

# Death in today's society essay



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Death Taboo Introduction Death distances humans from life, is what death is thought of today. Death that is the strongest proof of humans being mortals is denied on its face value by the modern age people. People try to escape death and defeat its existence to live a fearless life that maximizes their pleasure for eternity. The phobia against death has made people avoid discussing death in public, and today it has become a taboo, like pornography was in the medieval ages.

Sociologists and thinkers such as Gorer, Moller and Cline have studied the subject in great detail with solid research and a concerted effort they have recognized the changed behavior of people towards death. Instead of accepting its existence and getting on with the reality: that we have to leave this world one day, people deny death. This is reflected in their behavior towards death rituals and gatherings. Discussing death or the deceased is considered to be strange in today's society. People that speak of death or the dead people face prudery at the hands of their social environment.

Thus, death has become a taboo, or something that should not be talked about. This situation was not always the case; in fact this is a modern day development. This transition in the reactions of people with respect to death, as noted, studied and explained by Gorer and his proponents is known as Taboo Thesis. In this paper a discussion will be made on the following thesis statement, " Death, today, is treated as a fearsome, alien phenomena and has become a taboo, with lesser and lesser people concerned about it. "

Contribution from Gorer

Geoffrey Gorer, born in 1905, was a renowned English Anthropologist. He spent his life in understanding the nature of humans and how do they get along with different variation in their lives. One of his greatest contributions to the field of Sociology is his work and research on the notion of death, the transition that it has been through the ages and its prevalent status in the current world order, categorically the United Kingdom. Very interestingly Gorer compares the treatment of death in the modern society with that of the notion of pornography in the Victorian Era.

This creative and analytical thinking ability of Gorer made him stand out from other thinkers and anthropologists and thus his work has become exceedingly significant for scholars in order to expand their horizons of study on death or other related areas (Gorer 1955). Gorer compares the treatment of the notion of pornography in the Victorian era with that of the treatment of death in the contemporary world. In the Victorian era pornography was considered to be a highly intimate affair and discussion in public was considered to be an “ eye-brow” raising issue that would lead to prudery in the society if projected.

Gorer does not approve of such reactions as he believes that copulation and sex are issues known to people in general, so veiling them does not make a lot of sense as people tend to speak about issues that they are aware of, so the same must hold true for pornography as well. This argument is aesthetically forwarded by Gorer regarding death and the reaction of people to it in the contemporary world. Gorer opines that death is as big a truth in life as life itself, but today people try to evade from its existence in a manner

that is similar to the Victorian era where people avoided sex and obscenity related discussions in public.

Gorer believes that the society is distancing itself from the acceptance of a universal fact, and truth, and perhaps this is something that one would agree with as well (Gorer 1955). A contemporary example Let's consider the Somalian drought, termed as the " worst humanitarian crisis" by the UN. It is on the verge of engulfing the lives of more than 700, 000 humans in the months to come. This drought has shown the real face of humans to themselves, but it's such a pity that we still don't seem to care.

No matter how steep the death toll is, no matter how severe a disaster, people just continue living their own lives, for life has become as convenient as it has never been before. Joseph Stalin was absolutely spot on when he coined his famous quote " a death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic". No better sentence in the world could depict how we act to events such as the Somalian drought. Humans are so indifferent to everything that is happening around them, and have become so self-centered that they simply don't care who died outside their circle.

This goes for the entire human race for the most part, and not a particular class or segment of the society. A prominent example of the hedonistic approach that has taken as the sole path of our lives is the Annual Tomatina Festival in Spain. More than 90, 000 pounds of tomatoes, tantamount to several hundred thousand tomatoes, are wasted in this festival, for what is termed as " for fun". The event has more than 20, 000 tourists from around

the world, spending Dollars and Euros to attend this futile activity, participating actively (One India Living 2011).

That is exactly what Gorer depicted. We treat death to be something really personal and not worth mentioning or discussing in public. This transition has come about with the change in people's attitudes towards death and their eloping from religion and scriptures. We have to die one day and that day could be any day, but we just don't want to know which day it is because we simply don't care. We want to maximize pleasures and avoid pain and we, today, have become more self-centered and rational; so as far as we are happy, the world is a good place to live in.

This ideology was forwarded by Gorer in the post World War II era and one can claim that his thinking was influenced by the innumerable deaths that were incurred during that period. However Gorer is not alone with his conception of alienation of death and bereavements from the society, in fact Aries is pretty much a proponent of the same (Gorer 1955). Walter's Perspective On the other hand Tony Walter, born in 1948, a freelance writer and a sociologist on the subject of Death and Society, has a different chain of thoughts.

Walter has conducted a lot of research regarding the reaction of people towards death and he came up with sound observations and claims. He is not of the opinion that death in the modern age has become a taboo. In fact, he declares that the modern society is much more concerned with deaths, and as a ground to this argument he presents the mass media as the evidence. He says that today in newspapers and in electronic media we see

that the news of deaths is overwhelmingly dominating. He says that deaths were not given more importance in the past.

Today the leading newspapers of the world publish death reports and publications on the front page and there never was a time in history where deaths were subjected to more seriousness and significance. A recent example of this is the notorious events of Tottenham in 2011 where one death triggered the masses to cause riots and challenge the establishment of the law enforcing authorities in UK (Walter 1991). The work of Moller The argument here is not only about the discussion of death, bereavement practices and rituals exercised in public, but also the message taken by people from the deaths of their loved ones. Dr. David Wendell Moller sheds light on a beautiful concept entailing death. He expresses the significance of death to life and claims that death is not an end in itself, in fact it is the beginning of an eternal and illuminated journey of salvation. Dr Moller, also known as Dr. Death among his students and colleagues in the School of Medicine, IUPUI, has conducted research on the subject of Death and Dying and he has also noted a prominent transformation in the beliefs of people regarding death.

Like Gorer, Moller maintains the view that in the early time before the 19th Century death was celebrated in a humble manner. People used to gather to talk about the life of the person who had just died. The family, friends and acquaintances used to share various incidents and experiences associated with the departed soul. This was a useful social exercise as it did not only give chance to the family members of the deceased person to mourn and share their sorrows with others but it also served as a platform where people could remind themselves of their ultimate faith and get prepared to face it.

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With the passage of time this concept has depleted and now instead of facing death as the sole truth of life people either tend to evade it, avoid it, deny it and sometimes even defeat it. This act of avoiding death has led to curious psychological dilemmas among people. Now they see death as being horror, fearsome and ugly and that is why they don't want to talk about it anymore (Moller 1996). Cline and the fear of death in women This elevating fear in the minds of people regarding death is also acknowledged by Dr. Sally Cline. In her book " Lifting the Taboo" she goes out an extra mile and brings the fear of death in women to limelight.

With respect to her research she says that women are afraid of dying today. The fear is not of the fact that they have not done anything to please the Almighty, but the fear is astonishingly for materialistic reasons. People fear death because they perceive death to be something that will snatch their worldly pleasures from them. People evade the notion of dying because they don't want to submit their wills and themselves to an eternal entity, God. People want to pursue their dreams till eternity and want to be the commanders of their destinies and fates.

This is where we once again come to the view points of Gorer and Moller that today death has become a taboo. People don't talk about it and thus they don't know anything about it. Cline also discusses some of the most prominent and standout sources of fear for death in women and not surprisingly the fear was related to their household, love, relations, children and affection. With this entire discussion in hand and the views of different thinkers and sociologists taken into consideration we can sum up the discussion into the concluding phase (Cline 1995). Conclusion

Death, the greatest truth on earth after life is treated as a taboo in today's world. People in the modern day life try to turn their backs when it comes to talking about death. Death is treated as something that is either a curse or lower cast argument not worth discussing in public. A lot of people also take the topic of death and dying as highly private, intimate and personal and it is not the place of friends, relatives and even parents to talk about it with them. This avoidance of the acceptance of the realm of death is forcing modern age into a state of denial.

The dilemma is so severe that we have stopped the process of self talk as well, and we just want to deny and defy death. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Moller is of the opinion that death has been captured by mass media much more than it has been covered historically. Perhaps this is the reason that people avoid discussing death in public circles, because it is already been discussed everywhere. But the discussion of death in newspapers or electronic media is not for the sake of self evaluation, or for the spiritual good of humans, it is in fact covered like any other news item where statistics are mentioned and that's it.

The people, to whom media is aimed at, have now started looking at death in quantitative terms rather than its subjectivity. Death is not seen as the beginning of a new life by the people today. Under the current circumstances where we see consistent deaths recurring all over the globe in Haiti, Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya and Turkey by means of natural disasters and human activities people have started treating death as a taboo. Deaths are occurring so frequently and so quickly that people have started fearing and



they don't want to let that fear overcome their lives and devastate their spirits and efforts.

People want to live the moment and in the urge to do so they have distanced themselves from morality. People have become hedonistic. In the drive to avoid discussing death, people today have involuntarily forgotten about death. Those who talk about death are either looked down upon or are perceived to be puritanical in their approach towards life and that is exactly how death has become a taboo in today's world. Denying death and eloping from its acceptance will do no good. The media, the family and the society needs to play a role, a role to revive the forgotten norms and values of death.

The media is also obliged to edify the masses and bring them closer to humanity and nature. Talking about death, or those who are dead in a family gathering shall not be done with the aim of becoming puritanical or acquiring necrophilia, in fact the purpose should be to accept a reality and to get on with it without thinking about escaping it. This will bring us closer to the life, and will give us motivation and better reasons to become a better human being, and to play our role in the welfare of the society. References David Wendell Moller. *Dying and Historical Context.* " *Confronting Death.* New York, Oxford University Press. 1996. Geoffrey Gorer. " *Pornography of Death.* " *Death, Grief and Mourning.* " Doubleday and Company. 1955. Sally Cline. " *Earlier Times, Other Cultures and Religions.* " *Lifting the Taboo.* New York University Press. 1995. Sally Cline. " *Mortal Messages.* " *Lifting the Taboo.* New York University Press. 1995. Tony Walter, " *Modern death: taboo or*

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