

funeral industry has changed from small, family-owned funeral homes to larger, funeral corporations or multinational conglomerates. Irrespective of the organization type, the survival of the funeral industry depends on its ability to adapt to consumer needs. In many cultures, consumers demand a wide variety of funeral types; people want to personalize their funerals. In the United States, death wishes show an increasing rejection of embalming. Instead, the bereaved may want their loved one's ashes made into diamonds or sent to the moon. A number of Japanese housewives wish to be buried, not in their husband's ancestral grave, but in a collective women's grave or to have their ashes scattered under a tree. The funeral industry is an adopter of cultural and social changes, and at the same time, a producer of the new services and products consumers demand. However, the funeral industry does not craft a fusion of global funeral culture. Although the funeral industry may export a ceremonial performance (e.g., exporting embalming from the United States to the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Japan, and elsewhere), and the techniques used are similar across countries, their interpretation and its value in the ceremony are unique to each culture. Hence, the funeral industry will continue to conform to social changes and consumer needs, while creating homogeneity in the funerary culture they serve.

Hikaru Suzuki

See also Commodification of Death; Death Care Industry; Embalming; Funeral Home; Funeral Industry, Unethical Practices; Funerals; Funerals and Funeralization in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Further Readings

- Howarth, G. (1996). *Last rites: The work of the modern funeral director*. Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- Laderman, G. (2003). *Rest in peace: A cultural history of death and the funeral home in twentieth-century America*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Midford, J. (1963). *The American way of death*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Parsons, B. (1999). Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The lifecycle of the UK funeral industry. *Mortality*, 4(2), 127–145.
- Pine, V. R., & Philips, D. L. (1970). The cost of dying: A sociological analysis of funeral expenditures. *Social Problems*, 17(3), 405–417.

Suzuki, H. (2000). *The price of death: The funeral industry in contemporary Japan*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Walter, T. (2005). Three ways to arrange a funeral: Mortuary variation in the modern West. *Mortality*, 10(3), 173–192.

FUNERAL INDUSTRY, UNETHICAL PRACTICES

Family members are particularly vulnerable at the time of the death of a loved one to feelings of guilt and despair. This vulnerability can lead to magnifying the processes of rites and rituals involved in funerary practices. Individuals who are involved in the for-profit funeral industry know these psychological phenomena and find it easy to exploit the vulnerable in order to profit handsomely from providing funerary services.

Widespread ethical problems in the funeral industry were first highlighted by the 1963 muckraking exposé, *The American Way of Death*, written by Jessica Mitford with her husband, Robert Treuhaft. Mitford's book exposed a range of practices seemingly designed to maximize the cost of funerals. They ranged from outright deceptions, such as telling consumers that embalming was a legal requirement, to providing underwear and universal "fitafut" shoes, even when only the upper part of the corpse was to be displayed in a split lid casket. Mitford's graphic description of embalming in particular enraged readers of the book, which quickly became a best seller.

The public outcry that followed its publication prompted the U.S. Congress to hold hearings on the funeral industry. Eventually the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued its Funeral Rule in 1984, which sought to end the secrecy surrounding funeral costs and the practice of forcing all consumers to pay for all services, whether wanted or not. The rule requires that consumers be given complete and itemized cost information for specific services to be provided.

Although the Funeral Rule led to more accurate and easily understood information, the funeral industry adopted marketing practices designed to represent the funeral home personnel as friendly and supportive of grieving families, appealing to a

combination of guilt and gratitude to encourage decisions for more expensive options. The revised practices of a revived funeral industry prompted Mitford and Truhft to write a second scathing indictment of the funeral industry. In *The American Way of Death Revisited* (published 2 years after Mitford's death in 1996), Mitford adopts a journalistic technique of accurate reporting with devastating effectiveness. Starting with the task of identifying, characterizing, and attracting the customer base, Mitford details everything from the analysis of the ability to pay by the bereaved, the choice of language in describing the services and products offered by funeral homes, the procedures employed in preparing the deceased for viewing, the range of caskets and their strategic array in showrooms and catalogs, to the final item: the vault and the techniques for its sale.

Characterizing the Customer

Funeral directors are acutely aware of the pending financial resources of families that are in the process of dealing with settling the estate of a recently deceased relative. Some of the resources are predictable from the decedent's history of employment. Minimally they include the death benefit from Social Security. Often there are paid-up insurance policies intended for "final expenses"; larger policies, pension benefits, and stock accounts may provide a considerable amount of cash to the immediate family. In a smaller community, the funeral home owner can calculate with great accuracy the available cash and can plan the funerary services to be offered accordingly.

Language

Funeral home directors are trained in their schooling in language calculated so as to build the confidence of the customer in the director's wise counsel. An embalmer is now a "dermasurgeon." Funeral directors have appropriated the title and role of "grief therapist," despite usually lacking any training in clinical psychology. The industry from time to time publishes lists of "in" and "out" words and phrases to be used in grief counseling: These lists are occasionally revised. Since 1916, handling the corpse has evolved from "prepare body" to "prepare remains" or "prepare (decedent's

name)." Coffins have become "caskets"; morgues "preparation rooms"; a stillborn child is "your baby/infant"; the dead are now "the deceased"; ashes have become "cremains" or "cremated remains," and so forth. The word *death* is not to be used; thus, a death certificate is a "vital statistic form." Graves are "opened" and "closed" rather than dug and filled. And the deceased have not died; they have "expired." Directors never refer to the cost of the casket but rather speak glowingly of "the amount of investment in the service." And above all, cremation never occurs in a retort or oven; it is a "cremation chamber" or "vault": "language dictated by sensitivity to the bereaved relative's sensitive feelings."

Preparation of the Corpse

Different preparations are needed depending on the state of the body upon death. An individual who has had the fortune to die suddenly in his or her bed still looks gruesome: blood pools in the lowest parts of the body; sphincters suddenly lose their tonus, releasing fecal matter and urine. Many automobile deaths are traumatic, involving loss of limbs or head or torso. Still worse are the results of assault by others. Some difficult preparations are those in which death has followed torturous mutilation. The mortician is thus faced with an enormous challenge to prepare the decedent for final viewing by friends and family, seeking to erase the horror resulting from identification viewing and replace it with a final image more in keeping with the perception that "he/she looks like he/she is sleeping," perhaps the highest compliment to the mortician's artistic skill.

Because bodily decay starts rapidly, a decedent who is to be viewed (and perhaps shipped home first) must be washed and embalmed. But embalming, started during the Civil War so soldiers could be shipped home, is not the procedure of the Egyptians; its aim is to carry the deceased for the few days between death and burial or cremation during which friends and loved ones "say their good-byes." "Grievance counselors" solemnly assure those who remain behind that final viewing is healthy and facilitates the grieving process, even though there have been no adequate controlled studies that provide such evidence.

All this cosmetic work, the replacement of lost limbs, smoothing with wax and airbrushed colors

the face ravaged by injury or savagery, is necessary only if viewing is to occur. And here, social custom and expectation, fanned by such celebrated phenomena as state funerals, dictate that the closer one can approximate such a spectacle, the greater the value accorded to the deceased.

The Casket

Morticians are acutely aware that the single most profitable element in the optimal funeral is the casket. Caskets and cosmetics are essential elements in creating the illusion that the clock has been wound back to before the death event. A decedent well prepared for viewing, perhaps dressed in a favorite dress or smoking jacket, holding a Bible or pipe, wearing the rings and keys and pins of a lifetime of exemplary learning and service, all contribute to the illusion that he or she "is just sleeping."

Morticians' conferences present empirical research on how the display of caskets may be staged to increase the likelihood that a more expensive model is chosen. The array is not by cost, but presents options in an order that seems to deflect attention from price and toward appearance and quality. Tendencies to turn one way or another when entering a room full of caskets have been determined by behavioral studies: As most individuals are right-handed and tend to turn in that direction, more expensive options are placed to the right of the door to the display room. If a customer is left-handed, a door on the opposite side of the display room is the preferred point of entry, so that the natural tendency to turn first to the left will be met by the more expensive options.

The Second Casket

A major part of the illusions surrounding funerary practices is the idea that decay can be held at bay, not merely through embalming, but also through burial in "hermetically sealed" caskets placed in a brick or concrete vault, sometimes lined with lead. Individuals agreeing to these structures usually do so in the belief that they prevent air, water, worms, and bacteria from getting to the deceased's remains. In truth, the vault serves only the interests of the cemetery as it

prevents collapse of the soil above the casket as the latter, and its contents, degenerate.

Cremation

Cremation of the deceased became increasingly popular after the publication of the first Mitford work. Cremation can be achieved for a few hundred dollars and does not require a casket. The dead individual can be transported directly from the death bed to the crematorium in a body bag. Ashes, depending on the wishes of the consumer, can be returned to the family in a tin box or in an urn of almost any price. Most states permit ashes to be scattered in public lands or buried in a cemetery or even a backyard.

What Is Ethical and Unethical

When it was discovered that a Tennessee man had accepted money for cremating bodies which he had piled up instead of cremating, everyone agreed that this was unethical. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to get agreement on every practice that an individual consumer may consider unethical.

The major effort of the FTC in enacting rules to regulate the funeral industry has been to stop deliberate misrepresentation by morticians of facts and laws. Telling the bereaved that embalming is a legal requirement, even for cremation, to combat the spread of infectious disease is banned, as are other practices such as not offering a detailed price list of unbundled services. But the FTC makes no requirement that individuals who seek funerary services not be unduly influenced by guilt or the pressure of peer expectations, long a requirement of informed consent in medicine and human subjects research. The result is that, given the psychological sophistication of modern marketing methods and sales psychology, the funeral industry regards itself as ethical when it gives the public what it wants rather than the minimum of what it needs.

The public needs means of disposing of the dead in such a way that public health is preserved. It needs its sensitivities served by proper respect for remains. It needs a place and time for family and friends to gather and memorialize the deceased. All else serves the dubious human characteristics of status and making atonement that is too late.

Still, allowing for the psychological manipulation that any successful salesperson of real estate or automobiles practices, and thanks to the Funeral Rule of the FTC, most practices of the funeral industry do not fall clearly into the category of the unethical. In that respect, the caveat emptor admonition is the remaining protection for the consumer.

The Not-for-Profit Way

Some 200 nonprofit, volunteer-run memorial societies in the United States and Canada provide opportunities for advance planning and guidance at the time of execution of those plans. A small fee paid to one such society entitles the member to the services of any society at the location of the individual's death. Most of these societies belong to the Continental Association of Funeral and Memorial Societies or the Memorial Society Association of Canada. They can help structure such options as a home wake, rental of a casket, and burial without involvement of a funeral home.

A final option is body donation to a research medical school. Cadaver donation is intended for training medical students and advanced study by medical physicians. Donor cards may be obtained from Continental Association of Funeral Memorial Societies, Inc. As a medical school may decline the offer, alternative plans should be made.

Irene E. Leech and Richard T. Hull

See also Burial Laws; Economic Impact of Death on the Family; Embalming; Funeral Industry; Pre-Need Arrangements

Further Readings

- Mitford, J. (1978). *The American way of death* (Rev. ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster. (Original work published 1963)
- Mitford, J. (2000). *The American way of death revisited* (Paperback ed.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1998)

FUNERAL MUSIC

Associating various kinds of performing arts to the most important events occurring in people's

lives is a common feature of human culture. Prayer staging, singing, and dancing are commonly met at solemn occasions such as births, initiation rites, marriages, and funerals, as well as more specific rites of passage as, for example, ordination in some churches. But perhaps the association of these rites and music is nowhere as frequently met as with funeral practices, except in those religious contexts where music as a whole is forbidden, such as in the most radical tendencies within Islam. Singing and instrument playing are universally conspicuous. In Western culture, funeral music has given way to a special musical genre that is commonly called the *requiem*, from the Latin form of prayers dedicated to the deceased in the Catholic Church.

Specialists in the field of rituals as applied to funeral procedures generally distinguish between three types of rituals: (a) rituals of separation: the deceased is said good-bye to by the community as he or she leaves the realm of the living through the words of an officiant (e.g., a priest or a prayer leader of some sort); (b) rituals of translation, from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead; (c) rituals of welcome, at the threshold of the realm of the dead, once again an officiant or a group of welcomers. Music, accompanied or not by songs, can be heard at every stage of the whole set of rituals. In the Catholic Church, the rituals of separation are perhaps the most important since the contemporary funeral corteges have relinquished the pageantry of ancient times and that the burial itself, being held in open air, is rarely an occasion for much singing and music playing. Moreover, except for prominent people, the funeral ceremonies of today are often reduced to some perfunctory praying and speaking. In most cremation ceremonies, however, records are played, which are chosen in accordance with the deceased's tastes. This now occurs also in some religious funerals.

Requiems, From Dufay to Britten

At the beginning and at the end of the sung Mass of the Dead, the officiant begins his last oration by the words "*Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine*" (Give him/her, Lord, eternal rest). The word *requiem* applies to a special kind of mass, to which many illustrious composers have given their names. Mozart is the best known of them. But others such