

**Title: The Call of Death: A Noble Undertaking - Female Morticians in The Traditionally Male - dominated Funeral Home Industry**

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**Introduction:** Death does not discriminate. At some point in our lives we all will purchase a funeral service. Over the last few decades, the gender composition of funeral directors in the United States has changed dramatically as women have entered this traditionally male-dominated occupation. Despite this new trend, gender gap continues to be a struggle that is as real as selling a death service.

**Purpose:** Understanding the essence of a culture requires engaging with, experiencing, reflecting upon, documenting and interpreting the underlying attitudes, beliefs and practices that define its social and cultural existence. This ethnographic study seeks to capture these intricacies in the cultural setting of a micro-culture of female morticians and to understand their unique use of cultural rhetoric to define their social and cultural positions in relation to the wider funeral home industry.

**Method:** The participant in this semester long ethnographic study is a local mortician, owner and director of Oak Rest Funeral Homes and Cremations. The study employs three kinds of data collection methods: interviews, observations and documentation through audio recording. These data, along with the author's reflective journaling and academic literature, were subjected to a thematic analysis in order to develop the narrative descriptions and taxonomies of this study.

**Results/Discussions:** The funeral home industry remains male-dominated. Complications in regulatory policies such as "ready-to-embalm" laws continue to increase gender gap in funeral

directors and is considered an impediment to minority groups. Women occupy a unique position in this industry and their cultural performances are influenced by their gender.

**Conclusion.** Despite an increase in women pursuing a career in this male-dominated profession, gender stereo-types and regulatory policies continue to be a hindrance preventing progress.

However, women like the participant can excel in this microculture, because of their gender as much as in spite of it.

**Recommendations:** While there is extensive study on the industry itself, factors contributing to the gender gap and comparative analysis on immigrant funeral directors in this profession is very limited and therefore demands further in-depth study.