma if he refused to accept the researcher's idea that the bird could be dead. The following diagram illustrates the manner of questioning followed by the researcher in regard to the needed branch questioning in picture A, Question 1. Although this method was followed, the actual branch questions were not included on the questionnaire form in order to keep the form short and concise. The diagram is printed in narrative form to describe conversation between the researcher and the child (see following page).

Pilot Study

In order to find out whether the devised set of questions would be useful and to obtain practice in administering them, the researcher performed a pilot test on three selected children ages six, eight, and ten years of age. The pilot study also served the purpose of testing the terms that were used in the instrument for meaning to
1. What's happening in this picture?

A. If child responds with death-related answer, "The boy found a dead bird."

   Researcher: "How do you know the bird is dead?"

   Child

   If "Yes"

   Researcher: "Could that bird be dead?"

   Child

   If "Yes"

   Researcher: "How do you know the bird is dead?"

   Child

   If "No"

   Researcher: Discontinue questioning

B. If child responds with an answer that is not death-related, "The boy saw a bird and went over to it."

   Researcher: "Is that bird different from the other birds?"

   Child

   If "Yes"

   Researcher: "Could that bird be dead?"

   Child

   If "Yes"

   Researcher: "How do you know the bird is dead?"

   Child

   If "No"

   Researcher: Discontinue questioning

   Child

   If "No"

   Researcher: "That bird is upside down. Could he be dead?"

   Child

   If "Yes"

   Researcher: "How do you know the bird is dead?"

   Child

   If "No"

   Researcher: Discontinue questioning

Figure 1. Branch Questioning
the children. If a particular term seemed unclear, or if the response was not similar to the anticipated response, the item was re-evaluated. Only minor revisions were made after the pilot study.

Collection of the Data

The researcher collected names of prospective sample members from references given to her by friends, associates, and friends of selected sample members. An arbitrary sample size of thirty-five children was originally selected, but only thirty-three children were interviewed. Late in the data collecting period, two cancellations were made.

The researcher phoned the prospective sample members, informed them about the study, and made an appointment for further clarification of the study. The parents were asked not to discuss the nature of the study with their children, but rather to tell their children that "a lady would come to visit them and ask them some questions." The only criteria for sample membership were the following: (1) the child must be between the ages of four through ten years of age, and (2) parental permission must be granted for the child to be questioned. Although religion and past experience with death were gathered as data, those factors were not included in the selection of the sample.

Each parent of each child included in the study (mother and/or father) was told the purpose of the study.
If they seemed to be in agreement with the purpose of the study, they were requested to review the pictures and the child's questionnaire carefully. Parents who agreed to allow the researcher to ask all of the questions were to sign the Parental Consent Form (Appendix A). The parents were then interviewed following the form on the Questionnaire for Parents (Appendix B). They were also told the purpose of the questions if they were interested. The parents were interviewed without the child present, but the parent was requested to be present or within hearing distance as the child was interviewed. The researcher felt that it was necessary to have the parent listen to the child's answers in order to clarify the child's misconceptions later if they wished. The parents seemed quite curious about the child's answers and were eager to listen to the interview.

After speaking to the parent, the child was requested to come into the room. The researcher took time to get acquainted with the child and told each child that she had some pictures she would like the child to see. It was further explained that the researcher would ask about the pictures, but that anything the child said would be a right answer. Each picture (Appendix D) was shown alone, and the corresponding blocks of questions were asked (Appendix C). At the end of the interview, the child was praised and told
that he had answered all of the questions correctly. The researcher also asked if the children wanted to ask anything or comment on the pictures or questions. One child responded, "I can do 'good' on this kind of test because we do these pictures and stories in school."

**Analysis of the Data**

The data obtained in this study were dichotomous and nominal. The answers from the children's questionnaires and the answers from the respective parents' questionnaires were placed on computer cards to facilitate handling. Not all of the questions asked in either questionnaire were used or analyzed in this study. The frequency of answers from blocks of questions regarding the cause of death, reversibility of death, state after death, death and movement, and spatial concepts and death were compared with respect to the age group of the child answering (as shown in tables in Appendix E). Next, the frequencies of answers with regard to variable of experience with death, religion, and rank in the sibling group were compared among the age groups (as shown in tables in Appendix F). Comparative generalizations were made from these groups of data.

The next chapter will present a profile of the subjects and the presentation of the findings.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents a profile of the subjects in the sample and a presentation of the findings.

The Subjects

Of the thirty-three children interviewed, six were four through five years of age (Group I), nine were six through seven years of age (Group II), and eighteen were eight through ten years of age (Group III). Of the thirty-three children, eighteen were female and fifteen were male. The majority of children had had some experience with death of a friend, relative, or pet.

The Findings

Comparisons were made of the frequencies of answers between the three age groups, and generalizations were then made with regard to each category of answers. The data for each category of answers are shown in the respective tables in Appendix E.

The Cause of Death

In response to the question, "What happened to make this bird die?" (as shown in Appendix E, Table 1), nineteen
of the thirty-three children stated an accidental cause of death, whereas fourteen of the thirty-three stated a purposeful cause of death. In scoring this question, the interviewer categorized such statements as, "He fell out of the tree," or "He ate something poisonous," as accidental. Statements such as, "Another bird pecked him to death," or "A cat ate him," were coded as purposeful causes. The younger children in Groups I and II had the majority of their groups answering with an accidental response, but Group III had a fairly equal number of responses in the accidental and purposeful categories.

The literature stated that children generally think of death as accidental (Anthony 1967); and it would seem that the children under seven years of age in this sample thought of death as accidental, whereas the children over seven years of age were somewhat divided in their thinking. The majority of children thought of death as accidental rather than by design.

Question 2 asked, "Could the bird have 'just died' for no reason at all?" The children in this sample seemed to think that death should have a reason for occurring and that it could not "just happen." Twenty of the thirty-three children responded negatively to this question, but thirteen responded positively. The younger children (Group I) were equally divided in positive and negative responses,
but the older Groups (Group II and Group III) had a larger proportion of their groups responding negatively.

Most of the children in this sample believed that God had something to do with death. Question 3 asked, "Do you suppose that God might have had something to do with this bird dying?" The majority of the children responded positively, but there was a definite difference in group responses. More than half of the older children (Groups II and III) responded positively, while more than half of the younger children in Group I responded negatively. When comparing these respective groups with the degree of religiosity in the home (as shown in Appendix F, Table 6), the "very religious" and "moderately religious" homes in all groups had a greater frequency of "Yes, God had something to do with it" response. The children from the "occasionally" religious homes responded equally "Yes," and "No," to this question.

The opinion of all groups in response to Question 4, "If the little boy had wanted the bird to be dead, could that have caused the bird to die?", was that the death of the bird could not be caused simply by the boy desiring the bird to be dead. The children were quick to add, however, that the boy could kill the bird if he truly wanted him to be dead.
Question 5 asked, "Could the little boy have caused the bird to die by thinking about it?" A distinct difference was seen among the group responses, with the children under seven answering as if thinking could cause death. The responses to this question clearly indicated a transitional manner of thinking in the six-to seven-year-olds (Group II). The younger children responded as if thinking could cause death, and the older children responded as if thinking could not cause death. The six-to seven-year-olds were equally divided in their thinking.

"If the bird was bad before he died, could he have died because he was being punished?" and "Who punished him?" were questions 6 and 7. A difference was also seen between the groups in response to these questions, with the younger and older children responding as if death could be a punishment. Surprisingly, Group II (the children aged six to seven years) answered as if death was not a punishment. The majority of children of all ages felt as if God was the one who punished. Greater numbers of the "very religious" children and the "occasionally religious" children believed that God had something to do with death and that death could be a punishment (as shown in Appendix F, Table 6). The "occasionally religious" group responded with God as the punisher more frequently than the "very" and "moderately religious" groups (as shown in Appendix F,
Table 6). Children interviewed who were never taught about God (per parental information) answered similarly to the children from religious families. Perhaps this reflects some of the information shared in peer groups and reinforces the idea of a "culture of childhood."

In considering age as a precipitating cause of death, questions 8 through 10, the majority of the children answered that the dead bird was an old bird. Nearly all of the children in all groups responded that either an old bird or a young bird could die and that either old or young people could die. The children who had had an experience with death of a relative or friend did answer similarly to their previous experience (as shown in Appendix F, Table 7).

Movement and Death

All of the children regardless of age (as shown in Appendix E, Table 2) knew that a dead bird could no longer move. Question 2 asked, "If things can't move, are they dead?" All groups responded similarly, with nearly equal numbers in each group responding negatively and positively. There were inconsistencies in responses to Questions 3 and 4: "A chair can't move. Is it dead?" and "Is a train alive? It moves." The majority of children of all ages had difficulty distinguishing if an inanimate object (such as a chair or train) was dead or alive. According to the
literature (Rochelin 1967, Piaget 1929), the majority of children equate immobility with death, but they seemed confused about the state of life or death in an inanimate object. One seven-year-old responded that the chair was alive but that the wood was dead! Another ten-year-old stated: "A train isn't alive, but the engine is because it makes the train move."

Spatial Concepts and Death

The majority of children (as shown in Appendix E, Table 3) in all groups responded that the dead bird would "go to heaven" if he was put under the ground (Question 1). The children under seven years of age in Groups I and II responded that "all" of the dead bird rather than "part" of the dead bird would go to heaven. Nearly all of Group III stated that part of the bird would go to heaven, and they named the soul or spirit most frequently as the parts to go to heaven. Bodily parts such as the brain and insides were also named by all groups.

Reversibility of Death

Nearly all of the children in all groups (as shown in Appendix E, Table 4) knew that the dead bird could not awaken again and that the dead bird was different from a sleeping bird; however, most of the children were inconsistent in their responses when the question was reworded.
Question 5 asked, "If this bird was good before he died, will he wake up on earth again?" The youngest and oldest children responded that the good dead bird could no longer awaken on earth, but almost half of the six- to seven-year-old group felt that a good dead bird could awaken on earth again. Apparently the children saw "goodness" or "badness" as a condition which would allow or prevent waking again on earth, since most of the children in all groups answered negatively to the following question: "If the bird was bad before he died, will he wake up again on earth?" "Goodness" of "badness" also determined if the bird would wake up in heaven. The majority of all groups responded that a good bird but not a bad bird would wake up in heaven.

Belief that a fairy princess with a magic wand could awaken the dead bird was strong in all three groups. The older children differed from the younger groups, however, since more of their group did not believe in the powers of the fairy princess. Question 4 asked, "Does this happen in real life?", referring to the powers of the fairy princess. As expected, a larger percentage of the children over six believed that the powers of the fairy princess did not exist in "real life." The children who were in Group I (four through five years of age) were equally divided in their thinking as to the powers of the fairy princess existing in "real life."
The irreversibility of death was the opinion of all groups. If death was reversible on earth, it was seen as a consequence of "goodness" or "badness." When speaking of the dead waking up, a distinction was made in all groups as to the place of awakening—"heaven on earth." Nearly all of the children believed that a fairy princess with a magic wand could awaken a dead bird, but most of the children over five years of age believed that this would not happen in "real life." Almost half of the children under five believed that this could happen in "real life."

State after Death

Nearly all of the children (as shown in Appendix E, Table 5) responded that the bird could no longer breathe after death. Although the majority of children in all groups responded that the dead bird would no longer grow, a few in each group answered that the bird would grow. Greater differences in group responses were seen to the following question: "Will he [the dead bird] have any more birthdays or get older?" Four of six children in Group I answered "Yes," and seven of eighteen children in Group III answered "Yes." The children who were six to seven (Group II) answered "No" most frequently. Almost half of the children of all groups interviewed answered that the dead bird would get older and have more birthdays. The true meaning
of this question is not clear since the answer does not delineate if the bird would be conscious of the birthdays. Nearly all of the children knew that the dead bird could not eat. One of the younger children responded, "The bird won't eat because he won't be hungry." When asked if the bird could eat if he was hungry, the child responded, "Yes."

The presence of older siblings in the family or experience with a pet's death did not seem to influence the children's responses to specific questions (as shown in Appendix F, Tables 8 and 9).

Summary

Death may have several varied meanings for the same child, but most of the children in this sample thought of the cause of death in terms of being accidental rather than the inevitable end of us all. The children seem divided in their thinking on some concepts with respect to age. Many of the conditions after death (ability to awaken on earth again, movement to heaven or hell) were dependent on the degree of "goodness" or "badness" before death. Punishment for a wrong doing was seen as a cause of death, and God was the most often cited as the one who punishes.

Most of the children felt that a dead bird could no longer eat or breathe, but he could get older and have more birthdays.
Immobility was associated with death but many of the children had difficulty in determining if inanimate objects were alive or dead.

Generalizations and the conclusions of the study are presented in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Discussed in this chapter are the generalizations, conclusions, implications for nursing, and recommendations of this study.

Generalizations

Children responded differently to many of the questions, although there were some questions that all groups answered similarly. More of the younger children under seven thought of death as accidental, whereas the older children tended to give purposeful causes of death as answers. The children also seemed to think that there had to be a reason for death occurring. Most of the children responded that God might have something to do with death. The children who believed that death could be a punishment usually answered that God was the one who did the punishing. Contrary to the literature, the children in this sample did not say that the boy could cause a death by desiring it but not taking action. The children under six years of age believed that death could be caused by thoughts but the children over seven years of age did not respond in this manner. As expected, the children between six and
seven generally presented an equal number of positive and negative responses showing a transitional period in thinking at this age.

The children did seem to associate immobility with death, although they had difficulty distinguishing the difference between what is alive and what is dead.

States of "goodness" and "badness" contributed to the possibility of the dead bird awakening again on earth. Nearly all of the children saw a difference between a sleeping bird and a dead bird.

The children did seem to believe in the powers of a fairy princess with a magic wand, but the frequencies diminished with the increase in age. As for the magic and the fairy princess occurring in "real life," more of the children under seven years responded that this event could happen in "real life" than did children over seven years of age. The frequency of the possibility of this event occurring also diminished with an increase in age.

Nearly all of the groups responded similarly to questions regarding the state after death. The children responded that the dead bird could no longer breathe, grow, or eat. They did respond with more variety to the possibility of the bird getting older or having more birthdays. This question may have presented some confusion in meaning to the children. Almost half of the children believed the
bird would get older, and half of the children believed that he would not get older.

In comparing answers with such variables as the presence of older influencing siblings, experience with death, and the degree of religiosity in the home, the investigator found that the experience with death seemed to relate the most with answers about death. The other variable did not appear to have any pattern of relationship. Interestingly though, children answered about God regardless of their religious upbringing or lack of exposure to religion.

Conclusions

From the data presented in the preceding pages considered in the perspective of the review of the literature, the following conclusions were derived:

1. Children do think of death differently at different ages and stages of development.

2. Previous experience with death may bear some relationship to the child's present understanding of death.

3. The degree of religiosity in the home may bear some relationship to how the child sees God as a precipitator of death.

4. Immobility is associated with death.
Implications for Nursing

Children do hold their own unique conceptualization of death which is consistent with the age, previous experience with death, degree of religiosity in the home environment, and the stage of development. Before nurses attempt to help a family explain death to a youngster, initial steps should be taken to determine how the child presently views death. The nurse should be aware of developmental trends in conceptualization and the child's ability to grasp certain death-related concepts.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This researcher recommends that this study be replicated using:

1. A larger sample with equal numbers in each age group;
2. A more valid and shorter questionnaire;
3. Different strategies and techniques such as open-ended interviews and drawings to provide more information from the view of the child;
4. Children from various cultural groups as informants for cross-cultural comparisons.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to describe ideas children have about death, to compare these ideas with regard to age and stage of development, and to describe ideas which are voiced by children who have had, or have not had, experiences of death. Generalizations were made among groups of children who came from homes with different kinds of influencing factors contributing to the child's concept of death.

The conceptual framework was based on the idea that children belong to their own specific culture of childhood, that they are not "little adults," and that children differ in their ability to understand death-related concepts because of their age and/or stage of development.

Review of literature regarding children's ideas of death indicated a wealth of information as to how children conceptualized death and death-related topics. There was definite agreement that children continually alter their concepts of death as they grow until they come to view death in an adult manner.

The data for this study were collected, described, and compared using the frequencies of answers in the
children's and parents' questionnaires. The sample included thirty-three children between the ages of four through ten years of age. These children and respective parents were interviewed by the researcher in a southwestern community of approximately 300,000 population.

The limitations of the study were: (1) The sample was small. (2) The numbers in the three groups were not equal. (3) The children included in the study were referred for permission to be questioned about death and therefore the use of random sampling was not feasible. (4) The sample was composed of only English-speaking children and families of the Anglo middle class. (5) Attention was limited to conscious attitudes expressed verbally, for it was clear that the questionnaire would not allow for an adequate assessment of deep-seated and abstract beliefs.

All of the children in the sample responded to all questions. All of the parents were present during the interview with the child. There was a difference in answers between the three age groups, but a general pattern of differences could not be determined. Children in the six through seven years did seem to give wider varieties of answers, showing a tendency for this to be a transitional period in thinking.

In conclusion, the structured questionnaire proved to be a useful means of obtaining a description of the
child's conceptualization of death. All of the questions did not, however, lend themselves well to analysis and comparison between groups.

The study findings seem to support the belief that children of different ages and/or stages of development conceptualize death differently.
APPENDIX A

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

I, ____________________________ (parent or legal guardian), give my permission for Mrs. Jaynelle F. Stichler, R. N. to interview ____________________ (my son or daughter) concerning his/her ideas of death.

The title and purpose of the research study have been explained to me, and I have reviewed and approved the questions and pictures which will be presented to my child. I also grant permission for my answers and my child's answers to be used in the research study.

It is my understanding that neither my name nor my child's name will be known to anyone but Mrs. Jaynelle Stichler.

Signed _________________________

Date __________________________
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS
Date ______________________
Name ______________________
Age ______________________
Sex ______________________
Number of siblings _________
Rank in siblings __________

I. Name of religion ______________________

1. How often do you attend church services?  
   weekly  biweekly  monthly  occasionally  never

2. Does ______ attend services with you?   yes  no  dk

3. Does ______ attend Sunday School or  
   catechism (any child oriented service)?   yes  no  dk

4. Does ______ say prayers that you know  
   of?  yes  no  dk

5. Have you ever heard him mention death  
   in his prayers?  yes  no  dk

6. Does he have a favorite prayer that he  
   often recites? If yes, have parent  
   recite prayer; does it contain a death  
   related element?  yes  no  dk

7. Does the family say grace at meals?  
   If yes, how often? every meal  some  
   meals  occasionally  yes  no  dk

8. Does ______ have a favorite grace?  
   If yes, does it contain a death related  
   element?  yes  no  dk

9. To your knowledge, has ______ heard Bible  
   stories of death such as David and  
   Goliath and/or the crucifixion of  
   Christ?  yes  no  dk

10. Would you consider your family to be:  
    very religious  mod. religious  
    occas. religions  sl. rel.

II. Topics of conversation and death related  
   experiences

A 1. Is death ever discussed in your home?  yes  no  dk

2. Have you ever directly spoken with  
   ______ about death or explained a death  
   related topic to him?  yes  no  dk
3. Has ____ ever commented about or asked questions about death without your prompting? yes no dk
   If yes, what did the child ask or say?
4. Are war, natural disasters (earthquakes floods, hurricanes) discussed in your home? yes no dk
5. Does ____ watch crime shows, cowboy movies, or other death related topics on T.V.? yes no dk
6. Does ____ have nightmares which leave him frightened or crying? yes no dk

B 1. Has ____ ever had a relative or friend die? yes no dk
2. Was the friend or relative close or distant in relationship? close distant
3. How long ago did the friend or relative die?
4. How often did the child see the friend or relative before the death? often occas. seldom never
5. How old was the deceased at the time of death?
6. Did the child view the body after death? yes no dk
7. Did the child attend the funeral? yes no dk
8. Did the child go to the grave site? yes no dk
9. Did the child express fear of the body? yes no dk
10. Did the child ask any questions or comment on the death, burial, cremation after-life, spirit, or remains of the deceased? yes no dk
    If yes, what did the child say?
11. Did the person die of a lengthy illness, short illness, accident, or suicide? Underline one answer.
12. Did the child ever comment on the cause of death, such as "God's will," or that it might have been punishment for a wrong? yes no dk
    If yes, what was the child's comment?
13. Did you ever hear the child bless or pray for the deceased? yes no dk
14. Generally, how would you describe the child's attitude toward the death?

C 1. Has ____ ever had a pet die? yes no dk
   If yes, what kind of a pet?
2. How did you dispose of the dead pet? (choose one)
   a. Bury it in the presence of the child.
   b. Bury it without the child seeing it.
   c. Take to vet, humane society, etc. with the child accom.
   d. Take to vet, humane society, etc. without child accom.
3. Did you have a funeral for the pet? yes no dk
   If yes, were any prayers or eulogies said about the pet? yes no dk
4. Did the child touch the dead pet? yes no dk
5. Did the child express fear of the pet? yes no dk
6. How did the pet die?
7. Did the child comment on the cause of death: "God's will" punishment for the something the pet did punishment for something the child did
8. Generally, how would you describe the child's attitude toward the pet's death?
9. Did the child ever mention digging up the pet to see if it was still dead? yes no dk
Date__________________
Name__________________
Age__________________
Sex__________________
Number of siblings______
Rank in siblings______

Questions for picture A:

1. What's happening here:
   a. If no response about a dead bird: Is this bird different than the other birds? If yes: How is this bird different?
   b. If response includes that the bird is dead: How do you know that the bird is dead?

2. Can the bird move any more?
3. If things can't move, are they dead?
4. A chair can't move; is it dead?
5. Is a train alive? It moves.
6. Can this bird wake up?
7. Is this bird different from a sleeping bird? If yes: How is this bird different from a sleeping bird?
8. Can this bird breathe?
9. If a fairy princess came along with a magic wand, would the bird wake up? Does this ever really happen?

Questions for picture B:

1. What is happening here?
2. If the bird is buried under the ground, will he go to heaven?
3. Will all or part of the bird go to heaven? If part; Which part will go to heaven? (If the child does not respond "soul" or "spirit": Will the bird's soul or spirit go to heaven?
4. If the bird was good before he died, will he be able to wake up on earth again? Will he be able to wake up in heaven?
5. If the bird was bad before he died, will he be able to wake up on earth again? Will he be able to wake up in heaven?

Questions for picture C:

1. What's happening in this picture?
2. What do you suppose happened to this bird to make him die? Make up a story: Circle one: accidental inevitable
   Does death happen by accident or on purpose?
3. Could the bird have "just died" for no reason at all?
4. Do you suppose that God might have had something to do with this bird dying? If yes: What did God have to do with it?
5. If the little boy had wanted the bird to be dead, could that have caused the bird to die?
6. Could the little boy have caused the bird to die by thinking about it?
7. If the bird was bad before he died, could he have died because he was being punished? Do you know what "punished" means? (Accept any reasonably close definition) If yes: Who punished him?
8. Was the bird an old or young bird?
9. Can either an old or young bird die?

Questions for picture D:
1. What's happening in this picture?
2. How do you think the bird's family feels?
3. Will the bird's family see him again on earth?

Questions for picture E:
1. What's happening in this picture?
2. Will the dead bird be able to grow any more?
3. Will he get older or have any more birthdays?
4. What will the dead bird eat?
5. What does the word "death" or "dead" make you think of?
6. Can you name the other animals in this picture?
7. How many birds that are alive are in this picture?

Miscellaneous comments from the child during or after the interview:
APPENDIX D

ILLUSTRATIONS USED WITH THE CHILDREN'S QUESTIONNAIRE

The following five illustrations were designed by the researcher for the purpose of focusing the child's thinking toward a life and death theme. Each illustration was used with a block of questions from the questionnaire.
APPENDIX E

FREQUENCY OF ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS REGARDING CONCEPTS OF DEATH
Table 1. Cause of Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I</th>
<th>Group II</th>
<th>Group III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-</td>
<td>4-5 yrs.</td>
<td>6-7 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sponses</td>
<td>N=6</td>
<td>N=9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What happened to make the bird die?</td>
<td>acc.**</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>purp.**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could the bird have &quot;just died&quot; for no reason at all?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk***</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you suppose God might have something to do with this bird dying?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If the little boy had wanted the bird to be dead, could that have caused the bird to die?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Could the little boy have caused the bird to die by thinking about it?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If the bird was bad before he died, could he have died because he was being punished?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*accident  
**on purpose  
***don't know
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs.</th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs.</th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Who punished him?</td>
<td>NA****</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Was the bird</td>
<td>old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an old bird or a young bird?</td>
<td>young</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Can either an old bird or a</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>young bird die?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Does this happen in &quot;real</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life&quot;? Can either old or young</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people die?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***Not applicable
### Table 2. Mobility and Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I N=6</th>
<th>Group II N=9</th>
<th>Group III N=18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can the bird move anymore?</td>
<td>yes 0</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 6</td>
<td>no 8</td>
<td>no 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If things can't move, are they dead?</td>
<td>yes 4</td>
<td>yes 5</td>
<td>yes 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 2</td>
<td>no 4</td>
<td>no 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A chair can't move, Is it dead?</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 2</td>
<td>no 7</td>
<td>no 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk* 1</td>
<td>dk* 1</td>
<td>dk* 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is a train alive? It moves.</td>
<td>yes 4</td>
<td>yes 5</td>
<td>yes 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 2</td>
<td>no 4</td>
<td>no 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*don't know
Table 3. Spatial Concepts and Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs.</th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs.</th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses N=6</td>
<td>N=9</td>
<td>N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. If the bird is buried under the ground, will he go to heaven?</td>
<td>yes 4 6 16</td>
<td>no 1 3 2</td>
<td>dk* 1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Will all or part of the bird go to heaven?</td>
<td>all 2 4 16</td>
<td>part 3 5 2</td>
<td>dk 1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Which part of the bird will go to heaven?</td>
<td>A 3 4 1</td>
<td>B 1 1 2</td>
<td>C 0 2 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D 1 1 1</td>
<td>A = not applicable</td>
<td>E 0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B = spirit</td>
<td>F 0 0 1</td>
<td>C = soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D = body</td>
<td>E = insides, brain</td>
<td>F = none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*don't know
Table 4. Reversibility and Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs.</th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs.</th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can this bird wake up?</td>
<td>yes 0, no 6</td>
<td>yes 1, no 8</td>
<td>yes 1, no 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is he different from a sleeping bird?</td>
<td>yes 6, no 0</td>
<td>yes 8, no 1</td>
<td>yes 18, no 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If a fairy princess came along with a magic wand, would the bird wake up?</td>
<td>yes 5, no 1</td>
<td>yes 9, no 0</td>
<td>yes 12, no 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Does this happen in &quot;real life&quot;?</td>
<td>yes 2, no 3, dk 1</td>
<td>yes 2, no 7, dk 16</td>
<td>yes 2, no 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If this bird was good before he died, will he wake up on earth again?</td>
<td>yes 2, no 4</td>
<td>yes 4, no 5</td>
<td>yes 6, no 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Will he wake up in heaven?</td>
<td>yes 3, no 2, dk 1</td>
<td>yes 8, no 1, dk 17</td>
<td>yes 1, no 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If this bird was bad before he died, will he wake up on earth again?</td>
<td>yes 0, no 6, dk 0</td>
<td>yes 0, no 0, dk 16</td>
<td>yes 1, no 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Will he wake up in heaven?</td>
<td>yes 0, no 5, dk 1</td>
<td>yes 1, no 8, dk 17</td>
<td>yes 1, no 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*don't know
Table 5. State after Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group II</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group III</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>N=6</td>
<td>4-5 yrs.</td>
<td>N=9</td>
<td>6-7 yrs.</td>
<td>N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Can this bird breathe any more?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Will the dead bird be able to grow any more?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Will he get older or have any more birthday?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Will the dead bird eat anything?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS COMPARING RELIGION, EXPERIENCE WITH DEATH, AND PRESENCE OF OLDER SIBLINGS
Table 6. Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs., N=6</th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs., N=9</th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs., N=18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. If the bird was buried under the ground, will he go to heaven?</td>
<td>yes 4</td>
<td>yes 4</td>
<td>yes 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 0</td>
<td>no 3</td>
<td>no 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk* 0</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you suppose that God might have had something to do with this bird dying?</td>
<td>yes 3</td>
<td>yes 5</td>
<td>yes 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 1</td>
<td>no 2</td>
<td>no 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk 0</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If the bird was bad before he died, could he have died because he was being punished?</td>
<td>yes 2</td>
<td>yes 2</td>
<td>yes 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 0</td>
<td>no 5</td>
<td>no 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dk 2</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Who punished him?</td>
<td>A 1</td>
<td>A 5</td>
<td>A 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A = not applicable</td>
<td>B 2</td>
<td>B 1</td>
<td>B 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B = God</td>
<td>C 0</td>
<td>C 0</td>
<td>C 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C = boy</td>
<td>D 0</td>
<td>D 0</td>
<td>D 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D = other</td>
<td>dk 1</td>
<td>dk 1</td>
<td>dk 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*don't know
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs., N = 6</th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs., N = 9</th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs., N = 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How old was the deceased at the time of death?</td>
<td>old 4</td>
<td>old 1</td>
<td>old 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>young 0</td>
<td>young 6</td>
<td>young 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Can either an old bird or a young bird die?</td>
<td>yes 3</td>
<td>yes 6</td>
<td>yes 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 1</td>
<td>no 1</td>
<td>no 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does this happen in &quot;real life&quot;? Can either old or young people die?</td>
<td>yes 3</td>
<td>yes 6</td>
<td>yes 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no 1</td>
<td>no 1</td>
<td>no 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Was the bird old or young?</td>
<td>old 4</td>
<td>old 3</td>
<td>old 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>young 0</td>
<td>young 4</td>
<td>young 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Experience with Human Death
Table 8. Experience with a Pet Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs., N = 6</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs., N = 9</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs., N = 18</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Had experience</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>Had experience</td>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>Had experience</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How did the pet die?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A=accident B=killed</td>
<td>A=accident B=killed</td>
<td></td>
<td>A=accident B=killed</td>
<td></td>
<td>A=accident B=killed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C=natural death</td>
<td>C=natural death</td>
<td></td>
<td>C=natural death</td>
<td></td>
<td>C=natural death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D=illness</td>
<td>D=illness</td>
<td></td>
<td>D=illness</td>
<td></td>
<td>D=illness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What happened to make the bird die?</td>
<td>acc.* 3</td>
<td>acc.* 2</td>
<td>acc.* 4</td>
<td>acc.* 2</td>
<td>acc.* 5</td>
<td>acc.* 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Could the bird have &quot;just died&quot; for no reason at all?</td>
<td>yes 2</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 2</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 8</td>
<td>yes 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If the little boy had wanted the bird to be dead, could that have caused the bird to die?</td>
<td>yes 4</td>
<td>no 0</td>
<td>yes 6</td>
<td>no 1</td>
<td>yes 12</td>
<td>no 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Could the little boy have caused the bird to die by thinking about it?</td>
<td>yes 3</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 3</td>
<td>yes 0</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
<td>yes 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*accident
#purpose
+don't know
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Group I 4-5 yrs. N=6</th>
<th>Group II 6-7 yrs. N=9</th>
<th>Group III 8-10 yrs. N=18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Older Siblings</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Older Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. If the little boy had wanted the bird to be dead, could that have caused the bird to die?</td>
<td>yes 2 yes 0 no 1 no 3</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 1 no 5 no 2</td>
<td>yes 2 yes 1 no 10 no 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could the little boy have caused the bird to die by thinking about it?</td>
<td>yes 2 yes 2 no 1 no 1 dk* 0</td>
<td>yes 3 yes 1 no 2 no 2 dk 0</td>
<td>yes 2 yes 1 no 10 no 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Will the dead bird grow any more?</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 0 no 2 no 3</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 0 no 5 no 3</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 1 no 11 no 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Will he get older or have any more birthdays?</td>
<td>yes 2 yes 2 no 1 no 1 dk 0</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 1 no 5 no 1</td>
<td>yes 6 yes 1 no 6 no 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Will the dead bird eat?</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 0 no 2 no 3</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 0 no 5 no 5</td>
<td>yes 1 yes 0 no 11 no 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*don't know.
REFERENCES CITED


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