

**Last Words in the Texas Death Chamber:  
Implications for Theory, Practice & Research  
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A qualitative study was conducted to investigate thematic components of the last words given by death row inmates in Texas between 1982 and 2004 at the time of execution. Last words were available from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice website and the book *Texas Death Row: Executions in the Modern Era* (Sunriver Cartel, 2000). Ninety-four inmates were excluded from the study, while 72% (n=242) of death row inmates' last words met inclusion criteria. Transcripts of last words in the death chamber were recorded thematically with NVIVO software and then analyzed.

A grounded theory approach was utilized; a typology of last words and a mid-level theory emerged from the data. The typology was based on the interaction between two components: *thematic* (religion, responsibility, and meaning) and *community* (self, inmate family/friend, victim/victim family, criminal justice/ social system). Religion produced last words classified as validation/salvation, coping/comfort, guilt/forgiveness and justice. Responsibility produced sincere remorse, conduct, insincere remorse and innocence. Meaning produced last words classified as change, support, healing/closure and oppression. The mid-level theory that can explain this typology is called the *transitional-relational equilibrium theory*, which states that during the transition from life to death, inmates utilize religion, responsibility and meaning in their final communication to restore equilibrium to relationships (persons to whom the last statement is directed). The typology and mid-level theory that emerged in this study may be utilized by the TDCJ Victim Services Division in practice, when preparing victims' families for an execution so that they have more realistic expectations of these last statements. This study also makes a contribution to death and dying theory. Findings can also lead to future research such as examining the impact of inmates' last words on victims' families grieving process.

Reference

SunRiver Cartel. (2000). *Texas Death Row: Executions in the modern era*. Marietta,GA: Longstreet Press.