

## ***Mass-Observation in the 1990s***

### **Spring Directive 1994**

#### **PART 1: Death and Bereavement**

##### ***Personal experiences and beliefs:***

*You should feel free to approach this subject in a way that suits you and your experience.*

Do you remember when you first became aware of death? Can you describe this - taking into account your age, the circumstances, your parents' attitudes and any memories you have of ceremonies or specific occasions. Please write as fully as you can, and if you can recapture your feelings at the time, please describe them.

Can you describe how your understanding of death and dying has changed as you have grown older?

We would like to find out how you *now* feel about death and dying. Do you think about death very much? Have you made any practical preparations for your own death or for the deaths of people close to you?

In what ways are your attitudes towards death, dying and mortality influenced by religious or spiritual beliefs? Please explain. For example, do you feel that death is final, or do you believe in life after death? Do you believe in reincarnation? When you think about "death", do you have some kind of mental image?

The supernatural - what are your views, for example, do you believe in ghosts? Have you ever attended a séance?

What experiences have you had of people dying? If you have professional experience, please explain and comment. If you feel able, perhaps you could write about any experience of bereavement you have had. We would be interested to know what kind of support and comfort you were able to obtain - for example, from friends and family, from professionals, from the ceremonial arrangements, or from any other source.

What does the term "dying before his/her time" mean to you? Do you feel that there is a right or wrong time of life at which to die?

##### ***Death and society:***

Do you believe that our society respects the dead? Do you think that our society *should* respect the dead? How do you think the treatment of death and of people dying has changed over the years?

How do you think children should learn about death? If you have children of your own, how did/do you handle this question?

What are your views on cremation and burial? Please also write about your views on the various rituals and ceremonies surrounding death. Please feel free to write about your views on and experiences of cultural variations in this country and in other countries.

What do you think about the portrayal of death and dying in the media?

##### ***Violent death:***

There has been a lot of media attention given to "serial killers". In this section, we would be grateful if you would comment. Some questions are:

What does the term 'serial killer' mean to you? When did you first become aware of the term? If possible, give the names of six or more serial killers.

In your opinion, are serial killers a recent phenomenon? Could you describe when and how you first learnt about serial killers? Which case was it? What was your source of information?

How do you think a serial killer differs from an 'ordinary' murderer? What do you think makes a serial killer become that way?

Do you think that serial killing is on the increase?

Did you see the film, "The Silence of the Lambs"? What did you think of it? Do you read (or watch on TV) crime thrillers or detective stories which depict murder? Please give some recent examples if you do.

Does the portrayal of serial killers in books and films like "The Silence of the Lambs" fit with your assumptions about serial killers? What do you think about the treatment of serial killers in the media?

Have the recent cases and/or portrayals of serial killers made you more nervous and cautious of the dangers? Please describe how your behaviour has changed as a result.

## **PART 2: Autobiographies & Diaries**

*As you know, I spent some of my time last year working on a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council called "Literacy Practices and the M-O Project". This meant that I had time to read over lots of directive replies in detail and we also managed to interview a small number of M-O correspondents. This project finished officially last November, but my co-researcher, Brian Street, and I are still working on the subject and hope to publish at least two books in 1995. This section then is a development of that work. It also complements an evening course I am teaching in adult education at Sussex in "autobiography" in the context of life history work. I would be very interested in your comments, reflections and everyday activities in relation to the subjects below. Thank you in (eager) anticipation - Dorothy.*

**Autobiography:** Have you ever written or started to write your autobiography?

If you have, please describe how old you were when you thought about it, why you think you were prompted to think about doing it, how far you got with it, what kind of research or investigations, if any, you made (eg interviewing people, reading old letters and diaries, looking up family records, etc). Did you have publication in mind? If you completed it, where is it now and who has read it?

If you have never written or wanted to write your autobiography, or tried and given up, please give your views on the subject. If I asked you to write your autobiography now, what would you feel?

Do you think of writing for Mass-Observation as autobiography?

Do you read autobiographies? If so, what kind? Can you explain why you like them?

**Diaries:** do you keep a diary? If the answer is NEVER, you need read no further, but if you once did, please try to answer the questions below as far as they relate to your past practice:

Please describe how you go about it, or once went about it. Some questions I have are: Is it completely private? Do you write it every day? When do you write it? Do you send it, or a version of it to us at the Archive? Do you show it to other people?

What does it cover - events, feelings, ideas, all of these, or none? How long have you done it? Where do you store it? Do you re-read it? How does it relate to your other writing, if you do any other?

Why do you think you keep it? If you were suddenly unable to keep it, how would you feel?

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