

## Summary

Green burial (GB) has emerged in the past decade as an alternative to conventional funerals which reflect a restructuring of priorities within death practice. It may also be a response to secularization and the decline of traditional religion where ecological ethics and ritual practices are developed as alternatives. It is for these reasons that this phenomena was examined to better understand what motivated this shift. To do this, I focused my research on the experience of participants and green burial workers to understand how green burials serve their needs.

## Background

Green burial is defined as a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration of habitat (Green Burial Council Alliance). Green burial has grown exponentially in the past ten years according to surveys conducted by both the National Funeral Directors Association (2019) and the Green Burial Council (2015). Past research that focused on green burial supporters found that age, SES, education, and geographic location were indicators of green burial support (Gonzalez 2009) but failed to address the experience of these supporters and how this might influence growing demand. This study seeks to answer the question “How do people experience green burial?”.

## Objective

To build on the sociological understanding of emerging death rituals which includes an analysis of green burial rituals and to assess whether these rituals play a role in expanding support for green burial.

## Methods

Data were collected using qualitative observations of green burial grounds in three states and ethnographic interviews of green burial workers and participants. Data were analyzed using Berger’s social construction of reality, Turner’s rites of passage, and Collins’ interaction ritual theory to assess green burial ritual effects.



Figure 1. Bench at GB cemetery in Austin, TX. Courtesy of Overstreet.



Figure 2. Native American imagery at GB cemetery. Courtesy of Overstreet.



Figure 3. Jewish section at green burial cemetery in Austin, TX. Courtesy of Overstreet.



Figure 5. Decorated grave at cemetery in New Mexico. Courtesy of Overstreet.



Figure 4. Grave marker using natural materials. Courtesy of Overstreet.

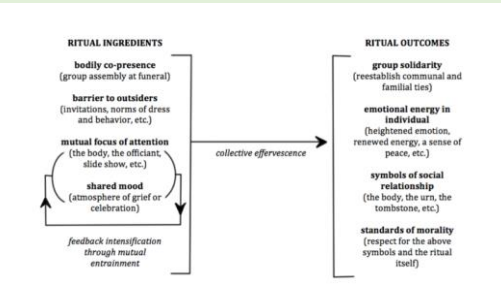


Figure 7. The Interaction Ritual Model (as described in Collins (2014)).

## Green Burial: Experience of Participants and Workers

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## Results and Conclusion

Initial results revealed that green burial rituals produce group solidarity, heightened emotion and renewed energy for the individuals involved, a sense of peace, the development of meaning associated with the symbols and rituals found in the burial, and the development of standards of morality (respect for the symbols and rituals taking place. Green burial allowed religious groups to practice their burial traditions in a more acceptable way than was available through conventional burial. And those who had participated in a green burial service said that they would choose this type of ceremony for themselves. This research has shown that green burial does have potential and I hope to explore this topic further in graduate school.



Figure 6. Basket of flowers before green burial ceremony taking place in Washington. Courtesy of Overstreet.

## Literature Cited

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