

KENNEDY STIRRED TEEN-AGERS' GRIEF

Emotion Is Found Greater
Than Would Be Expected
for Adolescents' Parents

'PARADOX' IS DISCERNED

Young Children Preoccupied
by Violence of Murder,
Psychiatrists Say Here

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

Adolescents displayed more grief over the assassination of President Kennedy than they might be expected to show over the death of a parent.

This observation was offered as a "paradox" yesterday by Dr. Martha Wolfenstein, an associate professor of psychiatry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Her paper was presented to a conference on reactions of children to the assassination.

The "major life task" of adolescence, Dr. Wolfenstein said, is the loosening of the child's bonds to his parents. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of loss involved in a free expression of grief often proves too difficult. By staying dry-eyed adolescents reject the fact of death, she asserted.

It was different Nov. 22. She and her colleagues, Dr. Wolfenstein said, were struck by the frank outpouring of emotion for the dead President from ordinarily inhibited teen-agers.

The assassination, she reasoned, suddenly focused their diffuse everyday feelings of loss and estrangement. As a remote

figure, the President was easy to mourn, but as a kind of idealized parent, Dr. Wolfenstein observed, he summoned up some of the most painful emotions of adolescence.

Preoccupied By Violence

Although adolescents appeared to be overwhelmed by the death of President Kennedy, speakers at the conference found that younger children were preoccupied by the violent way in which he died. For young children, death is not necessarily an irreversible phenomenon, Dr. Sybelle Escalona, a psychiatry professor at Einstein, remarked.

Their confusion on this point, other speakers noted, may have been intensified by the detailed television coverage of the assassination. President Kennedy, whom they had mostly known as a television figure, was still before their eyes.

At the same time, the notion that something catastrophic had happened was graphically shown by the reactions of their parents and, also, by the cancellation of all their favorite television programs, the speakers asserted.

Two Boys Regressed

Dr. Augusta Alpert, associate director of the Child Development Center, presented a paper on the reactions of four disturbed boys between the ages of 4 and 6. In response to the slaying of the President, each of the boys adopted defensive postures that represented regressions to more infantile states.

Analysis showed that the boys had fused fragments of what they had heard of the assassination to fantasies of violence against their fathers. The murder of Lee Oswald, the accused assassin, seemed to impress them as a sign of the retribution they might suffer.

Presumably to forestall such a fate, the boys all turned passive, becoming excessively well-behaved. Dr. Alpert said that one of the boys was later able to use the experience of the President's death as a platform on which he could work out his hostility to his own father.