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The Crematory Debate: Key Framing Processes

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Abstract

This study builds on a previous project that examined media reports related to a proposal to construct a chapel and crematory in a small suburban town. The exploratory study, based solely on media reports, established a chronology of events and identified major narratives employed by the proponents and opponents of the crematory.

The current study revisits the chronology of events and challenges the integrity of the narratives portrayed in the media reports. A qualitative research design, including in-depth interviews and participant-observation, was used to gather data. Our findings suggest that the controversy was much more complicated than initially reported. In addition, three distinct periods were identified, characterized by shifting identity fields and negotiated frames. Interestingly, the major narratives identified in the original project were empirically confirmed in the current research.

The Crematory Debate: Key Framing Processes

**Introduction**

The Crematory Debate: Key Framing Processes

This research builds on a previous project by Steward, Fritch, and Spomer (2016) regarding a proposal that prompted controversy over the construction of a crematory within the city limits of Bethany, Oklahoma. The exploratory research examined media reports over a six month period (December 31, 2014 through mid-June 2015). We carefully outlined the chronological events presented in media reports, noting key inflection points covered during the controversy. In addition, we identified prominent narratives by the proponents and opponents of the proposal. This research seeks to strengthen the chronology of events and to challenge the integrity of the narratives portrayed in media reports as articulated in the first project. To accomplish these goals, we employed qualitative research strategies and drew from social movement literature that served as a theoretical scaffold.

In review, Bethany is a small suburb located on the northwest side of Oklahoma City. It is considered part of the larger metro area. The city expands over 5.2 square miles with approximately 20,000 residents. The municipal government reflects a weak mayoral model, in which there are eight city council members, two from each of the four wards. The mayor is elected, a voting member, and chairs the council.

The controversy centered on a proposal to build a chapel and crematorium on a site nestled between an upper middle-class neighborhood and several businesses. A senior residential center was located adjacent to the proposed site. While the target property was already zoned for commercial use, a crematory required additional approval by the city council.

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The exploratory research examined media reports dated December 31, 2014 through June 12, 2015. There were 20 media reports that were examined. In the first project, we developed a timeline (See Appendix Figure1), noted the growing affective rhetoric (especially from those opposed to the crematory), and identified the narratives or frames created by the opponents and proponents of the proposed crematory. In addition, we documented the hegemony of the crematory in the controversy. As stated, the crematory was only one part of the proposal; in terms of construction, the most prominent aspect of the facility was the chapel. The location of the crematory was attached behind the chapel.

As reported, the city council approved the proposal in mid-February 2015, clearing the way for construction of the facility. However, a citizens group filed an injunction to halt construction, followed by a campaign for a city-wide referendum to nullify the council's decision. The funeral home, amidst the controversy, withdrew their proposal. The referendum, according to some media reports, was required by law regardless of the status or action of the funeral home. The final vote was a stunning 71% in favor of over-turning the city council's approval.

While the first project shed light on the progression and narratives of the controversy, it was limited by two restrictions. First, our analysis was bound to only media presentations. The chronology and excerpts from those accounts were filtered through the lens of the reporters. The second limitation was the lack of a theoretical framework to provide a more meaningful analysis. In this research, we use "frame analysis" as our theoretical scaffolding. We argue that a qualitative strategy coupled with a theoretical framework remedies the limitations noted in the exploratory project.

## Literature Review

Frame analysis has been popularized over the past three decades as a conceptual model to explain or describe framing processes within social movements. Prior to the mid-1980s, it was assumed by many sociologists that social movements were mobilized as a rebuke or corrective measure toward grievances or perceived injustices. Little attention was directed to the meaning and process of mobilization. The fluidity and negotiation of meaning in mobilizing participants to oppose a perceived injustice was a given. McAdams et al. (1988) aptly unbundled the issues of the micro-mobilization context and the role of advocates in the creation and promulgation of meaning. These processes were largely ignored in most iterations of resource mobilization. In sum, resource mobilization approaches, which dominated the intellectual landscape in the 1970s and 1980s, failed to address key processes within the micro-mobilizing context of social movements.

The cascade of criticisms against the structural emphasis of resource mobilization theories grew in the 1980s. These criticisms provided a theoretical space for movement scholars to explore key processes that enveloped meaning and motivation of participation. Snow and Benford (1988) were early proponents in describing these processes. This line of research has grown and been fruitful in understanding social movements since the late 1980s.

The term “frame” is borrowed from the conceptual work of Irving Goffman (1974; Snow et al. 1986). Goffman (1974) suggested that frames are a way to organize undefined experiences by ascribing meaning to such experiences. Stated another way, people assign meaning to their experiences and social phenomenon, by placing the same into familiar categories. The process (which occurs in a collectivity), became known simply as “framing.” The concept resonated with



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many researchers in the field struggling to find a conceptual scaffolding to describe movement phenomenon. This approach later anchored related perspectives that were proffered by social constructionists.

Several related and overlapping developments emerged early from this research tradition. One development is refined in the work of Hunt et al. (1994). They described three distinct identity fields relevant to all social movements. The first identity field are the protagonists. This includes those actively working in the group, such as staff, leaders, etc., as well as those sympathetic to the movement. They may view themselves as “victims,” “casualties of an unjust system,” or as “advocates or reformers” to remedy some social ill or injustice. The second field are the antagonists. Often, antagonists are assigned negative attributes, viewed with contempt, and vilified by the protagonists. They may be attached to the status quo, the wealthy, corporate world, a business, or Wall Street. The final identity field is the audience. These are by-standers or neutral observers. They are viewed as potential recruits by the protagonists, persuaded through dialogue, or moved to support their cause through powerful symbolic messages.

A second development was articulated by Snow and Benford (1988). They deftly argued that “framing” is an interactive process, focused on shared meaning. At its most elemental level, three distinct areas are fundamental and considered as “core” to the framing process. The first includes “diagnostic framing.” This identifies the problem, or the matter that should be changed. At times, the source of the problem is not necessarily manifest. As the term implies, the burden is on the movement to identify the source, and to provide an accurate diagnosis of the issue. This process also includes the identification of whom, or what should be blamed. Vilification or culpability (as described above) resides within the diagnostic framing process.

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The second core framing process is “prognostic framing.” This involves “...the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan.” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 616). Social movements, including the recruitment of participants, would wane or suffer without a clear plan to overcome or overturn a grievance or some perceived injustice. The final component of the core framing process is “motivational framing.” This task is what Benford and Snow (2000, p. 617) refer to as a “...‘call to arms’ or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabulary of motives.” In other words, a compelling narrative is necessary in most cases to prompt participant action.

The development of frames were taken for granted in structural approaches to social movements. By contrast, framing scholars correctly noted that these core processes and identity fields are the work of agents and inextricably connected to constructions of social reality.

This research examines the interactional aspects of frame development as it relates to the Bethany crematory controversy. Specifically, we endeavored to understand frame development from the perspective of those who opposed the crematory, as well as the corresponding roles of the funeral home and the city council.

### **Methods**

This research builds on an exploratory project by Steward, Fritch, and Spomer (2016) labeled as the Bethany crematory controversy. While the initial project examined media accounts of the debate, this research largely draws from field notes, primarily in-depth interviews with key stakeholders of the funeral home, city council, and the opponents of the construction of the crematory.

### **Participant Observation**

Field notes were collected from the town meeting convened by the city council to discuss the proposed chapel and crematory. The meeting was held on Tuesday, February 17, 2015. It began at 7:32 pm and concluded at 11:39 pm. The researcher used a common technique that Emerson et al. (1995) refers to as “jottings.” This is akin to Berg’s (2001) strategy of “cryptic notes.” These short phrases or words were fleshed-out into a larger narrative shortly after the researcher exited the field.

In full disclosure, the researcher (Fritch) was invited by the funeral home to serve as an expert on the issue of crematoriums. His presentation centered on the technical aspects of cremation. We do not believe his participation adversely affected his observations, except perhaps during his five minute presentation. On the contrary, we argue that his participation in this capacity heightened his awareness of the emotional contours of the audience and tone of the meeting.

### **In-depth Interviews**

*Participants.* The in-depth interviews were conducted over the summer and fall of 2015. A purposive sample was drawn, limited to key personnel of the funeral home, city council, and opponents of the proposal. Each interview spanned 60 to 90 minutes in length.

As a starting point, we contacted people who were mentioned in the media accounts. One of the researchers was tasked with contacting the individuals. In the initial contact, the researcher outlines the landmarks of the project and requested a face-to-face meeting. Meetings occurred at their offices or a public location specified by the participant.

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Prior to the interview, one of the researchers explained the parameters of the research and provided a written Informed Consent and an Affirmation by Research Subject form. Among other things, it affirmed the choice to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty or sanction. We requested that the participant sign and date the Affirmation by the Research Subject form.

***Instrument.*** In order to capture the latitude of possible frames and motivations, the project employed a semi-structured interview schedule (See Appendix Document 1). The questions centered on three central themes. The first area focused on demographic information specific to the role of the interviewee. Depending on the ambience of the pre-interview, these questions were presented at either the beginning or the conclusion of the interview. The second area consisted of questions and probes related to the chronology of the events. We wanted to understand the seminal elements of the opposition and its evolution related to specific points in time. The third area focused on the framing processes and how these frames developed throughout the course of the controversy. In our initial research, these frames were presented as fundamentally static and immutable. We suspected that data from the field would challenge this conception.

***Process of Data Analysis.*** In all but three interviews, both researchers were present for the interviews. After the interviews, each researcher coded the data guided by a common method. We employed a two-step process. The first was coding every distinct thought or feeling. In the second step, we refined and developed broader narratives by collapsing similar responses, emotions, beliefs, into conceptually distinct categories.

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To ensure reliability, we compared our refined codes and narratives. In the process, we discovered two types of inconsistencies that required a resolution. First, there were gaps of information noted. In other words, both researchers failed to come to the same conclusions. In such cases, the information was identified and discussed. We discarded any information that did not garner unanimous support.

The second type of inconsistency occurred when there was a disagreement on the intent of a statement by the participant. Again, a discussion ensued regarding the intent of a response or comment. In the few occurrences, we determined to resolve the inconsistency by examining the context of the statement. Again, we discarded any information that failed to gain unanimous support (Hodson, 1999).

### **Analysis**

Analysis of our field notes, coupled with the media accounts from the initial project, point to distinct periods or stages in the Bethany crematory debate. The original chronology of events, while sufficient for the scope of the exploratory project, failed to adequately capture the nuanced and emergent nature of the debate relevant to the framing processes and identity fields. First, the developments prior to the appearance of the initial media report (December 31, 2014) are significant in the formulation of the diagnostic and prognostic frames. Second, the media accounts in isolation, failed to inform us of important theoretical considerations, such as the mutable character of the audience and culpable parties. Finally, the exploratory project defined the narratives or frames quite accurately, but failed to provide the contextual landscape in terms of “timing” and “frequency” of their appearances. These limitations appear to be resolved in this follow-up project by employing qualitative research strategies and building on the theoretical foundation of frame analysis.

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As stated, the entire spectrum of the controversy may be viewed through three distinct periods. Each period is defined by a significant shift in strategies by the protagonist, antagonist, or audience. While specific dates are noted to delineate each period, we acknowledge that this is for analytic convenience. Reality, unfortunately, is not that generous. The “edges” between one period and another are often blurred and far from distinct as we portend. With this caveat, the controversy may be viewed as a period of incubation, followed by a developmental period, and concluding with a maturation period.

### **Incubation Period**

The first period begins with the discovery, by one of the residents in the nearby neighborhood, of the Planned Unit Development (PUD). It concludes before the first formal public announcement of their opposition to the proposal. We label this as the incubation period. The scope of the opposition only includes a few residents of the neighborhood. The major narratives were two-fold; concern over air quality and depreciating home values. At this point, the negative consequences of the crematory were limited primarily to the neighborhood, and second, the assisted living center located adjacent to the proposed site.

In the initial project, the chronology of the debate does not begin until December 31, 2014. This was the first media report related to the proposed construction of the crematory. Field notes, however, revealed that several residents of the neighborhood became active opponents well before the December 31 media account. In fact, the revelation of the proposal was known several months prior to the first media story. In early October 2014, a resident of the neighborhood noticed that the property of the proposed site had been disturbed (limited tree and

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shrub removal). Curiosity prompted this person to peruse the records at city hall. It was this inquiry that led to the discovery of the PUD submitted by the funeral home.

Alarmed by this discovery, one resident stated, “I was shocked by the rezoning of the property to allow for a crematory... it just didn’t seem right... and the more I thought about it the more concerned I became.” Several residents, who later became vocal opponents of the crematory proposal, claimed that they had thoroughly researched the issue. One claims, “at first I didn’t know what to think. But I started researching the issue [on the web- *added by researchers*] and determined this was not going to fly.” Another claimed, “I just got this sick feel’n when I first heard the plan. It was like getting punched in the gut. At that point, I didn’t know what I could do, but I gotta do something.”

By our accounts, several residents of the nearby neighborhood were in dialogue with one another about the pending PUD for nearly eight weeks prior to the first media account. It appears that this time was used by a few of the residents to find evidence that underscored the dangers of crematories. This preparation (incubation period) purports with comments from the funeral home members during their first face-to-face meeting with the residents of the neighborhood. As one of the funeral home employees stated, “We requested a meeting with the residents of the nearby neighborhood to discuss the proposal. It coincided with a scheduled homeowners Christmas party in early December 2014. They seemed to know the issues.” Another, reflecting on that first meeting with the residents, stated, “there were a few very well-prepared opponents... they had already printed a bunch of literature against the proposal.” To underscore this point, another funeral representative asserted, “One of the opponents of the crematory was an engineer who had written a white paper on the subject. He was seen by many of the residents as an expert... I guess because he was an engineer.”

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The tone of the meeting, according to a funeral home employee, exhibited a degree of hostility and incivility. This respondent reported, “the meeting became hostile... the president of the homeowners association was shocked by the hostility and lost control of the meeting.” The target of the hostility was clearly the proposed construction of the crematory.

One of the developments that emerged during this face-to-face meeting between the residents and the funeral home were the diagnostic and prognostic frames, though in nascent forms. One of the first diagnostic frames involved property depreciation. As one resident claimed, “my backyard backs up to it. I will lose my investment.” Another stated, “I would not have purchased a home in this neighborhood if I would have known there would be a crematory next door!”

The other diagnostic theme that was proffered involved air quality. According to the funeral home members, several residents expressed concerns over air pollution and the toxic levels of mercury in the exhaust. One of the residents commented, “What about the potential health risks... such as birth defects in pregnant women?”

What is interesting in the incubation period of diagnostic framing was the villain. At this point, the residents’ seemed content to blame the “crematory” for the negative effect on property values and air quality. This is echoed in the first media report, with a resident claiming that he supported cremation, but not “at this location.” The diagnostic frame, which locates the source of the problem and defines culpability, is not fully developed at this point, neither in terms of breadth (only a few of the residence of the neighborhood impacted are involved) or culpability.

To be sure, there is no indication that the funeral home is vilified in the early weeks and most likely, the entire span of the incubation period. While there were reports of a hostile tone,



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especially perceived by the funeral home representatives, we contend that the villain during the incubation period was the inanimate object called the “crematory.” At this point, many of the opponents likely viewed the funeral home (who had a positive reputation in the community as reported in the exploratory research) as misguided and unaware of all the facts related to crematories. Opponents seemed content to use “persuasion” as a means for change. In other words, what the funeral home personnel needed was an unbiased education regarding the ill-effects and negative impact to the nearby neighborhood. Once they “see” and “hear” the facts, they will “do the right” thing and withdraw their proposal. This perspective of the opponents to the crematory serves to contextualize the framing process during the incubation period. It underscores the effort of several of the opponents in gathering literature, making flyers, writing a white paper nearly 100 pages (including appendices), and collecting a bevy of “scientific findings.” These artifacts were all part of the repertoire of the residents.

Our field notes seems to support the notion that the residents would have been content with letting their “research” and “evidence” dissuade the funeral home from pursuing the misguided and dangerous construction of the facility. Under this scenario, no further action would be required of the opponents. As one of the funeral home respondent’s comments, “after all, everyone lived in the same small town and many attended the same church. But when we continued with the process and saw people who disagreed [with the rezoning to allow the construction of a crematory-*added by the researchers*] with us at church services, well, it was a bit awkward.” The prognostic frame (i.e., what should be done to remedy the problem), was relatively undeveloped at the first face-to-face meeting. From the opponents’ point of view, the crematory was the problem and the resolution was the withdrawal of the proposal by the funeral

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home. The rudimentary form of the prognostic frame, therefore, was the non-coercive strategy of “persuasion.”

The opponent’s intent to “educate” rather than “vilify” the funeral home also explains the funeral home’s construction of technical frames (see below), especially during the public meetings. The counter-frames created by the funeral home were of the technical sort. As one funeral home representative puts it, “the residents were getting ‘bad information’ and way off about the ‘science’ of cremation.” We identified the frames of the funeral home in our exploratory project as “technical” frames. These frames were focused on the “facts” and were specifically used to counter the unscientific claims by the opponents. Perhaps this is the reason that the number of technical frames reported in the media far outweighed the other two frames combined (i.e., business decision and appeal to reputation). One funeral home advocate characterized the arguments and claims of the residents as, “alarmists” and “emotional.” Another commented that many of the crematory opponents were “naïve” and “bullies.” One of the funeral home employee’s commented that one of the opponents was especially skilled at “overwhelming people with ‘stats’ and ‘terms’ that made cremation look like a dangerous practice.” Collectively, these frames by the funeral home were focused on countering the misinformation and “bad science” promulgated by the residents of the neighborhood.

We do not have any direct evidence to support the idea that there were private meetings among the residents of the neighborhood after the initial Christmas homeowners meeting with the funeral home. However, we infer from the media reports and field notes that conversations among a small group of the residents were continuous. The diagnostic and prognostic frames were more developed and refined as evident in the January and February meetings. As stated,

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the incubation period concluded prior to the first public hearing. This hearing, called by the city council in early January 2015, initiated the developmental period.

### **Developmental Period**

This period began with the first public hearing (January 9) and concluded with the approval of the proposed rezoning by the city council. The developmental period spans approximately five weeks. It is marked by an evolving set of diagnostic frames that are more defined and expanded the negative impact of the crematory well beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood. In addition, the culpability migrates from the inanimate object of the crematory to those associated with the funeral home.

Field notes confirmed the three narratives of the opponents of the crematory identified in the exploratory project; air quality, depreciating property values, and the inappropriate location. These diagnostic frames during the developmental period revealed greater cohesion among opponents. This not only appeared in the media accounts (after revisiting the data from the first project), but was evident in the council meetings. For example, at one of the council meetings, expert testimony coupled with the technical frames presented by the funeral home, asserted that only a heat signature is seen from the exhaust system. This countered the opponents' claim that these crematoriums "churn out black smoke" and "ashes of human remains" as stated in the town meeting.

Opponents challenged the "science" and "technical" aspects of crematories explained by the funeral home with a YouTube video (Moore, C., 2015) of a crematory in Oklahoma spewing heavy black smoke from the exhaust system. In addition to the video, the audience was made

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party to a phone conversation between the person recording the video and an employee of the crematory. The transcripts follows:

Employee: “name of facility, and name of employee”

Caller: “Hi, uh, are you located at, address of facility? “

Employee: “Yes, we are”

Caller: “OK, uh, making sure I had the right business, uh, we were driving by this earlier morning and noticed an incredible amount of dark black smoke coming out of the smoke stacks, uh, what do you guys burn there? If you don’t mind me asking?”

Employee: “um, we are a mortuary and cremation service”

Caller: “Oh, so you are burning bodies?”

Employee: “Yes”

Caller: “OK, so they produce that much smoke, is that what it was?”

Employee: “Um, I believe the embalmers brought in this morning an obese lady, so that’s probably the black smoke. Usually if they are obese they tend to have a darker smoke, um, is this the fire department?”

Caller: “Uh, no no, I’m just, I was just driving by and noticed it and wanted to make sure it wasn’t any issues or

Employee: “Oh, OK”

Caller: “Alright, I appreciate your time, thank you”

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Employee: Alright, goodbye”

The video and audio of the conversation, presented at a city council meeting, was a powerful diagnostic frame that effectively undermined the technical frames offered by the funeral home representatives. The video reinforced the frames of air quality and depreciating property values. The presentation also implicated the funeral home as villains in pursuing a proposal that threatens the quality of life of the community. As one opponent commented, “they were trying to pull one over on us with this mumbo-jumbo stuff.” This was a powerful dramaturgical moment that provided credibility to the opponents of the crematory.

In addition, the video also paved the way for the third diagnostic frame of the opponents (inappropriate location). The YouTube video clearly reveals the location of the crematory in the heart of an industrial park. While subtle, this image not only became a proxy for depreciating property values, but underscored the inappropriate location of the proposed crematory site.

The “inappropriate location” frame also broadened the audience. A restaurant was less than one block from the proposed site. More troubling, as noted by one opponent, “the senior assisted living center would be next to the crematory.” There were numerous people who were concerned about the impact of a crematory on our valued seniors. The threat to the seniors was largely psychological pain. As one opponent stated, “the psychological consequences to the elderly, I mean, can you imagine sitt’n there looking at this awful thing and thinking to yourself, am I next?”

### **Maturation Period**

Oddly, the maturation period began the day after the city council approves the funeral home’s PUD. The opponents to the crematory were sorely disappointed. One stated, “I just felt sick...

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like all of our hard work in pointing out the dangers [of the crematory-*added by the researcher*] were ignored.” Another suggested, “I was furious with the council and those who supported [the PUD-*added by researchers*] it. This is what’s wrong [with our political system-*added by the researchers*], we elect these bureaucrats to represent us and then they are in the tank for business.”

Two weeks after the city council’s decision, one of the opponents filed for an injunction to the city council approval. The injunction halted any planned construction for 30 days. During this period, the opponents were required to obtain a minimum number of signatures to hold a city-wide referendum. It was unclear from media reports of the threshold that had to be met. They speculated 400, 500, or 600 signatures. The number of signatures required was based on a percentage of the previous city-wide vote. The most precise figure was found in an article (Montgomery, 2015) that indicated 630 signatures.

The diagnostic and prognostic frames evolved during this period. While the former frames of air quality, property depreciation, and inappropriate location were still present, they were overshadowed by a new problem, mainly, the failure of the elected officials to heed the voice of the people. This core democratic value became the primary diagnostic frame. The city council, especially those who voted to approve the Planned Unit Development (PUD), were vilified and relegated to the status of “dictators” according to one opponent of the crematory. In fact, this was quite apparent on a billboard that reads, “SHAME ON YOU!” The city council members are named, including the mayor. In smaller letters, “NO THANKS” is referenced to the funeral home. The bottom of the billboard pronounced the primary diagnostic frame in this maturation period, “THE CITIZEN’S VOICE DOES COUNT. (See Appendix Figure A). This ideal was also infused in the motivational frame (see below). The billboard is symbolic of the

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emerging frames of culpability, which established a hierarchy of blame. From the opponents' point of view, the failure on the part of the elected officials was most blameworthy, followed by the funeral home.

The shift in culpability from the funeral home (development period) to the city council was intriguing. Prior to the council vote, the city council members enjoyed the status of the audience. The opponents presented their evidence against the crematory in similar fashion to the funeral home during the incubation period. They hoped to persuade the council to vote in opposition to the PUD. But when the council approved the PUD, they were quickly vilified as trampling upon the people who voted them into office. The diagnostic frame was clearly elevated to a higher value, and appealed to sentiments of a core democratic value of representing the people.

Motivational framing, which lurked in the recesses during the first two periods, became a driving force during the maturation period. Recall, motivation frames are those things that call people to action. In this context, the opponents of the crematory called on people to acquire the signatures of 1100-1200 residents, which exceeded the 630 signatures required for the referendum (Montgomery, 2015; Shanahan, 2015).

In appealing to a core American value of democratic rule, the opponents to the crematory persuaded some to join their cause. These bystanders are part of the identity fields that we labeled as the audience. Some of the bystanders, who were not convinced of the evils of the crematory, were moved to sign the petition, presumably because of this core value of democratic representation. This was reported to us by several activists who opposed the PUD, as well as several funeral home representatives.

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In an interesting twist, the funeral home formally withdrew their PUD. As one member of the funeral home shared, “the lawsuit and injunction was the tipping point. We just did not believe it was worth a long, drawn out battle in court.” The withdrawal of the PUD by the funeral home mattered little to the opponents of the crematory. The culpable party, as indicated in the diagnostic frames, was the members of city council. The tireless efforts by the opponents to obtain the signatures and press forward with the referendum were for a higher cause; to overturn the ruling by the city council. This appeal to a higher cause was the motivational frame that undergirded their efforts. In this sense, the opponents of the crematory, as one reported, desired to “put an exclamation point on the issue and to send a message to our elected officials to honor the will of the people.” The final count of the vote was a landslide in favor of over-turning the decision of the city council, 921 to only 375 supporting the council’s decision.

### **Discussion and Theoretical Implications**

In the first project, the researchers offered three impressions; 1) dominance of the crematory, 2) escalation of emotion as the controversy unfolded, and 3) the absence of a moral argument, or belief at the center of the crematory opposition. In-depth interviews and field notes from the town meeting provided partial support for our initial impressions.

This project confirmed the first impression (i.e., dominance of the crematory). The entire town meeting was dominated by the discussion of the crematory. There was no opposition to the construction of a chapel. Experts, however, presented the technical aspects of a crematory. In fact, one proponent of the construction of the crematory described the motivation of the opponents as the “NIMBY syndrome [not in my backyard-*added by researchers*].” Of course, NIMBY is a familiar acronym that characterizes community resistance toward locating



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undesirable businesses in one's backyard. All parties viewed the crematory as the focal point of the controversy. We believe that a chapel, without the crematory, would not have fostered the negative responses from the residents and businesses in the immediate vicinity of the proposal.

In the exploratory project, it was noted that there was an escalation (linear trajectory) of emotional responses from the first report through the conclusion of the controversy. This impression was not supported by our field notes. In fact, emotions related to the proposal were much more complex than assumed. Notwithstanding problems in defining an "emotional response," our observations suggest that inflection points existed throughout the six month debate. These points in time are clouded by pockets of individuals working on behalf of, or in opposition to the proposal. In other words, the steady linear escalation of emotions that were proffered in the first study gave way to moments of acute emotional responses followed by a period of relative calm. The emotional responses were clearly tethered to the situation or moment in time. The impression of a linear escalation inferred from the media accounts was not congruent with our field notes.

Finally, impressions of the absence of the morality of cremation in the debate appear to be empirically confirmed. Interviews with opponents, funeral home personnel, city council, all indicated that the debate focused on the "use" of that particular property, and not the morality of cremation. One respondent simply stated, "Religion did not play a role... people joined a side because they wanted to fight the battle." There were two odd comments by a resident(s). A council member received a phone message from presumably a citizen suggesting, "if the crematory comes in you are going to release evil spirits in the air." Another stated in a letter to the funeral home, "...I pray to God that you don't build that crematory.... Don't you know you

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are putting people's eternal life in danger?" Those comments, perhaps from a single resident, were clearly an isolated perspective.

### **Theoretical Scaffolding**

*Identity fields.* The theoretical premise of this follow-up project was two-fold. First, we wanted to uncover the details of the debate through a social constructionist lens, specifically, frame analysis. As stated in the literature review, the three principle identity fields are the protagonists, antagonists, and the audience. These identity fields aided our analysis of the complex interactions as well as the development of frames and counter-frames throughout the entire debate. The funeral home and city council played multiple identity fields as the controversy unfolded. The opponents of the crematory may be viewed as the protagonists or change agents, who sought to remedy some social injustice. In this case, a crematory that was considered dangerous to the community. The antagonists, thereby, were defined by the status quo, the power brokers, or purveyors of social injustice.

Our field notes revealed an interesting development with theoretical implications. First, the roles of the identity fields were neither static nor permanent, but rather mutable and transient. This is particularly evident with the role of the audience. During the incubation period, we argue that the funeral home representatives played the role of the audience, at least from the perspective of the residents who opposed the crematory.

Our field notes clearly indicate that the residents believed that the funeral home would withdraw their Planned Unit Development (PUD) after viewing the "facts" and "evidence" presented by several experts from the neighborhood at the first face-to-face meeting. The facts presented by the opponents to the crematory were found in their literature and white paper. When

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engaged with the audience, protagonists (opponents to the crematory) used “persuasion” as the primary tactic rather than vilification. We are convinced that during the incubation period, residents viewed the funeral home as neighbors and good citizens, who were simply misguided in their efforts and misinformed of the imminent dangers of crematories. After all, many attended the same church, frequented the same restaurants, managed the funeral arrangements of loved ones in the community, and one funeral home employee lived less than 1,000 yards of the proposed site. All considered, they were good people but simply uninformed or misinformed about the imminent dangers of their proposal. The villain during the incubation period was not the funeral home, but rather the crematory. In this manner, the residents were able to vilify the inanimate object of the crematory without indicting the respective members of the funeral home, who coincidentally, played the role of the audience during this period. However, the identity field of the funeral home mutates from “audience” to “antagonist,” as they continued to pursue their plans to rezone the property and construct a chapel and crematory.

The second period (developmental) began with the first public hearing on January 9, 2015. This meeting was carved out for those citizens who wanted to share their concerns about the proposal. At this point, the city council was the primary audience. The opponents of the crematory attempted to persuade the council of the imminent dangers of the crematory. There were three community meetings over a period of five weeks. During the developmental period, there is no empirical evidence to conclude that the city council played any role other than the primary audience. After all, the citizens of Bethany elected the council to serve the community. It was also evident that the villain or culprit during the developmental period was expanded to include the funeral home. This helps us understand one of the frames that the funeral home

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developed; “appeal to reputation,” as identified in the exploratory project. This was a counter-frame to combat the vilification proffered in the diagnostic frames by the protagonists.

The identity field of “audience” further evolved when the city council moved to approve the PUD. After an injunction, the opponents to the crematory expanded the culprit or villain to include the city council, specifically those who voted to approve the PUD. In conjunction with a new frame, the opponents of the crematory intentionally extended the audience to the entire community who are eligible to vote.

***Diagnostic, Prognostic, and Motivational Frames.*** The diagnostic frames tendered by the protagonists (opponents of the crematory) were developed prior to the first media reports. The funeral home presentation of a new chapel and crematory at the homeowners meeting in early December, 2014, were met with diagnostic frames, although in nascent form, by several residents. One resident, for example, lamented that his “property values were going to take a hit.” Another stated, “the smell and sounds of a crematory are awful.” This resident also claimed to have stated, “Don’t you know that the ‘soot’ from the chimneys are toxic.”

The frames that we identified in our exploratory project were empirically supported with our field observations. In neighborhood meetings, the issue of air quality and property values were clearly concerns during the incubation and developmental periods. The opponents to the crematory were largely from the neighborhood adjacent to the proposed site in the early periods of the controversy. As the controversy unfolded, the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames evolved; blame was imputed to individuals and simultaneously, the audience, as potential opponents to the crematory, grew to include the entire community. In other words, the frames of air quality and depreciating property values, which dominated the early periods of the debate,

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gave way to the frame of “inappropriate location.” In this frame, traffic concerns and psychological harm to seniors were foisted to the top-level concerns. This frame expanded the base of potential protagonists by connecting negative impacts of the proposal to new populations. We found that the full effect of the motivational frame is manifested during the maturation period, the ultimate expansion of potential movement members manifested in the diagnostic frame during the maturation period. It was posited that elected officials had acted in their own interest and ignored the voice of people. The motivational frame appealed to the deepest and most fundamental value of democratic society, that is, self-determination. The opponents of the crematory expanded their potential base of support by reframing the issue to include fundamental values of democratic society. The irony of this claim is that the rule of law and republican form of government was manifested, including the legal recourse and referendum on the council’s decision.

This research accomplished the following: 1) the chronology of the controversy began much earlier than the first report. 2) The protagonists grew from a few residents to more than 900 voters in the community. 3) The identity fields, particularly the audience, often viewed as immutable is quite variable depending on how the issues are framed. 4) Diagnostic and prognostic frames were subject to changes in content and frequency of use. While we did not specifically address prognostic frames (*i.e., what should be done*), it was implied in our analysis and discussion in the evolution of the movement. The primary tactic in the prognostic frames in the incubation and developmental periods was persuasion. The diagnostic frames became more focused in the second stage and the “villains” were expanded to include the funeral home and city council. 5) The motivational frame, or “call to action,” was enhanced with the development of a new diagnostic frame after the approval of the PUD by the city council. The appeal to

fundamental democratic values expanded the potential base of the opponents to include the entire community.

### **Limitations**

While this project adequately addresses the shortcomings in the exploratory research, there was at least one limitation of the current research related to our interview pool. We successfully garnered interviews from most of the targeted respondents, however, we were unable to secure interviews from two influential opponents of the crematory. These included an engineer, considered by many of the opposition as an expert of crematoriums, and the director of an assisted living home located adjacent to the proposed site of the crematory. The engineer did not outright refuse to be interviewed, but was unavailable for most of the duration of data collection period. Eventually, we determined he would not be available for an interview. The director of the assisted living home, on the other hand, simply informed us that there was no interest in participating in the research. We do not believe that the additional information from these individuals would have significantly changed the conclusions of this research.

### **Future Research**

One of the interesting contours from the breadth of interviews was the mention and importance of a white paper. The white paper was written by an engineer and provided the data and details of the dangers of crematories. Our cursory read of the white paper led to a fascinating website called, “no2crematory.” We believe that a connection exists between the website and strategies employed by the Bethany opponents to the crematory. An examination of the white paper, the website, and actions of the opponents to the crematory may merit future research.

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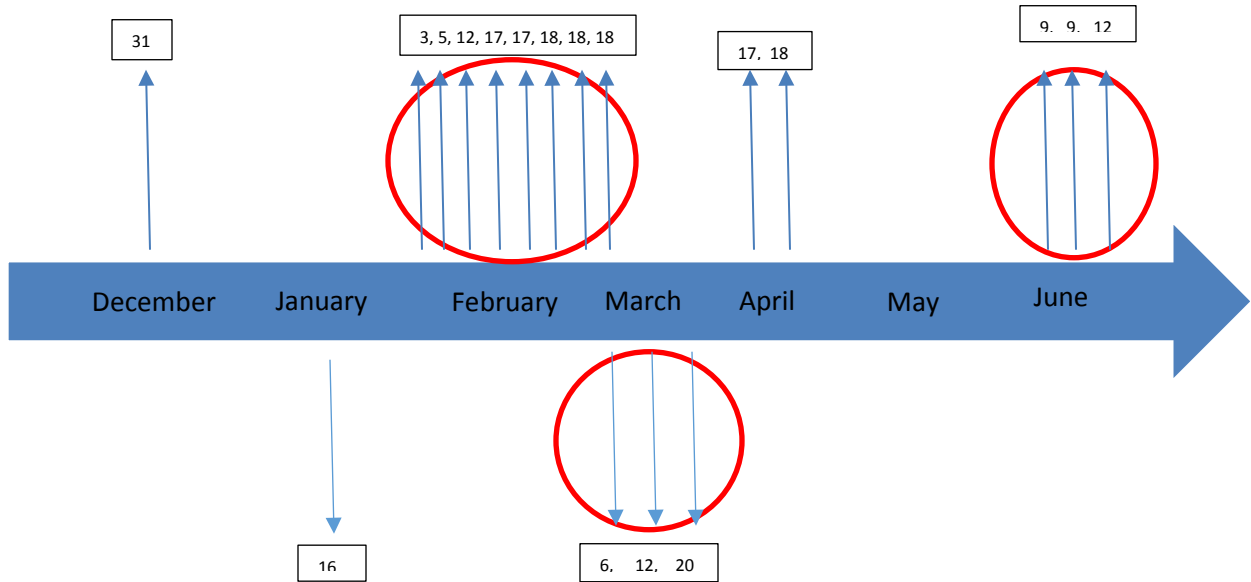
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Appendix

Figure 1

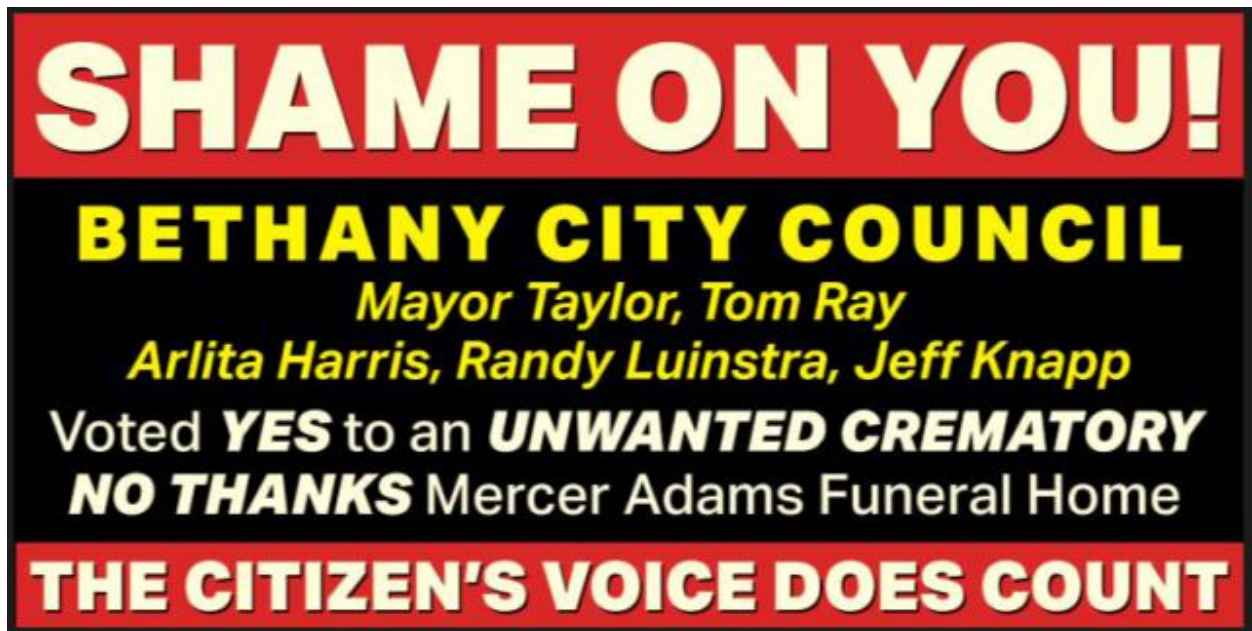


Explanation of Figure 1

This timeline represents the narrative of events found in the media. The blue arrows depict certain dates when the media wrote stories or other news broadcasts were aired. The red circles depict a surge of this media attention.

Appendix

Figure 2



Explanation of Figure 2

This image depicts the actual billboard designed and implemented for public consumption by the opposition to the crematory.

Appendix

Document 1

Standing Room Only: The Crematory Debate

Methods: Document Analysis, In-depth Interviews, & Participant Observation

Demographic Information:

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_ Religious Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Schedule:

1. Has anyone in your family or extended family chosen cremation as a funerary option?
2. Are you a resident of Bethany?
  - a. Probe: How long have you lived there?
3. How are do you live from the proposed site of the crematorium?
  - a. Probe: do you think it is too close?
4. How did you learn of the rezoning and proposed site for the crematory?
5. Describe your feelings on cremation.
  - a. Probe: Which side do you support?
6. What factors led you to oppose/support the rezoning decision.
7. Did you see anything in the newspaper or in the media to sway your decision?

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