TRANSCENDING DEATH DURING EARLY ADULTHOOD: SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY, DEATH ANXIETY, AND PURPOSE IN LIFE

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Robert Jay Lifton has originated a comprehensive theory of development based on the human psychobiological need to symbolize death and life continuity. He calls this condition the sense of symbolic immortality and argues that life is threatened whenever death is not transcended. A Sense of Symbolic Immortality Scale was built and administered to two groups of young adults (N = 136) in order to test the hypothesis that symbolic immortality develops with age (Drolet, 1986). Templer's Death Anxiety Scale and Crumbaugh and Maholick's Purpose in Life Test also were administered. Results show that established adults have a sense of symbolic immortality and a purpose in life significantly stronger than those of young adults. They show a negative relation between death anxiety and purpose in life, while purpose in life correlates highly with the sense of symbolic immortality. Finally, the premise that the sense of symbolic immortality helps cope with the fear of death is supported.

There exists a considerable body of research in the area of death that has studied extensively the anxiety and fear that death can elicit. There is, however, a growing interest in understanding the human gains that can be attained when, rather than retreating from the reality of death, one takes full account of its multifarious and pervasive nature, the influence of which can be observed throughout the entire life process. The underlying postulate of these studies is that whether we face, fear, ignore, or repress it, death is an "ultimate" given of existence and our capacity to be conscious of it an inherent and indispensable human quality; therefore, the personal and authentic awareness of death allows life to be lived to the fullest and human potential to be reached (e.g., Becker, 1973; Fisher, 1971; Keleman, 1974; Koestenbaum, 1964; Palgi, 1983).

To give death a participative status in the life experience requires that we, first, recognize the existential conflict that it engenders, that is, the perpetual tension that exists between the awareness of death's inevitability and the deep-rooted desire to continue living (Yalom, 1980) and that we then accept to question and, ideally, change the negative individual and social myths that we have elaborated so carefully (Keen, 1980). However, in that the idea of death traditionally has been and still is anathema in our Western culture, in order to make room for any modification of such an outlook within our mental or psychic existence, a drastic change in the world view would have to occur. In the field of psychology, as well, a revised paradigm would be necessary that would encourage the expansion of our understanding of human attitudes and behaviors into a more encompassing interpretation of human existence. It is purported in the present study that such a paradigm would rest on a vision of life and death as unity instead of antithesis and that such a unity can be sensed, and thus enhanced, throughout the life process.

Robert Jay Lifton, through his studies of humans dramatically confronted with death, as with the survivors of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and Vietnam, probably has explored the "place of death in the human imagination, and its bearing on our sense of endings, changes, and beginnings" (1979, p. 7), more thoroughly than anyone else. Somewhat in the same way that Freud elaborated a dynamic model of man based on the development of sexuality, Lifton has proposed a new psychological paradigm founded

on the evolution of the process of imagery (or symbol formation) in which death and symbolization of life continuity are given primary attention.

Contrary to Freud and many of his followers, however, Lifton purports that even though our consciousness tends to deny and repress the reality of death, throughout the life process we know deep down inside that we will die. This "middle knowledge" of death manifests itself in a fundamental and universal need to preserve and develop a personal sense of continuity and lastingness. Lifton calls this special existential condition the sense of symbolic immortality, which brings forth imageries of death transcendence and helps us to genuinely and, thus, without overwhelming fear, face our finitude: "While the denial of death is universal, the inner life-experience of a sense of immortality, rather than reflecting such denial, may well be the most authentic psychological alternative to that denial" (1979, p. 13). Here, death becomes a powerful symbol that fosters personal and collective creativity. For man's consciousness of death combined with his capacity to symbolize his life, his culture and his history, past and future, render him also capable of imagining his death, both physical and psychological.

Thus, the sense of symbolic immortality is defined as an adaptive anticipatory response to the enigmatic and often frightening reality of death, as well as a natural "device," based on the psycho-physiological process of image formation, that can best help the individual deal with the dualistic nature of the existential condition, that is, to be fully potented, but yet finite beings. With his notion of symbolic immortality, Lifton renders the reality of death not only a positive aspect of life, but an active one that plays an essential role in development. He does this by fully acknowledging the role of death imagery within the intricacies of symbol formation, which he describes rightfully as probably the most distinctive characteristic of the human being's capacity for evolution.

Within this formative perspective, the individual is described as a meaning-seeker creature, engaged in an existence that can be understood as a quest for vitalizing images, in contrast with deadening images. This perspective also implies that a healthy evolution of psychic imagery (an active process from birth) will grant a sense of symbolic immortality and that, conversely, the absence of vital imagery or its breakdown will threaten the individual's capacity for expansion and renewal. For death, in addition to being a formative symbol, also can become a symbol for psychological death, marked by a loss of vitality, a "death in life" as it were.

Lifton speaks of three parameters for psychological death, that is, severed connection, disintegration, and stasis. Some experiences, such as extreme trauma, have the power of bringing about death imageries and its accompanying death anxiety, while others (giving birth, social belonging, personal accomplishments, etc.) will elicit vital imageries, subsumed by three life parameters (those of contact, integrity, and movement), and foster a general sense of confidence in the world.

The notion of symbolic immortality is interesting in its appeal to our transcending qualities as it brings us beyond a linear conception of past, present, and future to the nontemporal, or, as Tillich (1959) would say, to a sense of eternity. It underlines our basic need or tendency to believe, many would say "irrationally," that our identity extends itself beyond our own encapsulated ego. In our occidental society, religion historically has been a major way of dealing with life imageries, death imageries, and immortality. But now, a large number of people have found themselves without any specific life framework or set of values and, thus, are left without any sustaining world view that could generate vitalizing imagery and provide a certain sense of immortality. And while it may have been necessary to question the values transported by traditional religious credos, the apparent void and anxiety created by this transition underscore the fundamental human need to nurture the mind with "realities" or images that celebrate life and allow it to expand, to transcend itself rather than shrink, and this in the light of its finiteness.

The balance between vitalizing and deadening imageries, symbolized throughout the life cycle by the generic polarities of contact-separation, integrity-disintegration, and movement-stasis, can be expressed through five distinct modes of experiencing, which Lifton calls modes of symbolic immortality. The first is called the biological mode and is associated with the sense that one is the continuity of one's parents and of past generations, as well as the sense that one will continue to live in one's progeny. It can also be extended outward from family to culture (or subculture), people, tribe, nation, or even be associated with ethical principles or personal values. It could include such dimensions as one's social identity or role and one's qualitative evaluation of the human species.

The second mode, which Lifton calls the creative mode, comes from the sense that one's work, one's teaching (of different sorts, including raising childen), one's personal influence (on friends, family, colleagues, or society at large), great or humble, will live on so that one's contribution will not die. The basis of this mode is the sense that what one does is worthwhile because it produces lasting or creative effects.

The third mode of symbolic immortality, the natural mode, is associated with the feeling of being a part of a universe that is beyond oneself, eternal. As we are part of eternal nature, we can be assured that something of us will continue to go on after death. What especially characterizes this mode is that, however our perceptions of nature might change, or however nature itself might change (Earth is in continual change, as is our contact with it.), we continue to seek in nature ultimate aspects of our existence (bringing us closer to fundamental aspects of our lives, such as our own finitude).

The fourth mode deals with the possibility of transcending death through spiritual attainment. Whether or not it includes the literal idea of an afterlife, the main feature of this mode is that it takes the form of a search for a release from profane or mundane life to a higher plane of existence, one in which the self is allowed to transcend its biological finiteness. According to Lifton (1979), although spiritual immortality often is sought in a group or within a culture and, thus, associated with shared religious beliefs, it is above all a personal quest for ultimate meaning and continuity that provides life-power and power over death.

The fifth and last mode of gaining a sense of symbolic immortality, called the mode of experiential transcendence, can be described as the capacity to "lose oneself" in other elements and movements of the human flow. It is distinct from the other modes of symbolic immortality in that it depends solely upon a psychic state, one characterized by extraordinary psychic unity and perceptual intensity. This state can take the form of an intense ecstatic experience or a more common feeling of being fully alive and connected with one's center. It can occur in any type of activity, even though it often is associated with moments such as giving birth, orgasm, athletic effort, intellectual or artistic creation, religious or spiritual experience, and any form of contemplation. But in order for it to be truly transcending (that is, the feeling of one's participation in the larger human process), the experience must occur in connection with any one of the other four modes. In addition to the sense of well-being it produces, authentic experiential transcendence also generates significant inner change. As says Lifton: "One never 'returns' to exactly the same inner structure of the self. Having once broken old forms, one senses that they can be broken again, or at least extended beyond earlier limitations" (1979, p. 26).

The present study represents an empirical attempt to operationalize the notion of symbolic immortality. Death anxiety and meaning in life also are considered. As the sense of symbolic immortality is related psychobiologically to our existential death anxiety, symbolic immortality should be associated negatively with death anxiety. As meaning in life often has been defined as the experience of death transcendence (Frankl, 1969; Koestenbaum, 1964; Marcel, 1962), it should correlate positively with the sense of symbolic immortality and negatively with death anxiety.

The specific developmental "era" of early adulthood (18 to 40 years of age) is the focus of the present study, in accordance with Lifton's theoretical assumption and empirical observation that the sense of symbolic immortality evolves throughout the life cycle. More specifically, a group of young adults (18 to 30) were compared to a group of established adults (30 to 40) in order to test the premise that the development of the sense of symbolic immortality parallels general development of maturity.

Lifton, however, like many other theorists, does not deal with the twenties and the thirties as two distinct stages; he describes early adulthood as a period during which individuals are more preoccupied with building a vitalizing life structure than with the finite aspects of one's life process. It is suggested here that most developmentalists have too quickly associated personal awareness of one's own death with the so called "mid-life crisis" and, by doing so, have accepted prematurely the concept that people between 20 and 40 years of age do not have any significant rapport with death and dying. While it is true that adolescence and the mid-life transition might be comparatively more tumultuous periods in one's rapport with death and ultimate concerns than early adulthood, the present study takes a more incremental view, which ultimately reflects more closely Lifton's theory, that whatever the nature or the level of death awareness experienced, the reality of death always produces a compelling need to appropriately symbolize and integrate our immediate actions and our ultimate connectedness. Indeed, one can suggest that the adult's special capacity for self-appraisal intensifies doubts about his or her "immortality power" and, hopefully, activates individuals to strive more deeply and more authentically toward better forms of connection, integrity, and movement with immediate as well as ultimate experiences. Consequently, it is hypothesized that established adults should generally have a stronger sense of symbolic immortality than young adults. Bocknek's (1980) description of young and established adults will be used in the Discussion section to interpret the data.

Method

Instruments

The sense of symbolic immortality questionnaire is a summated scale of attitudes (or beliefs) built on the mode of what is commonly called a Likert-type scale (Selltiz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 1976).

The construction of the items has been done by closely identifying, in Lifton's work (especially his theoretical contribution of 1979), the elements of the person's growing process of image formation that seem to contribute most to an evolving sense of symbolic immortality. Special effort was made all along to stay as close as possible to Lifton's thought. The formulation of items was guided strongly by Lifton's definitions of the five modes of experiencing through which the sense of symbolic immortality can be gained. More specifically, items were formulated in order to have a "balanced" representation of the areas of life that play a central role in our imagery of symbolic continuity: love, sexuality, and personal bonds; learning, working, and making; death, play, and transcendence; home and place; relationship to society and environment; and nurturance and growth (Lifton, 1979). First, a pool of 67 items was constituted. Thirty-three of these were keyed "true," and 34 were keyed "false." In other words, 33 items were intended to be clearly favorable or to contribute to a better sense of symbolic immortality, while 34 were intended to be clearly unfavorable. A selection of the most pertinent items was pursued through the content validity and the internal consistency analyses. The format of the test is a summated scale with seven alternative responses provided (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree).

A series of five main propositions or premises have guided the construction of this version of the Sense of Symbolic Immortality Scale (Drolet, 1986).

1. The sense of symbolic immortality rests more on the personal awareness of our finitude than on the remote experience of our biological death. Consequently, most of the items reflect our experience with different facets of the living process that play an important role in the life-death balance.

2. Each item of the scale represents an image or object toward which the person reacts. Each person has his or her personal way of perceiving the object or image, and that is exactly what the questionnaire wants to evaluate. For instance, in the item "Intimate relationships scare me," the 20-year-old might think of relationships with friends, while another person, let us say a 25-year-old, might think more in terms of a love relationship. They do not perceive the item the same way because they do not experience intimacy in the same way. What the item wants to tap into is not the nature of their intimate relationship, however important this might be, but more precisely how they feel about being intimate with other people.

3. It is not objectivity that is under evaluation, but subjectivity, or, more accurately, personal experiencing. Objectively, we might find that a person has many friends or a good love relationship, but perhaps the person does not feel that way.

4. It is how the person senses his or her symbolic continuity through various meaningful life experiences that the test is intended to probe. A corollary of this proposition is that while theoretically people cannot accurately describe their real attitudes or most intimate traits of personality, in practice they can and will make a very acceptable assessment of their true experience. Here, they are invited to assess their experience of symbolic immortality. This is also a principle upon which Kotchen (1960) and Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) proceeded. If this assumption were wrong, it would show up both in low test-retest reliability and in low internal consistency.

5. The questionnaire is made up of attitude-items that avoid self-report of social or emotional problems. If it were so, the level of resistance to this test would be much higher and the chances of obtaining distorted answers much greater. The defenses are minimized and the free expression of one's real way of being in the world maximized by the fact that the way to arrive at a final interpretation of scores is not at all transparent to subjects. In other words, the subjects do not clearly understand the intention of the test. The items are designed to be separate reflections of the person's reaction toward various life experiences. Many testimonies from the subjects support this view. A corollary of this proposition is that we can assume realistically that the instrument is probably free of the confounding effects of social desirability.

Three judges were consulted for the evaluation of the face validity of the initial 67 items generated by the experimenter. The judges were Robert Lifton himself and two doctors in psychology who were very familiar with his theory. Their task consisted of rating each item from 1 to 5 in terms of relevancy-irrelevancy to the sense of symbolic immortality, on the following basis: (1) irrelevant; (2) slightly associated; (3) moderately associated; (4) considerably associated; (5) very greatly associated. Furthermore, because the 67 items were grouped into five modes of experiencing, the judges were asked to evaluate whether the items had been identified with the appropriate mode.

Of the 67 items, 14 received a rating of 3 or lower by more than one of the judges and were identified as the most likely to be discarded. However, the scale was administered to a group of 184 part-time and full-time college students (93 females and 91 males, between 19 and 50 years of age) in social science and education programs at l'Université Laval (Québec, Canada), and it was only after the first internal consistency analysis proved that, in fact, they were the items the least related to the concept under study that they definitely were eliminated. The 53 items left were estimated to be associated to a considerable degree with the sense of symbolic immortality.

Twenty-seven more items were discarded on the basis of their correlation weight as shown by the analysis of internal consistency; the analysis of interitem redundancy (a correlation of more than .50 between two items strongly suggested the elimination of one of the two items); the judges' ratings and comments; and the present author's theoretical and rational analysis. Thus, the final questionnaire was composed of 26 items, with 15 items keyed "true" and 11 keyed "false." (See Appendix.) The two questionnaires, that is, the first and final versions of the SSIS, had the items ordered at random, so that position preferences and the "halo effect" caused by a series of positively or negatively stated items might be minimized and because a certain alternation of positive and negative items encourages the subject to read each item carefully.

The coefficient alpha, developed by Cronbach (1951), was used to measure the level of internal consistency of the questionnaire. Already, with the initial pool of 67 items, the scale showed a very high level of internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of .87 (N = 184). This was an early indication of the coherency of the theory developed by Lifton as well as the relevancy of each item formulated to the concept of "sense of symbolic immortality."

Templer's (1970) Death Anxiety Scale and Crumbaugh and Maholick's (1964) Purpose in Life Test also were administered to the final sample of subjects.

Sample Data and Procedures

All of the 151 respondents were volunteers enrolled as part-time or full-time students in social science or education programs at l'Université Laval (Québec, Canada). All were French-Canadian and were administered the French version of the Sense of Symbolic Immortality Scale (SSIS), as well as the French versions of the Death Anxiety Scale (DAS) and Purpose in Life Test (PIL). Although the DAS and the PIL were not validated again in French, it was assumed that the meaning of every item was maintained throughout the translation.

Of the 151 respondents, 15 were eliminated because they had not completely filled out the questionnaires. Therefore, a sample of 136 subjects was left for the final administration of the three scales. Seventy-three subjects belonged to the 19 to 25 age-group, and 63 belonged to the 33 to 39 age-group. The younger group was composed of 54 females and 19 males, and the older group was composed of 40 females and 23 males.

For the SSIS, respondents were asked to agree or disagree (on the 7-point scale) with the 26 statements according to "your feelings, way of seeing things, or way of living at this stage in your life."

Results

The SSIS

Item analyses were performed on the 26-item scale, following the final administration. The coefficient alpha produced was .91 (N = 136); consequently, it can be concluded safely that the present scale that measures the sense of symbolic immortality has a very high internal consistency. An item analysis (Pearson's r between the total score and the score on each item) revealed a correlation range from .11 (Item 15) to .70 (Item 24); 15 items were above .52 and 10 items above .34. Interitem redundancy was kept at a fairly low level. The mean correlation was .28, with a minimum of $-.16$ (only item 15 was negative) and a maximum of .68.

The internal consistency coefficient also was measured for the five subscales. The subscale that measures the biosocial mode of experiencing symbolic immortality (items 5, 11, 12, 14, 19, 21, 23, and 25) produced a coefficient alpha of .75, with low interitem redundancy. (Mean correlation = .39, with a maximum of .46.) The subscale that measures the creative mode (items 4, 6, 7, 9, 20, 22, and 24) obtained an internal con-

sistency alpha of .82, with an acceptable level of interitem redundancy. (Mean correlation = .37, with a maximum of .62.) The spiritual scale of symbolic immortality (items 1, 8, 10, and 15) produced a coefficient of .64, with fairly low interitem redundancy. (Mean correlation = .39, with a maximum of .48.) The subscale that measures the mode of transcendence (items 3, 13, 17, and 26) produced an alpha of .63, with low interitem redundancy. (Mean correlation = .21, with a maximum of .37.) Finally, the subscale that measures the natural mode of symbolic immortality (items 2, 16, and 18) produced an alpha of .53, with low interitem redundancy. (Mean correlation = .27, with a maximum of .34.)

Table 1 presents the intercorrelation matrix of the subscales and the scale as a whole (SSIS). Notice that the spiritual subscale distinguished itself the most from the other subscales and the total scale.

Table 1
Inter-subscale and Scale-subscale Correlations

	Symbolic Immortality Subscale					
Subscale	Bio.	Creat.	Spir.	Trans.	Nat.	SSIS
Biosocial						.92
Creative	.80					.92
Spiritual	.34	.38				.53
Transcendence	.73	.74	.25			.82
Natural	.72	.72	.31	.64		.80

Twenty-nine subjects, whose ages ranged from 19 to 45, participated in a test-retest procedure in order to evaluate the reliability of the SSIS. The SSIS was completed 3 weeks after the first administration, and the product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's *r*) obtained between the two sets of scores was .97. This coefficient represents very good test-retest reliability and suggests that the SSIS is a measure that does not fluctuate or change very much over a short period of time.

In this phase of questionnaire construction, the main goal was to gather items that contributed to the sense of symbolic immortality as a global construct. In the task of selecting the items, the formation of distinct subscales equivalent in size and internal validity was secondary. However, a principal components factor analysis also was performed in order to challenge and further explore the theoretically based clustering of items among the five modes of symbolic immortality.

The Varimax rotation method was performed on the scale. Three factors out of five emerged as distinct, that is, those that reflect the biosocial, the creative, and the spiritual subscales. This is not surprising given the fact that those three particular subscales are internally the most valid. The four transcendent items emerged as being associated with the biosocial mode, and there is some indication that the three natural items also might be associated with the biosocial mode. Consequently, following item analyses, internal consistency analyses, and principal components analyses, it would be realistic to say that, at this point, the SSIS is most valid when considered as a whole. Taken individually, the five subscales are less reliable in giving a relevant assessment of a particular mode of symbolic immortality, with the possible exception of the biosocial, the creative and, perhaps, the spiritual subscales.

Correlational Analyses

Table 2 presents different simple and multiple regressions performed on the dependent variable sense of symbolic immortality in relation to the variables age-group, death anxiety, and purpose in life. As expected, the sense of symbolic immortality is related negatively to death anxiety and related strongly and positively to purpose in life. Also, it can be seen that the two age-groups are discriminated significantly on the SSIS, as the variable age explains 22% of the variability (R^2) of the scores. In comparison, it should be noted that the variable age-group is not related significantly to death anxiety, $F(1, 134) = 1.29, p < .26, R = -.09, R^2 = .00$, but that age-group is related positively to purpose in life, $F(1, 134) = 18.23, p < .0001, R = .35, R^2 = .12$. Thus, 12% of the variability of the scores on the Purpose in Life Test is explained.

Table 2
Different Simple and Multiple Regressions Performed on the Dependent Variable Sense of Symbolic Immortality

Independent variable	R	R^2	F
Age[a]	.46	.22	36.74**
Death anxiety	−.26	.07	9.62*
Purpose in life	.84	.70	313.84**
Age + death anxiety	.51	.26	23.51**
Age + purpose in life	.86	.74	184.69**
Death anxiety + purpose in life	.84	.70	155.83**
Age + death anxiety + purpose in life	.86	.74	122.28**

[a]Defined in two age-groups: 19 to 25 and 33 to 39.
*$p < .003$. **$p < .0001$.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the difference attributable to the variable age-group was most manifest in the biosocial and creative modes of symbolic immortality. Indeed, age-group explained 20% ($r = .44$) and 18% ($r = .42$) of the variability of the scores on the biosocial and creative subscales, respectively. Also, the biosocial mode of symbolic immortality was related particularly to death anxiety ($r = -.31$, $p < .0005$), even more so than the global score of the SSIS.

While no significant difference was found between the two age-groups on the Death Anxiety Scale, age and death anxiety were, nevertheless, correlated significantly within the younger group, $r = -.24, F(1, 71) = 7.23, p < .04$. Thus, within the age-group 19 to 25, the older subjects tended to be less death anxious than the younger subjects. No such correlation could be observed in the older group. However, if we eliminate the variable age and compare the subjects' performance on the SSIS with their performance on the DAS, we find that high death anxiety subjects tend to have a low sense of symbolic immortality, and low death anxiety subjects tend to have a strong sense of symbolic immortality, $r = -.26, p < .003$.

Finally, a coefficient r of $-.30$ was obtained between the scores on the Death Anxiety Scale and the scores on the Purpose in Life Test, $F(1, 134) = 14.36, p < .0005$.

Discussion

The findings support the general premise that attitudes towards death in adulthood can evolve in the form of a growing sense of symbolic immortality. While no difference

was observed in death anxiety between the two age-groups, the findings do support the pertinence of studying the question of attitudes toward death in a more encompassing way, as the concept of symbolic immortality allows us to do.

More specifically, these results give evidence that early adulthood, as a developmental period between the seemingly more tumultuous periods, psychologically speaking, of adolescence and middle age, is a time when the adult's relationship to death and immortality is evolving. Moreover, as a positive change was observed within a period generally perceived as relatively stable, at least as far as death consciousness is concerned (e.g., Jaques, 1965; Jung, 1965; Levinson, 1978), we can speculate and expect that growth of the sense of symbolic immortality also would mark the middle years, and, probably, old age. But this would need to be verified. The development of the sense of symbolic immortality also could prove to have some inconsistencies, as have been revealed in some studies on children's and adolescents' development of attitudes toward death (e.g., Alexander & Adlerstein, 1960; MacIntire, Angle, & Struempler, 1972).

Following the nature of the sense of symbolic immortality, the change or development observed can be explained at two levels. First, it represents an increase of the capacity for symbolic life in early adulthood. The Sense of Symbolic Immortality Scale takes full account of the fact that, in adulthood, psychic images have become mostly abstract symbolizations, in contrast with the more physiologically based images of childhood. Results show that one's personal quest for symbolic immortality is more abstract at the end of early adulthood than at the beginning. Thus, one becomes more able to feel the continuity of the human chain as well as the many forms it can take. Conversely, it can be inferred that one's way of imagining one's finitude also can reach a higher level of symbolization at the end of the thirties. Established adults are thus capable of envisioning, with more poignancy than before, deadening components of their life that could lead to a sense of separation, disintegration, or stasis, all of which are psychological forms of death.

The positive change of the sense of symbolic immortality in early adulthood also indicates a positive evolution of psychic imagery. The vitalizing images of connection, integrity, and movement outweigh the deadening images of separation, disintegration, and stasis. This suggests a certain evolution of the capacity to symbolize death (through what Lifton calls the process of image formation) and, yet, transcend it (through the vehicles provided by culture), instead of being incapacitated by anxiety about it. In turn, this evolution brings about a feeling of confidence in the integrity, continuity, and movement of the life process. It is this growing confidence in being a part of a project that goes beyond one's finite life that yields a sense of symbolic immortality.

That the differences observed between young and established adults are more manifest in the biosocial and creative modes of symbolic immortality comes as no surprise. Among others, Bocknek (1980) and Levinson (1978) have emphasized the especially active social (or biosocial) and professional (or creative) roles that adults in their thirties play in our culture. Lifton (1979) also observed that even in the late twenties, when one has had time to build an initial adult life structure, one cannot yet lay "confident claim to one's modes of immortality, especially those of family line and works" (p. 86). This corroborates the idea already enunciated by Bluebond-Langner (1977), Maurer (1966), as well as Lifton (1979), that the "knowledge" of death is present throughout life and that the only difference between developmental stages is the way in which it is expressed. Finally, it bears out Blake's (1969) finding that attitudes toward death are dictated by the developmental issues of a particular "age-stage."

The negative correlation observed between symbolic immortality and death anxiety supports the contention that the development of the sense of symbolic immortality contributes toward immunizing people against the fear of death. Similarly, death anxiety was related negatively with purpose in life. From these results, it could be concluded that death anxiety is not so much a function of age, at least in early adulthood, but,

rather, a function of one's capacity to transcend death and experience life-power, as manifested in one's level of symbolic immortality and purpose in life.

As for the significant correlation between age and death anxiety observed within the younger age-group ($r = -.24$, $p < .04$), there seems to be only one way of understanding it. Because no difference was observed between young adults and established adults on death anxiety, we are brought to think that conscious fear of death reaches a relatively stable level throughout early adulthood. Consequently, the difference recorded in young adulthood might be related to the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. While the early adult transition (approximately from 17 to 22 years old) generally is understood to be an integral part of early adulthood (e.g., Golan, 1981; Levinson, 1978), we could suppose that many of the younger adults in the sample still are struggling with issues that characterize adolescence. After all, as Bocknek (1980) puts it, "It is the relative location in the life span . . . not fixed chronological age, that distinguishes a developmental stage" (p. 33). Thus, it appears that many of these "transitional" young adults may not yet have attained a sense of life-power (more characteristic of adulthood) that would help them to better cope with death and its equivalents (i.e., imageries of separation, stasis, and disintegration).

The fact that the biosocial mode of symbolic immortality was particularly related to death anxiety, even more than the global score of symbolic immortality, seems to indicate a special cause-and-effect type of relation between weak biosocial identity and connectedness, and fear of death. In other words, the mode of biosocial immortality, which is based principally on a sense of biological continuity and a sense of truly belonging to a culture that will survive oneself, seems to contribute slightly more toward pacifying our fearful and conflictual confrontation with death than the other modes, at least in early adulthood. This underlines the role of social belonging and participation in the development of the sense of symbolic immortality. Spiritual traditions have realized for a long time the transcending power of the biosocial mode, especially in their insistence on love as a privileged way of having access to eternal life (Savard, 1988).

The significant increase of purpose in life observed between the two age-groups also could find explanations in developmental theory. Following Bocknek's (1980) identification of "self-particularization" as the central intrapsychic issue of young adulthood (18 to 30 years), it is a time when individuals can form a first adult life structure and plan their life more purposefully than ever before. Indeed, their distinctive sense of personal power and confidence in their potential, as well as their activist orientation and openness to experience and change, particularly help them to act upon their values and beliefs.

However, while young adults enjoy a newly acquired sense of capability, it is only in established adulthood that individuals can sense their own effectiveness. Bocknek calls it a time for "consolidation and effectuation." More than ever before, adults in the fourth decade have a real need to act upon their goals and objectives. They are no longer content with dreaming and talking about their projects and their future (as adolescents do); they no longer feel they ought to prepare more or gain much more experience in order to act (as young adults do); they want to and are capable of accomplishing things, to make it happen, now (Bocknek, 1980). On the whole, established adults are more deeply committed to ongoing activities, projects, and purposes. Consequently, it is not surprising to see that established adults have a stronger purpose in life than young adults, especially as we consider the dimensions emphasized in the Purpose in Life Test: goal-directed behaviors, personal responsibility, activity over passivity, enthusiasm over lack of stimulation. Established adults' greater readiness and desire to make things work certainly account for much of the difference observed between the two groups on the PIL.

The relation found between purpose in life and death anxiety corroborates all the previous research reviewed in the literature (e.g., Blazer, 1973; Durlak, 1972, 1973; Goodman, 1981). Fear of death and purpose in life appear to be incompatible experiences.

Fear of death can be duly considered as an expression of one's inability to go purposefully forward in the enterprise of living. This view tends to be supported by some studies that have indicated that death anxiety is related to past orientation as opposed to future orientation (Bascue, 1973; Dickstein & Blatt, 1966, Goodman, 1981).

The very high positive correlation between the SSIS and the PIL ($r = .84, p < .0001$) was to be expected, but, nevertheless, raises questions. Are the sense of symbolic immortality and purpose in life complementary constructs that contribute in their own ways toward a positive existential stance? Are they similar concepts? Are the two measures overlapping in content? From a theoretical perspective, the sense of symbolic immortality appears to be a larger concept than purpose in life. While the PIL is aimed at measuring the intensity of the purpose in life, the progress made in the realization of one's objectives, and general life satisfaction, the SSIS attempts to measure, through five fundamental modes of living, a pervasive sense of being an integral part, and, by the same token, an active and meaningful part, in time and space, of the world. It is suggested at this point that purpose in life (as defined by Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) is a function of a strong sense of symbolic immortality, and not the other way around. In other words, the sense of symbolic immortality, as a larger conception of our sense of existence within finitude, would include having a purpose in life. However, this remains a question for further consideration.

The PIL has been criticized by some (e.g., Braun & Dolmino, 1978; Yalom, 1980) for being loaded in social desirability and for being highly value laden. Even though the SSIS has not been checked yet for these dimensions, its form and content invite us to believe that it is less so.

As said earlier, the present version of the Sense of Symbolic Immortality Scale is most valid and discriminative when considered as a whole. In contrast, Mathews and Mister (1987), who subsequently have developed an instrument to measure the same concept, have emphasized the independence of each of the five modes, but have completely neglected the validity of the questionnaire as a whole. As well as not mentioning the internal consistency of the questionnaire, the rather low inter-cluster correlations (including one negative correlation between the "religious" mode and the "experiential" or transcendence mode) demonstrate that the authors did not believe it necessary to establish a conceptual and empirical link between the five modes of symbolic immortality in their instrument.

As far as the SSIS is concerned, more work needs to be done to increase the empirical validity of its subscales, in particular for the transcendent, natural, and spiritual modes. More independence among subscales would allow more discriminative investigation into the relative prevalence of each mode of symbolic immortality in different groups, be they distinct in culture, psychological health, age, occupation, or otherwise.

In the present study, the mean raw score obtained for the 26 items was 5.1, which suggests that the overall sample of subjects do experience a slightly positive sense of symbolic immortality. But if a young, well-educated and supposedly healthy group of individuals obtains 5.1 on a scale of 7 points, what can we expect of less privileged people and, for that matter, of the general population?

This sample also seems to gain symbolic immortality more through the creative mode ($M = 5.3$) than through the biosocial mode ($M = 4.9$), which says something about the emphasis placed, in our society and particularly during early adulthood, upon work, personal accomplishment, and creativity as spheres of personal value and identification.

It is hoped that this operationalization of the concept of symbolic immortality has contributed to the notion that life and death are not separate realities, but a dynamic unity. Unfortunately, the reality of death is not being given full consideration in our times, and such a state of denial can only have detrimental social and individual conse-

quences. The results of the present study are evidence of the fact that our mental representations of life and death do change and, thus, possibly can contribute to the enhancement of life for the individual, as well as for society at large. The notion of symbolic immortality can be useful in many contexts, but especially in death education, the education of individual and social values, and the process of individuation in general.

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APPENDIX

THE SENSE OF SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY SCALE

1. I have developed a personal understanding of existence which helps me appreciate life fully.
2. The physical surroundings in which I live are very healthy.
3. Nothing interesting happens in my life.
4. I don't have any influence on my surroundings.
5. I am of no value in the eyes of society.
6. If I died today, I feel that absolutely no trace or influence of myself would remain.
7. I participate in the development of many others.
8. I feel that, in spite of my inevitable death, I will always be an integral part of the world.
9. I feel that I am doing what I want in life.
10. I have certain values or beliefs that help me accept or rise above my mortal condition.
11. I have the feeling that human nature is doomed to destruction.
12. Intimate relationships scare me.
13. Once I've decided to do something, I do it with sustained interest.
14. I often feel very lonely.
15. The eventuality of my death contributes towards giving meaning and structure to my life.
16. My sex life contributes greatly to my well-being.
17. I have difficulty undertaking new things.
18. I feel comfortable in my body.
19. My love life brings me little joy.
20. I feel competent in what I do.
21. If I died today, I have the feeling that I would live on in certain people I would leave behind.
22. I am full of energy and vitality.
23. I am not sure of who I am.
24. I am satisfied with my life so far.
25. I have good contact with others.
26. I feel that I do not use my time well.