
The Materiality Of Death: Study Of Grave Markers

Death is inevitable and there is nothing anyone can do to stop it from occurring and due to everyone eventually dying at one point in time, burials are something that is very often thought of. Burial is a ritualistic act that places the corpse of a dead person into a constructed grave that has been dug into the earth, that has been around for at least 100,000 years. It is meant for the expectation that the soul of the recent deceased individual that has been buried would more easily reach the afterlife which was thought to have existed underground. Whatever kind of grave was constructed, the importance of the proper burial of the dead was emphasized by every ancient culture and the rites accompanying burial were among the most elaborate and significant in many cultures typically by using elaborate grave markers showing the individuals importance and wealth. These markers would be shown right above where the deceased was buried to indicate who was bellow while showing the importance of that person. While there are many different burial types specific to each individual person, they ultimately have the same goals. Burials are meant to show respect for the physical remains of a person who has recently passed away while giving closure to the family as a final good-bye. With average burial graves today costing an upwards of \$1,000, it is important for people to understand the wealth behind these burials and how important it is for people to examine these elaborate death markers and who lays beneath.

In 1842, the average age of death for people engaged in professions and their families it was 45 years old, for tradesmen and their families it was 26 years old, and for laborers such as mechanics and servants was 16 years old. Then in 1904, the mortality was analyzed and found that by grouping social class groups together, it was not showing a fair and accurate representation of a true life expectancy. Since 1921, these types of reports have revealed a less consistent pattern of risk in all-cause mortality increasing from the professional groups in social class to the unskilled laborers in another social class. However, life expectancy for the United States population in 2016 was 78.6 years, a decrease of 0.1 years from 2015. While the age-adjusted death rate decreased by 0.6% from 733.1 deaths per 100,000 standard population in 2015 to 728.8 in 2016. Looking at age between 2015 and 2016, the death rate increased for younger age groups but decreased for older age groups. With this being said, infants do not significantly differ as to the average mortality rate if 587.0 deaths per 100,000 live births. However, looking at the life expectancy of today, the life expectancy from 1842 seems almost insane as our current average life expectancy today is 78.8 years old. We see someone as 16 years old as only being a kid with their whole life ahead of them, and back then it was almost over for some. Ultimately, people have started living longer than people did back in the older times where life was more intense than it is now.

Death itself is an event that occurs in a specific way and at a specific time and place where a person's life comes to its complete end. While each and every person has their own life expectancy and longevity, everyone at one point in time will die. Life expectancy is the estimated number of years remaining in a person's life at a particular time, which is usually at the time of birth. While, longevity is the average number of years between a person's birth and their death, which is usually based on lives that have ended and not years that are yet to be lived. Both of these help indicate the mortality rate by measuring the proportion of people who have died within a particular time period to the number of people in the particular population.

While death is something that is very much known of, not many people really take the time to look into what has stayed consistent or changed over different historical areas not only between males and females but also based on individuals wealth. This paper will examine the differences over time between males and females while highlighting stone types of grave markers to determine wealth and if there is any connection with longevity.

Standard plaques in the ground or headstones coming out of the ground are common markers of graves in the Evergreen Cemetery. A total of 30 grave markers were inspected at the Evergreen Cemetery located in Fort Lauderdale, FL. From each grave marker, details were taken of the birth and death date, the gender of the deceased, and material and size of the grave markers located in numerous spots around the cemetery from different historical areas. While most grave markers were from different historical areas, I did include a few grave markers of men and women from similar historical periods to help indicate if gender determines any type of life expectancy. However, there were not any grave markers analyzed from people who died previously to 1900 to help determine current life expectancy within the past century. If data was incomplete on a grave marker, these markers were skipped to make sure they would not be included in the analysis in determining longevity as they were missing important information in determining this.

The height of each grave marker was measured with a standard tape measure, measuring 1 inch wide by 16 feet long. Height was measured from side to side to determine the width and from top to bottom to determine height, to the nearest.25 inch. The material primarily used in the grave markers were stone, granite, and marble. Granite is considered the most expensive of these materials and sandstone is considered to be the least expensive. While some prices start at \$300 per piece, this price can skyrocket to roughly \$1,000,000 a piece depending on size and material, however, there was not any of this caliber to examine. Grave markers recorded were a combination of flat makers that were flush with the grass and upright headstones. Most prices for flat markers start at \$300 and could go as high as \$8,000 while upright markers start at \$700 and can go up to \$30,000. Price is determined on material type as well as the size of each grave marker, so there was no real way to determining the price for every single grave marker. Therefore, the best way to determine any type of wealth based on markers was to base it off of material type and height to show which markers were more expensive than the others. Genders were record based on guessing of the first name and by text indicating wife, mother, she, etc. If names were too unique and unable to differentiate between gender, these grave markers were skipped to help eliminate any false records that could compromise the analysis. The relation between each grave marker was examined through analysis to determine medians.

Data was obtained from 30 different gave markers located in the Evergreen Cemetery, with 15 being female and 15 being male from all different historical eras. The earliest birth dates of the grave markers examined were 1900 with the latest being 1983. The earliest death dates of the grave markers examined were 1955 with the latest being 2019. The height of the upright grave markers ranged from 36 inches to 48 inches with a mean of 42.85 inches while the height of the flat grave markers ranged from 8 inches to 16 inches with a mean of 12.88 inches. The mean height of all materials is granite being at 26.5 inches, sandstones being at 29.44 inches, and marble being at 25.5 inches. Sandstone was the principal material for 18 (61%) of the markers, granite for 8 (26%) of the markers, and marble at 4 (13%) of the markers. The 30 grave markers yielded data for 15 females and 15 males, with women having a higher percentage of 53% and men having 33% of having family descriptors such as wife, mother, father, son located on the grave marker itself. The median year of death of these 30 people was 2007. With the mean

ages of death for males being at 66.53 years and females being at 79.93 years. In the end, females had a higher mean age of death than males did.

The average height of the grave markers seemed to decrease over time but there did not seem to be a direct connection between wealth based on the material type of the grave marker and the death age of the individual. There were grave markers where the individual died at age 55 and had one of the most expensive grave markers, a granite upright grave, whereas another individual who died at 95 years old had the least expensive grave marker. There did not show to be a true connection between the height of grave markers and the age at death as height was a variety throughout all markers and there was no specific height per death age. Throughout the research, the age of death was the dependent variable and the height of the grave marker and the year of death were the independent variables used to determine all of the mean and median calculations performed.

Throughout this analysis, it was determined that women, in fact, tend to live longer than men do. Based off of the 15 females used and the 15 males used with different historical eras, it's still true that women outlive men. In this study, women lived upwards of 95 years old while most men lived up to 80 years old. Throughout similar historical time periods, it was shown that women would live upwards of 10 extra years than men. This is consistent with all different historical eras up until the most recent ones as well. However, within recent years, individuals have started to live longer lives which is actually consistent between males and females. There were plenty of grave markers for people who were born before the 1950's, however, there are not many grave markers of people that were born after the 1950's indicating people are living longer. Ultimately, this analysis proved that the life expectancy today is much higher than it was 50 years ago.

There does not seem to be any indication that sizes and material of grave markers help determine wealth and longevity of an individual. There are people with the most expensive type of grave marker who only live to be about 60 years old, whereas another individual lived to be 101 and had the cheapest material and size grave marker available. These variables do not seem to make a difference regarding wealth and longevity, it mostly seems to be based on the families choice. There, however, does seem to be a consistency with female grave markers for the fact that women tend to have more expensive markers than men do and they also have more wording on their markers than men do. Men usually consist of cheaper materials regardless of the stature it was made into. Overall, there is no exact explanation between longevity and grave markers, however, there are definitely some consistencies between male and female markers.

Overall, most grave markers examined consisted of the cheapest material, gravestone, regardless of the age or gender of the individual, except a few. It does seem that it is possible people go with the cheaper option due to the fact that funerals themselves are just so expensive. While grave markers are something for a family to visit, it does not commensurate them as much as the actual funeral does which is why it is believed that most people spend their money there rather than an expensive grave marker.