

1984

A Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Suicide in Adolescent Literature

Roxanne Fox
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

The major purposes of this research were to analyze the portrayal of adolescent suicidal characters in books which adolescents are currently reading and to attempt to determine if this portrayal was realistic in the entire group of books. A panel of experts was used to obtain a sample of ten books. The portrayal of ten characters from the ten books were analyzed using an inventory of nine elements which were derived from a review of the literature currently discussing characteristics of adolescent suicide. The results of this analysis suggested that, for the most part, a realistic and generally balanced portrayal of adolescent suicide exists in these books. The most realistic portrayals were given in pre-suicidal behaviors, such as withdrawal and/or rebellion; disciplinary techniques used by parents/ guardians; peer relationships; and symptoms displayed by the characters. The majority of the characters, for example, were depicted as exhibiting warning signs to their friends and families.

Some definite discrepancies emerged in the areas of gender of suicide victims, methods used, and attributed causes of suicide. The patterns suggested that an unrealistic presentation may exist in these areas, but additional analysis would be necessary to determine if the patterns are significant.

Further recommendation for research to compare findings of this study with future analyses of religious dimensions associated with suicide, the point of view of the books, and the psychological aftermath resulting from an adolescent suicide, would be valuable in determining if these elements are important.

A CONTENT ANALYSIS
OF THE PORTRAYAL OF SUICIDE
IN ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Roxanne Fox
July 11, 1984

Read and approved by
W. Duane Johnson

Elizabeth Martin

Accepted by Department
Elizabeth Martin

Date *July 12, 1984*

ABSTRACT

The major purposes of this research were to analyze the portrayal of adolescent suicidal characters in books which adolescents are currently reading and to attempt to determine if this portrayal was realistic in the entire group of books. A panel of experts was used to obtain a sample of ten books. The portrayal of ten characters from the ten books were analyzed using an inventory of nine elements which were derived from a review of the literature currently discussing characteristics of adolescent suicide. The results of this analysis suggested that, for the most part, a realistic and generally balanced portrayal of adolescent suicide exists in these books. The most realistic portrayals were given in pre-suicidal behaviors, such as withdrawal and/or rebellion; disciplinary techniques used by parents/guardians; peer relationships; and symptoms displayed by the characters. The majority of the characters, for example, were depicted as exhibiting warning signs to their friends and families.

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CHAPTER 1

"To die, to sleep -
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to..." Hamlet, III, i. 60-63
Shakespeare

THE INTRODUCTION

"Homo sapiens is the only species which knows that death is inevitable. This makes it possible for a person to consciously plan the taking of his/her own life. In this sense, one may say: to be human is to have the psychic power to choose death."¹

Suicide² is a subject that questions the meaning of life and often results in denial of this kind of self-destruction. Denial of the issue does not change the reality that suicide has become an alarming alternative to life, especially among adolescents.³ The rate of adolescent suicides has increased so sharply that it is now considered to be the second or third leading cause of death for persons between the ages of ten and twenty.⁴ The suicide rate in the United States has more than doubled in the past decade, and there are as many as 50 to 150

¹ Harry Slochower, "Suicide in Literature: Their Ego Function," American Imago 32 (Winter 1975): 392.

² For the purposes of this paper, suicide and suicide attempt will be used synonymously.

³ For the purposes of this study, the following terms will be used synonymously: adolescence, adolescents, young adults, young people, teenagers, and youth.

⁴ Suicide and Youth, (Montgomery County, Ohio: Suicide Prevention Center, 1982), unpaginated.

attempts for every completed suicide.⁵ It is difficult to obtain exact data because many suicides are not reported or are masked as accidental deaths. Lone driver automobile accidents, anorexia nervosa, and abuse of drugs and/or alcohol are all defined by experts as masked suicides. Suicide among adolescents has become so widespread that no one should ignore or minimize its significance or the difficulties that lead up to it.⁶

Death at any age is perceived as a disturbing phenomenon. Death by one's own hand is even more perplexing. To many persons, intentional death is considered inexplicable and unnatural, and for this reason suicide has generally been considered a forbidden subject.

The alarming increase of adolescent suicide seems to be related to the pressures and frustrations of that period of life. As suicide is thought to be disturbing by society, so too is adolescence considered to be the most distressing and problem-oriented age. This is one reason why the combination of suicide and adolescence, both difficult phenomena, make the adolescent suicidal person an ignored and intimidating subject.⁷

One traditional approach to educating people in terms of values and attitudes has been through literature. Recently, however, little attention has been given to suicide in adolescent literature. According

⁵ Carl L. Tishler, Patrick C. McKenry and Karen Christman Morgan, "Adolescent Suicide Attempts: Some Significant Factors," Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior 11 (September 1981): 86.

⁶ Francine Klagsburn, Too Young to Die (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1976) p. 4.

⁷ Marya Marthas Sampson, "Adolescents Who Commit Suicidal Acts: Suicidogenic Factors," in Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing, eds. Gladys M. Scipien and Martha Underwood Barnard (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), unpaginated.

to Kenneth Donelson and Alleen Nilsen, many controversial issues have been explored in recent adolescent literature because of the belief that young people learn vicariously through experiences in reading. They further maintain that a satisfactory amount of books on the theme of suicide in literature for young adults have not been written because the theme of suicide cannot be handled simply as a vicarious experience, but is - in fact - a reality.⁸

Taking a different approach to this position is Joanne Bernstein. She advocates a need for examination of the subject because suicide is becoming a major societal problem. Furthermore, Ms. Bernstein suggests that the "literary portrayal of suicide is of interest to teachers, media specialists, counselors and parents because it is one aspect of death imagery which will have impact upon young people."⁹

Ancient Greek drama presented its interpretations of suicide, as in Antigone. Shakespeare created several characters who chose death by their own hand, as did Hamlet, Brutus, and Romeo and Juliet. Suicide in these early examples of literature was often romanticized, and this romantic attitude has significant appeal to youth even today. Francine Klagsburn notes that "young people assume they will be present to benefit from the punishment their death inflicts, or the love it arouses. They

⁸ Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen P. Nilsen, Literature For Today's Young Adults (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1980), p. 85.

⁹ Joanne Bernstein, "Suicide in Literature for Young People," in Young Adult Literature - Background and Criticism, eds. Millicent Lenz and Ramona M. Mahood (Chicago: American Library Association, 1980), pp. 161-162.

deny the one and only truth about death, that it inevitably ends life - and is final."¹⁰

Adolescent literature is related to the past in the way society of the time is reflected in the genre. Current literature is becoming more complex to keep abreast of the complexity of today's societal concerns. The present trend reflects the importance of youth to confront life through experiences in literature. As Maia Mertz suggests,

A general thought is being expressed for the need to develop adolescents who can critically examine today's covert as well as overt assumptions.¹¹

Based on this viewpoint, realistic adolescent fiction has been developed with the purpose of providing a credible approach to the problems and issues that confront many of our young people in today's world.

The integrity and credibility of the issues being treated in some books have received criticism, however, and two points of view have arisen. Educators and evaluators of adolescent literature who feel there is ample justification for books emphasizing problems such as drug abuse, pregnancy, and suicide, advise that inasmuch as adolescents are exposed to these issues in life, they should experience related issues in literature. They contend that reading about these issues might help a young adult gain control of his/her own actions in life. Evasion of reality and emphasis on idealistic, syrupy situations are not considered to be beneficial. On the other hand, some educators express their concern that recent adolescent literature is sensationalized, over-generalized, didactic, and/or filled with unrealistic portrayals. They

¹⁰ Klagsburn, p. 135.

¹¹ Maia Pank Mertz, "The New Realism: Traditional Cultural Values in Recent Young-Adult Fiction," Phi Delta Kappan 60 (October 1978): 105.

feel books are read to escape reality, and adolescents do not find reading about problems similar to their own meaningful. Both points of view are concerned with the provision of realistic portrayals in the content of the literature being developed for adolescents and to what extent adolescents are affected by the books they read.

Kenneth Donelson suggests one reason for reading adolescent literature:

...the relationship between influence of peer group and reading books about people of approximately the same age is a major reason adolescents enjoy novels written for them.¹²

Many of the current controversial issues facing today's youth have been treated in adolescent literature, including suicide. Fran Arrick's Tunnel Vision¹³ and John Mack's Vivienne¹⁴ are recently published books with the emphasis on suicide. Since literature can influence young adults, it is important that accurate and realistic portrayals of individuals and situations be given in the content of these books.

THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this research was to determine how suicide is presented in books read by adolescents. Are the attitudes and behaviors, intentions, and symptoms or suicidal tendencies of characters depicted realistically? No attempt was made to evaluate whether a book was "good"

¹² Donelson, p. 105.

¹³ Fran Arrick, Tunnel Vision (Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1980).

¹⁴ John E. Mack and Holly Hickler, Vivienne - The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981).

or "bad" literature, but focused only on the content of the book. Since there is concern for realistic portrayals of characters and content, it seemed important that the depiction of suicide in books read by adolescents be established. Recognizing that little, if any, content analysis of these books had been attempted as of this date, this study seemed appropriate and necessary as an initial step to further research in this area. This content analysis involved the evaluation of ten books, which were recommended by panel of experts.

SPECIFIC PROBLEM STATEMENTS

1. Are the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by characters who commit or attempt suicide in books read by adolescents presented realistically?
2. What attributed causes for adolescent suicide are given in the ten books selected?
3. How are peer relationships of the suicidal characters portrayed?
4. Are the differences in suicide intent displayed by gender realistically portrayed in books read by adolescents?
5. Is an accurate portrayal shown of the relationships between lethal methods used by characters who are successful at suicide and those less lethal methods used by characters who make unsuccessful attempts?
6. Are the symptoms displayed by suicidal characters accurate representations in books read by adolescents?

It is necessary to differentiate between attempted or completed suicide, referred to as "intent" in this study, because of a noted difference between the factors displayed by persons in relation to the individual concepts.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses refer to suicidal characters in books read by adolescents.

- H₁. The majority of the suicidal characters will exhibit one or more of the following behaviors:
- a. rebellion
 - b. withdrawal from parents or peers
 - c. dropping out of school
- H₂. The majority of the suicidal characters will be controlled by one or more of the following disciplinary techniques:
- a. criticism
 - b. nagging
 - c. withholding of approval
- H₃. The majority of the suicidal acts of characters will be attributed to coping with a loss of love due to one or more of the following:
- a. divorce
 - b. death of a loved one
 - c. break-up in a primary peer relationship
- H₄. The majority of the suicidal characters' peer relationships will consist of only one or two close friends of either sex.
- H₅. The majority of the characters who commit suicide will be adolescent males.
- H₆. The majority of the female adolescent characters who attempt suicide will try more than once.

- H₇. The majority of the methods used by characters who commit suicide will be one of the following lethal methods:
- a. hanging
 - b. firearms
 - c. poison
- H₈. The majority of the methods used by characters who attempt suicide will be one of the following less lethal methods:
- a. slashing of wrists
 - b. taking drugs
- H₉. The majority of the suicidal characters will display one or more of the following symptoms:
- a. They will express a desire to die or threaten to commit suicide.
 - b. They will display a significant change in behavior immediately preceding a suicidal act, as from severe depression to contentment.
 - c. Their depression will be accompanied by a loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, and general somatic complaints, such as nausea or headaches.

DEFINITIONS

Adolescent is a term derived from the Latin verb "adolescere", which means to "grow into maturity".¹⁵ For this study, it was defined as the period between twelve and nineteen years of age when an individual is involved in the process of becoming an adult.

¹⁵ Dorothy Rogers, Psychology of Adolescence (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 7.

Books which depicted a teenager as a suicidal character will be considered adolescent literature. The books may be fiction, biographies, or autobiographies.

For the purposes of this study, suicide was defined as an act of intentional death. This definition is generally accepted by professionals in the fields of sociology and psychology.

The factors referred to as attitudes and behaviors were defined as the thoughts and actions of characters towards themselves and other people, and/or the environment in which they lived.

Suicide intent was defined as the result sought by the characters whether they intended to kill themselves or simply wished to convey a need for attention, as with an attempt.

Symptoms were defined as the warning signs displayed by characters which indicated suicidal action followed.

Lethal methods were defined as those actions which preceded fatal results. Less lethal methods were defined as those actions which were unlikely to produce fatal results.

Realistic portrayal was defined as the presentation of factual and credible material within the content of the books which can be applied by readers to real life. The depictions of behaviors and symptoms of suicide in books will be as close to true life suicides as possible for this realism to exist.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The presentation of suicide in books read by adolescents has an effect on their attitudes, values, and behaviors in life situations involving self-destructive acts.

2. Due to the alarming increase of adolescent suicides, the media specialist has a responsibility to select and provide materials for adolescents which present a realistic portrayal of life situations.
3. The panel members selected by the researcher were able to recommend ten novels, biographies, or autobiographies which treated adolescent suicide and might currently be read by adolescents.
4. It was assumed that the researcher could apply the content analysis.

LIMITATIONS

1. The books to be used in this study were limited to ten books of fiction, biographies, or autobiographies which focused on the subject of adolescent suicide.

2. The books to be analyzed were recommended by a panel, members of which were selected by the researcher, and did not represent a true random sample of experts in adolescent literature.

3. Publication information and reviews of the books to be analyzed by the researcher were gathered from selection tools such as Booklist, School Library Journal, Book Review Digest, H. W. Wilson's Senior High School Catalog, and Books in Print.

4. The criteria used focused on the content of those books which are currently available for adolescents to read. The analysis of the content was limited by the researcher's personal knowledge and understanding of suicide. No attempt was made to evaluate the literary quality of the books.

5. The books to be analyzed were limited to those involving human characters who clearly exhibited suicidal tendencies and who might or might not commit suicide. The sample did not include those books which suggested suicide was committed to end suffering from a terminal illness, or was the result of anorexia nervosa. It did also not include books treating adolescence as a frustrating process in normal maturation development.

6. The characters exhibiting suicidal behaviors in the books read by adolescents were limited to the ages between twelve and nineteen.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature in relation to this study focused on three major concepts: the relationship between adolescent attitudes and behaviors and suicide; the symptoms and fallacies of suicide; and the treatment of adolescent suicide in literature. In the latter area, very little information has been previously written. The review, therefore, was expanded to include adolescent literature as a factor in influencing attitudes, behaviors, and values. Previous studies and published information concerning these concepts were found in the fields of psychology, sociology, English, and library science. This review included both opinion articles and research studies.

As the American Association of Suicidology suggests,

At best, adolescence is not an easy time. Pressures are perhaps greater than in any other stage of human development. The same troubles that lead adults to kill themselves affect young adults as well.¹⁶

The pressures referred to involve physical, social, and psychological changes that occur during adolescence. Psychologists and sociologists vary in their views of those factors which have the most influence on adolescent attitudes and values.

According to the AAS, the phenomenon referred to as identity crisis by Erik H. Erikson is considered to be an underlying motivation for many adolescent suicides. An identity crisis can occur when a teenager feels

¹⁶ "When a Teenager Gets Really Depressed," Changing Times, (June 1982): 27.

pressured into recognizing who he or she is and thinks a definite purpose in life must be established soon for adulthood to be attained. These adolescents perceive they should no longer be dependent and instead should seek independence, which many are not quite ready to do. There is conflict between wanting independence and yet needing the guidance and support of dependency. Most adolescents struggle through this period and become adults with few major problems. These teenagers may have occasional rebellion or even withdrawal in their effort to adapt. Some young people, however, do not possess "the coping skills necessary to overcome their anxieties and frustrations."¹⁷ Their inability to cope often results in depression, isolation, and/or alienation. In Too Young To Die, Francine Klagsburn described the depression as "devastating" or "severe". She suggested that a large number of suicides are related to clinical depression where feelings are destructive and seem to "encompass all of the adolescent's actions and thoughts."¹⁸ The young person appears to wallow in guilt and failure and often turns aggression inward. This theory of aggression-turned-inward has been widely accepted by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts and is credited to Sigmund Freud. The behaviors of depression, withdrawal, and isolation are often referred to as maladaptive.

In 1971, Jerry Jacobs conducted a study in which he interviewed a control group of fifty adolescent suicide attempters and their parents within forty-eight hours of the act. His findings concluded that most suicidal teenagers "mal-adapt" through the adaptive techniques of

¹⁷ "When a Teenager," p. 28.

¹⁸ Klagsburn, pp. 33-34.

rebellion or disobedience, withdrawal, dropping out of school, running away, and attempting suicide. His study indicated a "general reluctance by suicide attempters to resort initially or exclusively to the more drastic forms of adaptation before first trying the less drastic ones."¹⁹ Jacobs' findings supported his belief that suicidal adolescents attempt to cope in the same manner as normal teens before trying more drastic measures. A relationship between communication within families about disciplinary techniques and adolescent suicide was also identified. Almost twice as many attempters were controlled by parents through criticism, nagging, withholding of approval, and whippings. Yet, parental failure to discourage behaviors which adolescents considered bad and which they felt could have been overcome with parental help was perceived as a sign of rejection.²⁰ A general conclusion from this study was that parental attitude and the quality of family life are significant factors in the development of adolescents and their subsequent suicidal behaviors.²¹

The quality of family life as influenced by society was another factor that has been found to be related to suicide. An important study conducted by Emile Durkheim in 1951 revealed that sociological attitudes and expectations may result in suicide.²² The necessity for American families today to be more involved with life outside the family environment for pursuing careers or relationships are major reasons for

¹⁹ Jerry Jacobs, Adolescent Suicide: Wiley Series on Psychological Disorders (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1971), p. 83.

²⁰ Jacobs, pp. 72-73.

²¹ Klagsburn, p. 137.

²² Emile Durkheim, Suicide (New York: Free Press, 1951), pp. 16-17.

feelings of alienation and rejection to develop among young people.²³ This shifting state of the family organization has resulted in many children being left to care for themselves, and communication barriers often develop due to parental preoccupation with their own problems or pressures. The support and guidance needed by younger children from parents is decreasing, not necessarily due to neglect or abuse, but often due to financial obligations or other responsibilities. For older adolescents, career competition is becoming more difficult due to society's current economic status, and severe anxieties related to pressures for academic success or finding a good job are found to be additional reasons for their increased suicides.²⁴

"Growing up dead" is the terminology used by Herbert Hendin to describe an adolescent's conception of not being wanted by parents.²⁵ In 1975, a study conducted by Hendin of suicidal college students suggested that most adolescents felt their parents were more comfortable with a child who caused them no trouble or was lifeless.²⁶ His study also revealed that divorce and the preoccupation with death and violence were part of "the deadening of young lives."²⁷ These adolescents withdraw from society and surround themselves with noise, drugs and/or lack of interaction with others in order to be nonparticipants.

Separation or loss of a loved one through divorce or death may result in depression and isolation by adolescents. With reassurance and a sense

²³ "Teen-Age Suicide," Newsweek (28 August 1978): 75.

²⁴ "Teen-Age Suicide," p. 76.

²⁵ Klagsburn, p. 138.

²⁶ Klagsburn, p. 138.

²⁷ Sampson, p. 52.

of closeness to others, however, most young people can usually cope with this separation and accept it as part of the life process.²⁸ Suicide is not limited to adolescents who have suffered from a death or divorce. Break-up of primary relationships, involving peers of the same or opposite sex, can result in a more deeply felt sense of loss. Teenagers tend to view it as a personal affront, and feelings of inadequacy or incompetency are more prevalent. The relationship between gender and coping with their depression seemed to be the most significant one in relation to a love loss and was the most predictable variable of suicide.

Males in our culture have "historically been more aggressive and violent by nature."²⁹ Fighting, aggressiveness, and disobedience have generally been tolerated by parents and sometimes even encouraged. Males do not feel it appropriate to "cry for help" when depressed due to stereotypical attitudes imposed upon them by society. Often male adolescents are more independent, loners, or may abuse drugs or alcohol to cope with rejection or depression. These attitudes and values are reflected in male suicide intent. Fewer males attempt suicide, but males outnumber females by three to one in completed suicide.³⁰ Males use lethal methods of hanging or firearms for committing suicide. These procedures are not limited, however, to males, but seem to be related to intent of suicide. Firearms have been found to be the most common method of suicide with equal frequency by both sexes.³¹ In a study of total

²⁸ Jacobs, pp. 83-84.

²⁹ Sampson, p. 51.

³⁰ Sampson, p. 51.

³¹ Carl F. Wells, Suicide in Children and Young Adolescents (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981), p. 81.

population of child suicides by Shaffer (1974), of the twenty-one out of thirty cases studied, fourteen males and one female used a highly lethal method. According to Carl Wells, these findings suggested that differences in method reflect differences in intent rather than any in sex gender. To support his conclusion, Wells reported the results of a study conducted by Bergstrand and Otto in 1962. These findings suggested a high male to female ratio in attempted suicide.³² From these studies, it could be inferred that the majority of males who are suicidal intend to commit, not just attempt, the act.

Females are stereotypically considered to be "less aggressive and more impulsive, leading them to rapid, abortive gestures rather than violent, planned attempts."³³ Our culture, although changing, does not condone hostile reactions by females, and more inward aggression is a result. Methods which are less lethal, such as slashing of wrists or taking pills or poison, are more likely to be used in attempted female suicides. Measures will be taken by most females to inform others of suicidal thinking in order to prevent the attempt from becoming a committed act.³⁴

Having established behaviors of adolescents and factors which were thought to cause suicide, this researcher attempted to learn about symptoms of suicidal adolescents. In the studies and opinion articles

³² Wells, p. 80.

³³ Sampson, p. 52.

³⁴ Sampson, p. 52.

reviewed, there was agreement on the warning signs of symptoms of suicide.

Adolescents who appear to be in a state of severe depression, with a negative view of themselves, the world, and the future, are in need of help. A sudden change in this behavior is one of the most noticeable warning signs. A teenager who becomes seriously depressed may suddenly switch from being a pleasant, well-behaved student to a wild, unruly one. One, who is usually outgoing and friendly, may suddenly withdraw and want to be left alone.³⁵ This depression is often accompanied by loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, and general somatic complaints, such as headaches or nausea.³⁶

In addition to these warning signs, the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) suggests the following symptoms: a previous attempt, a suicidal threat, and/or what appears to be final arrangements being made. According to the AAS, eighty percent of those who are successful at suicide have attempted before. Many threats can be subtle, such as a young person who seems to be in a hurry to get obligations out of the way or gives away prized possessions, as jewelry and albums. While other signals are more direct, such as when an adolescent advises peers or family, "You won't have to be bothered by me much longer."³⁷ In relation to the latter, there is a fallacy that persons who talk of suicide will not do it. This is an incorrect assumption, as the threats, mild or severe, are cries for help and should be taken seriously.

³⁵ Klagsburn, p. 39.

³⁶ Sampson, p. 59.

³⁷ Kathryn V. Den Houter, "To Silence One's Self: A Brief Analysis of the Literature on Adolescent Suicide," Child Welfare 60 (January 1981): 4-5.

Another of several myths about suicide is that the pain and shame of one attempt will not lead to further. Professionals in the field indicate the first attempt is the most difficult, and subsequent attempts will be easier. Another misconception is that people who seem improved after being depressed are often thought to no longer be contemplating suicide. Often the opposite is true, because once they have decided to commit the act, many suicidal persons feel relief, as if a burden has been lifted from their shoulders.

Several other fallacies and their realities are listed as follows:

(1) Suicide is limited to an economic class. Statistics show that suicide occurs among rich and poor. (2) Suicide is hereditary. Tendencies toward suicide cannot be inherited. (3) Oppressive weather and holidays are elements in suicide. Studies have shown that suicide rate increases during April and May and is down in the winter months. (4) Suicides will occur most often during the late night hours while other people are asleep. Many attempted suicides have occurred between the hours of three and six o'clock in the evening when people are available to help. (5) Talking about suicide will give people ideas to kill themselves. The opposite has been found true, that talking may prevent suicide. (6) If no note was left by the victim, the death was not a suicide. Only a small percentage of notes have been left by suicide victims.

A final fallacy is that "nothing can prevent a suicide once a person has decided to die this way."³⁸ Unfortunately, this is the most misunderstood myth of all. Suicide can be prevented. It is not considered to be a disease. Suicidal persons feel it is their only

³⁸ Klagsburn, pp. 12-15.

solution to problems because they believe there are no other choices. Based on these misconceptions about suicide, this researcher felt it increasingly important that literature for adolescents give accurate portrayals of suicide.

Society often labels persons who attempt suicide as "insane" or "crazy". Even though these people are often deeply depressed, they should not necessarily be considered suffering from severe mental illness. Many adolescents who have committed or attempted suicide have never been under the care of a psychiatrist or any other professional in that field. This viewpoint should not be associated with fallacies. Depression in any form is a psychological state of confusion and should be treated by specialists before it reaches devastating stages, but it is misleading to assume that all suicidal persons are or have been "insane".

With suicide an increasing societal problem, it is important to evaluate its treatment in adolescent literature.³⁹ Friends, teachers, parents, and others can learn to recognize some of the symptoms of depression or the warning signs for deep psychological disturbance. Adolescents themselves need to be able to recognize the symptoms and need to be made aware of the importance of relating to others if they suspect someone they know is suicidal.⁴⁰ As part of the identity crisis, the influence and opinions of their peers are important to teenagers, and this is a determining factor in selecting books for adolescents which contain peer group characters.

³⁹ Bernstein, pp. 161-162.

⁴⁰ Klagsburn, p. 173.

Reaching the definition for adolescent literature in specific terms was found to be a problem during the course of this study. Educators, critics, and evaluators in the broad fields of English and education are not in agreement on an exact definition. In a study conducted by Alleen Nilsen, seventy-eight of one hundred surveys sent to educators and professionals in the field of English were returned with no consensus of a definition. Terminology ranged from junior novel, to juvenile fiction, to young adult literature, to adolescent literature, and finally, to adult books suitable for adolescents.⁴¹

According to Joanne Bernstein, inclusion of suicide in recent books for adolescents seems to fall into two categories of death. The first consists of those characters who are attempting to escape an intolerable situation, such as academic pressure, gang threats, or anxiety over a lost love relationship. The second category describes suicide as instrumental; by dying the victims feel they will influence someone else or are sacrificing life for the community. Bernstein suggests that suicide in literature has usually been a secondary issue in many of the books and frequently has an adult victim, such as a parent.

In her opinion, the following issues remain unconfrosted in adolescent literature,

- (1) the psychological aftermath felt by friends and families;
- (2) suicide which is treated in depth from an adolescent protagonist's point of view, either as the one who chooses to end life, or as one who is an immediate survivor;
- (3) accidents which are caused intentionally and
- (4) suicide as an act of revenge in which adolescents who feel inferior attempt to elicit sympathy as a means of getting back at the ones who seemed to deprive them of self-worth.⁴²

⁴¹ Alleen P. Nilsen, "Rating, Ranking, Labeling Adolescent Literature," School Library Journal 28 (December 1981): 24.

⁴² Bernstein, p. 163-164.

Further recommendations given by Ms. Bernstein of the knowledge adolescents seek in books they read seemed appropriate to this study. Consideration for the presentations of balanced points of view was one suggestion, such as questioning whether suicide is self-murder or a civil right. Dissatisfaction about the literature now available for young people to learn about suicide prevention and intervention was also proposed by Ms. Bernstein.⁴³

Relative to that idea was the assumption made earlier in the study, that adolescent literature has an effect on behavior, values, and/or attitudes. According to psychologists, adolescents who progress in a normal pattern of growth should be able to reason, analyze, and evaluate what they read. A young person should have the ability to differentiate objectively among several viewpoints and evaluate or assimilate abstract ideas based on individual needs. In relation to imaginative literature, or any literature dealing with subjects and viewpoints beyond the reader's actual experience, the adolescent should be able to vicariously experience what is being read and draw conclusions or evaluate what is felt to be important to that individual.⁴⁴

Until recently, the teaching of death and dying has been an exception rather than a rule. This viewpoint has changed to the current opinion that teaching about death is appropriate, "if we are to teach not only about life, but also about the breadth of experiences that life offers".⁴⁵

⁴³ Bernstein, p. 165.

⁴⁴ Donelson, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Anne Auten, "Why Teach Death Education?" Journal of Reading 25 (March 1982): 604.

To teach adolescents effectively, books which give accurate representations of life situations and life, in general, are necessary, especially when treatment of the less popular issues are involved.

Suicide is one of the more controversial issues being treated in recent adolescent literature, and accurate depictions of this unnatural act are as necessary as any of the other controversial issues now being dealt with in literature. In preparation for this study, this researcher searched for previous content analyses or studies of any kind that discussed the treatment of suicide in adolescent literature. The search was unsuccessful, which led this researcher to propose this study as an initial step for further research to be conducted on this topic. Articles and studies used for the review of the literature, with the exception of Ms. Bernstein's opinion article, were concerned with the concepts of adolescence, suicide, and/or adolescent literature as separate entities. A few included some mention of the concept of suicide as treated in literature, but none analyzed this topic.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The research technique of content analysis began in journalistic and communications research which emphasized a need for quantitative statements, considered to be more convincing than qualitative ones. Bernard Berelson was a pioneer in this kind of research and interpreted content analysis, in 1948, as a technique used for the "objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication."⁴⁶ Another viewpoint, presented by Klaus Krippendorf in 1980, suggested that content analysis "has the potential of being the most important research technique in the social sciences" because of the flexibility for approaching an analysis unobtrusively through symbolic phenomena rather than solely through physical events. Krippendorf defined content analysis as a research tool useful for making replicable inferences from data to context and suggested its purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of "fact", and a practical guide to action.⁴⁷

From these two opinions, it can be summarized that content analysis is a research technique which is aimed at exactness and the elimination of bias in the investigative process. Its methods, yielding clearly defined data to analyze, limitations set, adequate background preparation

⁴⁶ Bernard Berelson. Content Analysis in Communications Research. (New York: Free Press, 1952), p. 18.

⁴⁷ Klaus Krippendorf. Content Analysis - An Introduction to Its Methodology. (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 7.

making inferences from data and justifying the inferences in relation to factors in the context, and evidence needed for validating final results that must be clearly defined in advance, are used to decrease the degree of subjectivity for analyzing the content of the materials in this study. The problem and hypotheses for this research have been planned and outlined in detail for the purpose of attaining quantitative results of continuous data and for attempting to discern realistic characteristics in adolescent literature as it relates to the subject of suicide.

Since there was no comprehensive list of books read by adolescents which contain characters who contemplate suicide, panel members who were knowledgeable about adolescent books were selected to provide the researcher with a current sample of books to use in this content analysis. Each panel member represented a specific area of expertise. Included were a senior high library media specialist, a junior high library media specialist, a professor of library science at the university level who teaches a secondary materials course, a library media specialist at the university level who selects books for the youth collection, and an individual who works with adolescents who have attempted suicide.

The panel members were:

1. Jane Hohl, patient librarian, Mental Health Institute, Independence, Iowa.
2. Duane Johnson, professor of Library Science, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa. Mr. Johnson teaches a secondary materials course in the College of Education.
3. Lucille Lettow, youth librarian, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa. Mrs. Lettow is head of the Youth Collection in the University of Northern Iowa's library.

4. Jane Seeley, media specialist/librarian, Peet Junior High School, Cedar Falls, Iowa.
5. Linda Waddle, media specialist/librarian, Cedar Falls High School, Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Each panel member was contacted initially by phone or in person and later by mail requesting his/her participation in this research. At that time, each was presented with the purposes, limitations, and definitions of this research project. Each was asked to provide the researcher with a list of up to ten books that adolescents are currently reading which contain one or more characters who depict suicidal tendencies. These books could be fiction, biographies, or autobiographies.

Upon receipt of responses, a list of the titles given by the panel members was developed. The ten books which appeared most frequently were to be used as the sample for content analysis. Of the twenty-nine books named by panel members, (see Appendix A), ten were recommended two or more times. After reading two of these books, however, the researcher chose to eliminate them from the analysis. Maybe It Will Rain Tomorrow was about a parent's suicide and not an adolescent suicide. Lisa, Bright and Dark focused on an emotionally disturbed character who walked through a window as an indication of her disturbance but not as an act of suicide. To obtain two replacement books, the researcher randomly selected two titles from the remaining list of nineteen books named at least once by panel members.

The ten books used as a sample for content analysis and the characters analyzed are listed below. Each is annotated following its bibliographic information.

1. Arrick, Fran. Tunnel Vision. Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1980. (Character: Anthony Hamil)

At age fifteen, Anthony (Tony) Hamil hanged himself with his father's neckties. His friends and family could not understand why he chose to end his life. Despite appearing depressed the last few months of his life, Tony seemed to be feeling better the day before he died. The survivors Tony left behind were three friends, one "druggie" sister, a wishy-washy mother and a domineering father.

The novel began with the discovery of Tony's death and was told through the literary technique of flashbacks, interwoven among present events, from the points of view of people close to him. Everyone felt the blame and recalled recent events or conversations with Anthony in an effort to try and understand why a bright, talented, young man chose to die.

Almost every aspect of adolescent suicide was presented in this story including the behaviors, the alienation of peers, and the symptoms.

2. Eyerly, Jeannette. See Dave Run. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J. B. Lippincott, 1978. (Character: David Golden Hendry)

David Golden Hendry, at fifteen, ran away from his weak mother and harsh stepfather in pursuit of his real father, whom he had idolized as a child. He had been in trouble with law officials for using drugs and stealing a car. This was the third time he ran away from home. The reason for this last escape from his stepfather's abuse.

When he was mistakenly arrested for a crime he did not commit, law officials discovered that David was a runaway. While waiting to be sent home, David informed law officials that he'd rather die first.

David Hendry's story is told through brief episodic descriptions by people he encountered in the last few months of his life, including a friend, and his mother and stepfather. The descriptions provided glimpses of David as he appeared to other characters in the story, but David never emerged as a "real" person.

3. Fox, William. The Cop and the Kid. New York: Congdon and Weed, 1983. (Character: Michael Buchanan)

In this non-fiction book, the author was a New York police officer who persuaded seventeen-year-old Michael not to jump from a rooftop. This was the beginning of a relationship between the two males. Adhering to promises he made to the young man, Fox went against those who opposed his generosity and eventually gained legal custody of Michael.

The story was told in two parts. The first described Fox's desire to be a priest, his personal and professional backgrounds, and a few near-death crises he had encountered as a law official. Information about Michael's past and present were provided in the

second part, including the death of his grandparents, abuse by his father and rejections by foster parents.

When the media discovered this unusual relationship, much attention was aroused for both the "cop" and the "kid", including an unexpected interest by Michael's mother.

Suicide was not the main focus of this book, but Michael's two unsuccessful attempts were probably the basis for recommendation by a panel member.

4. Guest, Judith. Ordinary People. New York: Ballantine Books, 1976. (Character: Conrad Jarrett)

Conrad suffered emotional trauma and depression when his older brother drowned in a boating accident that Conrad survived. The entire family was affected by this tragedy, and it had great impact on their futures.

The book began with Conrad's release from a mental institution where he spent eight months ^{after} attempting suicide. He was discovered by his parents in the family home after he severely slashed his wrists. The protagonist had intense feelings of anxiety and an inferiority complex because his older brother had been outgoing and good at "everything". Conrad did not feel he could do as well or live up to expectations of friends and/or family.

A psychiatrist counseled Conrad through his fears and the struggle to return to his old pattern of life. Without the psychiatrist's help, the teenager might have been more withdrawn or depressed, for his father appeared overprotective and his mother uncaring.

Even though Conrad's one attempt was unsuccessful and not repeated, this book portrayed genuinely the feelings of a suicidal adolescent and the emotional aftermath of it. A positive element of this novel was its lack of sensationalism and identification of the emotional trauma associated with a death.

5. Mack, John E. and Hickler, Holly. Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl. Boston: Little, Brown, 1981. (Character: Vivienne Loomis)

On December 21, 1983, fourteen-year-old Vivienne Loomis hanged herself in her mother's empty workshop. Her family felt it important that Vivienne's written journal of her depression and death wishes, which she entitled "My Private Paper Book" be exposed. With the cooperative effort of her family, two former teachers, and a clinical psychologist, this non-fiction book about Vivienne's life and death was produced.

The book was divided into two parts. The first was a narrative of Vivienne's life and death and was told by words from her journal, poetry and letters, school compositions and teachers' reactions, and friends and family. The last half of the book was an effort to psychologically interpret Vivienne's action and thoughts prior to her death. Comments by her family were included in the psychologist's analysis of Vivienne's suicidal behaviors and symptoms and to help interpret forces affecting Vivienne's

depression. A general discussion of adolescent suicide and factors that are related to it were analyzed by John Mack. The last chapter of the book was written by Holly Hickler, who gave a teacher's viewpoint of adolescent suicide.

This book would be difficult for some adolescents to read and comprehend. Yet, its value exists in the first-person perspective of suicide as reflected by one fourteen-year-old.

6. Madison, Winifred. A Portrait of Myself. New York: Random House, 1979. (Character: Catherine d'Amato)

Catherine d'Amato lived with her divorced mother in a depressed urban area. She developed an almost obsessive "crush" on a new female physical education teacher and tried very hard to be recognized by the lady.

Catherine liked to draw and spend hours developing a portfolio of sketches which she intended to give as a present to the teacher. Aware that it was against school policy, the girl purposely went to the teacher's house to present her gift. Unfortunately, the teacher rejected the "gift" and verbally criticized Catherine's work. Later, Catherine was suspended from school for disobeying school policy. The latter, combined with Catherine's low self-esteem and loneliness, led to her suicide attempt.

When her mother went out one evening, the girl attempted to slash her wrists. Her first cuts were unsuccessful, so she continued to slash her wrists until the blood flowed steadily. When found by her mother, Catherine was unconscious but alive.

A religious dimension entered this novel, especially during and after the girl's suicide attempt. Catherine prayed before her attempt and cried for help during it. Afterward, her mother insisted the girl go to confession. Catherine displayed post-suicidal fear of death and shame in the story, even though both characteristics were noted as "myths" of suicide in the literature review.

7. Miklowitz, Gloria. Close to the Edge. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983. (Character: Cindy Bickford)

This novel was the story of a girl, named Jenny, who at one point contemplated suicide. She never carried out the thought. However, a former best friend, Cindy Bickford, did. Even though she was not the protagonist, the latter suicidal character was analyzed in this content analysis.

Told in a first-person narrative, Jenny's observations, thoughts and feelings about her friend's suicide attempt and eventual death were revealed from an adolescent's perspective.

Cindy Bickford felt like an outcast at school and was pressured to achieve by her mother. She was withdrawn and wanted to sleep rather than do anything else. In a first attempt to take her life, Cindy overdosed on drugs. She missed school for a few weeks and fell behind in her academic work. It appeared that she was getting her problems worked out and

diligently doing overdue homework, when Cindy made a second, successful suicide attempt. Prior to her death, Cindy gave her friend an ivory heart, cleaned her room and left no ends unfinished.

Even though the protagonist was not the significant suicidal character, this story was included in the analysis because of its accurate portrayal of behaviors, peer relationships, and symptoms.

8. O'Neal, Zibby. The Language of Goldfish. New York: Viking, 1980. (Character: Carrie Stokes)

Carrie Stokes was a thirteen-year-old who was afraid of growing up. She was portrayed as having an identity crisis, especially when facing womanhood.

This novel's presentation of a suicidal attempt and accompanying depression were adequate. More outstanding, however, were the denial and embarrassment displayed by her family. Theirs was the feeling that Carrie had everything a girl could want, and they lacked an understanding of her self-destructive fears.

A counselor helped Carrie face her depression, her fears, and her attempt to end her life. Carrie's one attempt was made by overdosing on pills.

As with other recommended novels, this novel's presentation of suicide was not the predominant theme of the story. It was included in the analysis, however, because it portrayed the youngest adolescent of the ten characters and included the only character involved in an identity crisis.

9. Pfeffer, Susan Beth. About David. New York: Delacorte Press, 1980. (Character: David Morris)

As a story told through the perspective of a friend, this novel involved an element of brutality. Despite the somewhat negative reviews of this book (see Appendix C), the researcher felt it was a good presentation of lack of clues, a factor often true of realistic suicide.

David Morris hated his natural parents because they did not want him and hated his adoptive parents because they mistreated him. At age seventeen, David killed his adoptive parents and then himself. The story began with this brutal event. In a note, David willed his journal to a friend, Lynn, and requested that she read it. The remainder of the novel portrayed Lynn reading about her friend's feelings and trying to adjust to life without him.

David's lack of leaving clues or giving signs was noteworthy, as was his lack of any significant behavioral changes. The researcher, however, felt these important because in reality, many suicidal adolescents do not exhibit overt warning signs of suicide. In addition, Lynn's opinion about David's mistreatment of his parents was one of the better examples of possible reasons for her friend's desire to die.

10. Sheldon, Mary. Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness. New York: Random House, 1981. (Character: Effie)

According to Linda Waddle, a panel member, this was one of the most popular novels being read by adolescents. The element of rock music, she advised, was responsible for its popularity, more than the inclusion of suicide. Nevertheless, she felt its suicidal implications were observed and noted by current readers.

The story was told in two parts. The first half of the book was presented in the form of a diary written by Effie's older sister after Effie's suicide. In the diary are not only thoughts and feelings of the older sister, but also observations and noted behavior changes of Effie.

At age fourteen, Effie shot herself. Her parents were divorced, and Effie deeply felt the absence of a full-time father. In an effort to make up for his absence, her father encouraged Effie's bizarre "crush" on rock star, David Angel, by buying her tickets to every concert he held, including some a considerable distance from home.

Her sister and mother felt Effie's obsession for David Angel was fairly typical for her age group, but they were not fully aware of the father's deceitful involvement. After she learned of David Angel's suicide, Effie went to a friend's house and used a revolver to kill herself. Her family was unaware of recent events in Effie's life that led her to suicide.

The second half of the book was devoted to the story of David Angel. Thoughts of people who knew him or were affected by him, as well as David's own thoughts, were used to tell about his life. During adolescence, the rock star fell in love with a girl named Rebecca. As he grew older, he never forgot her, and his drug and alcohol addictions did not help him face reality.

When Effie appeared at his door one night, David Angel mistakenly thought she was Rebecca. In an effort to show Rebecca his love, he actually made a blundered attempt at sexually molesting Effie. Later that evening, after the frightened girl ran away, the rock star shot himself. A few weeks later, Effie did the same.

The implied reasons for Effie's death, her behavioral changes, and method used were relevant to the accurate portrayals sought in this content analysis.

Panel members were asked to mail all of the requested information to the researcher. A self-addressed, pre-stamped envelope was included in the initial contact letter for this purpose. (See Appendix D.) In addition, each panel member was asked to specify a time when he or she could be reached for an interview either by phone or in person. During

the interviews, the researcher solicited the panel members' opinions on the following: the status of the portrayal of suicidal characters in books read by adolescents; reasons why adolescents read books on this topic; and the extent to which such books are read by adolescents.

The researcher used Books In Print, 1983-84, Fiction Catalog (10th ed.), and the University of Northern Iowa Library's card catalog to gather publication information not provided by the panel members for the books. After initial identifications of location were found in Book Review Index, reviews were read in School Library Journal, Booklist, Kirkus Reviews and VoYA.

The ten books in the final sample were obtained from libraries in the Cedar Falls area. Each book was read in its entirety by the researcher.

Each of the ten books was analyzed for its portrayal of suicide using nine elements. These elements were compiled by the researcher on the basis of research conducted and information synthesized from the literature review.

1. Behavior exhibited: this included rebellious acts such as disobedience to parents or school officials; withdrawal from family and/or peers; running away; dropping out of school; drug or alcohol abuse; other; none of the above; or unable to identify.

2. Family disciplinary techniques: criticism; nagging; withholding of approval; whippings or spankings; other; none; or unable to identify.

3. Attributed causes of the suicide attempt or completed act: this included inability to cope with loss of a loved one due to divorce, death or break-up of a relationship; pressure of career and/or academic

success; alienation/rejection from parents; other; none; or unable to identify.

4. Peer relationships pattern of suicidal characters: this included one or two close friends of either sex; multiple (more than two) friends of either sex; none; other; or unable to identify.

5. Sex of the character exhibiting suicidal behavior.

6. Age of the character exhibiting suicidal behavior: this included the individual listing of the ages twelve through nineteen. If not stated specifically in the text, ages were extrapolated or hypothesized from description of a character's actions, activities, and/or peer group.

7. Methods used for suicide acts: this included taking pills or drugs; taking poison(s); slashing wrists; hanging; firearms; other; or unable to identify.

8. Suicide intent of the character: this included one or more unsuccessful suicide attempts; one successful act; both; none; or unable to identify.

9. Symptoms displayed by the suicidal character: this included a threat to commit suicide or expression of a desire to die; making final arrangements; giving away prized possessions; a significant change in behavior, as from depressed to happy and content; loss of appetite; sleep disturbances; general somatic complaints, such as nausea or headaches; other; none; or unable to identify.

The researcher recorded all data from the analyses of the ten books on individual inventories. (For inventory samples, see Appendix E.)

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

The data related to each of the nine hypotheses were separately tabulated. Tables were developed for the data for each sub-category. A majority consisted of percentages which were above fifty percent, and these figures were used to accept or reject each hypothesis.

The analysis of the data is presented in narrative and tabular form. Each hypothesis is individually restated. Related data are presented in tabular form. Each table presents the findings related to the hypothesis, the categories within the area, the number of characters or incidents per category, and the percentages of discrete elements in each category. An analytic discussion of the results follows.

Hypothesis 1: The majority of the suicidal characters will exhibit one or more of the following behaviors: rebellion; withdrawal from parents or peers; or dropping out of school.

As shown by Table 1, 90 percent of the characters in the books exhibited behaviors considered characteristic of suicidal adolescents. On the basis of this percentage, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. It was difficult to assess the behaviors for this hypothesis because five of the ten characters were portrayed as exhibiting more than one. It became necessary for the researcher to make a subjective decision as to which behavior was the most predominant when analyzing each for placement in Table 1.

Table 1
Behaviors Exhibited by Characters

Behaviors	M	F	T	%
Disobedience/rebellion	2	1	3	30
Withdrawal	2	4	6	60
Dropping out of school	0	0	0	0
Running away	1	0	1	10
Drug/alcohol abuse	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Unable to identify/none	0	0	0	0
Total	5	5	10	100%

The best example of overlapping behaviors exhibited by a character was in Tunnel Vision. The protagonist displayed rebellion and disobedience by neglecting academic work, skipping school, and quitting the swimming team. As he became more withdrawn from his parents and peers, Tony appeared to want to spend more time in his room to be alone or to sleep. He became abusive to his friends, alienating himself from their company. As an example, when a friend asked Tony's advice about a problem, the suicidal character replied, "...I can't even solve my problems, Ditto. What do you expect me to do with yours? Cram it, Ditto, get out of here..."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Fran Arrick. Tunnel Vision. (Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1980), p. 99.

Both of the male protagonists in See Dave Run and The Cop and the Kid were also portrayed as rebellious and disobedient. Running away and dropping out of school were ways to escape their problems, but other acts were simultaneously displayed. A friend of Dave's recalled, "What put him on probation was...not smoking pot, but taking that guy's car and wrecking it." In addition his friend admitted that, "Dave had run away twice before."⁴⁹ The police officer who befriended Michael learned of the youth's attempt to set fire to at least two of the homes he lived in with foster parents.

The female characters were portrayed as withdrawn and exhibiting less aggressive behavior. As noted in the literature review, behaviors were displayed by the characters with outward and inward aggression according to gender.

The only female protagonist whose aggression was portrayed by overt defiance was in A Portrait of Myself. Before making her final attempt to win the approval of a female teacher, Catherine remembered, "a school decision forbidding students to go to a teacher's house had been established for several years... ." She rationalized, however, that, "Such an innocent act couldn't possibly be considered criminal."⁵⁰ The rejection by the teacher and ultimate suspension from school for Catherine's disobedience were factors which deepened her withdrawal.

⁴⁹ Jeannette Eyerly, See Dave Run. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J. B. Lippincott, 1978), p. 13.

⁵⁰ Winnifred Madison, A Portrait of Myself. (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 171.

In the books, the female adolescent characters generally appeared to continue close relationships with others and to maintain academic standards. The most inwardly aggressive female was described in Vivienne. The low self-esteem and deep depression felt by Vivienne were rarely exhibited to her family, yet her journal contained excerpts of written poetry, letters, and dated entries which revealed her desperate thoughts.

In summarizing the findings related to Hypothesis 1, the researcher felt behaviors considered realistic of suicidal adolescents were accurately portrayed by the characters in each of the ten books.

Hypothesis 2. The majority of the suicidal characters will be controlled by one or more of the following disciplinary techniques: criticism; nagging; or withholding of approval.

Table 2
Disciplinary Techniques
Used by
Parents or Guardians

Technique	T	%
Criticism	3	30
Nagging	1	10
Withholding approval	2	20
Whippings	1	10
Other	2	20
Unable to identify/none	1	10
Total	10	100%

As revealed in Table 2, a total of 60 percent of the characters were portrayed as being disciplined by criticism, nagging, or withholding of approval. On the basis of this data analysis, Hypothesis 2 was accepted. The data related to this hypothesis indicated a realistic representation with regard to the disciplinary techniques used by parents or guardians of the adolescent characters. It should be noted that this element was difficult to analyze because not all of the books presented the information in a way that distinctively outlined the disciplinary techniques. Many of the techniques overlapped each other, and when multiple ones were used it became necessary for the researcher to make some rather subjective decisions concerning the technique most often used. Nevertheless, the data were sufficient to accept the hypothesis.

The most predominant example of withholding of approval was demonstrated in About David. When an investigator of the murder/suicide questioned Lynn about her deceased friend, she described David's parents as follows,

They abused him...And they made demands on him, constant demands, he couldn't possibly hope to achieve. If he got a 90, they expected a 95. If he got a 95, they expected a 100. And if he got a 100 they wanted to know why he didn't get them more often...They never praised him. Never. I never once heard them say anything nice to him...for thirteen years.⁵¹

In Tunnel Vision, the suicide victim's father was critical, yet ignorant of reasons why his son would want to die. As he thought about an incident prior to his son's death, the father (Rand) remembered

⁵¹ Susan Beth Pfeffer. About David. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), pp. 19-20.

thinking that the unusual behavior was just part of a phase Tony was going through, "...Rand noticed for the first time how thin Tony looked... Ridiculous, he thought. I've seen the kid everyday this week...he didn't look so thin yesterday."⁵² But when he asked his son about the shadows under his eyes and how late he was out the night before and Tony told him that he had not gone anywhere, the father reminded his son he had once been young too.

Another male character felt little warmth and usually cold disapproval from his mother. In Ordinary People, when the suicide attempt was discovered by his parents, Conrad sensed his mother's concern for blood on the bathroom rug and towels was equal or greater than her concern for him.

The majority of the characters felt ignored, or they lacked attention from their parental figures. This was displayed by criticism and little, or no, positive feedback. Nagging and criticism seemed to be more prevalent than withholding of approval for disciplinary techniques used. In A Portrait of Myself, Catherine's unspoken response to her mother's suggestion that she would have helped her daughter with her problems was, "She had never listened. She had only lectured."⁵³ And a friend noted the criticism Cindy's mother expressed in Close to the Edge when she overheard, "You ought to be making up all the work you missed instead of sleeping so much."⁵⁴

⁵² Arrick, p. 57.

⁵³ Madison, p. 200.

⁵⁴ Gloria Miklowitz, Close to the Edge. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1983), p. 104.

The two non-fictional descriptions of adolescent suicide were the best displays of Herbert Hendin's "growing up dead" theory which was discussed in the literature review. This idea suggests that adolescents feel unwanted or unappreciated, yet are accepted because they never cause any trouble. As long as Michael was able to live with his grandparents, he was no problem to anyone. However, when they died and his father had to care for him, the "kid" in The Cop and the Kid began to have trouble. In Vivienne, her mother admitted to being "grateful...that Vivienne demanded little attention as an infant."⁵⁵

It became apparent to the researcher that one of the major factors in adolescent suicide, as presented in these books, was family life environment. The latter seemed to have significant influence on an adolescent character's behavior. An adequate correlation between the quality of family life depicted in these ten books and the researcher's present knowledge about teenage depression and suicide was observed.

Hypothesis 3. The majority of the suicidal acts of characters will be attributed to coping with a loss of love due to one or more of the following: divorce; death of a loved one; or break-up in a primary peer relationship.

According to data displayed on Table 3, only 40 percent of the causes given in this hypothesis were observed in the ten books. For this reason, Hypothesis 3 was rejected. Although representative of realistic

⁵⁵ John E. Mack and Holly Hickler, Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981), p. 93.

situations mentioned in the literature review, the hypothesized causes were not portrayed as the majority of those in the books analyzed. The researcher noted while reading the books that multiple causes were more predominant than single events in an adolescent's life.

Table 3
Attributed Causes
for
Suicide Attempts

Causes	M	F	T	%
Divorce	1	0	1	10
Death of a loved one	2	1	3	30
Break-up/relationship	0	0	0	0
Career pressure	0	0	0	0
Academic pressure	0	0	0	0
Alienation	0	0	0	0
Other	2	4	6	60
Unable to identify/none	0	0	0	0
Total	5	5	10	100%

The characters in Close to the Edge and About David were portrayed as feeling unloved and unappreciated by others. After a suicide attempt, Cindy expressed to her friend, "At school, it's like I'm invisible. People look right through me...I just wanted to go to sleep and never wake up."⁵⁶ She was not experiencing significant academic pressure as

⁵⁶ Miklowitz, p. 64.

much as depression based on her feelings of inferiority. David's lack of self esteem was based on his adoptive parents' desire to be natural parents and their expectations of him. His best friend, Lynn, recalled past events of David's life, "But they made such incredible demands on him. They insisted he run for junior class president, and when he lost they cut off his allowance for a month because they didn't think he tried hard enough. And he really did try."⁵⁷ Later in the book, a very brief, final journal entry written by David noted his suspicion that his mother was pregnant. Even though his assumptions were incorrect, this final statement revealed to the other characters David's final thoughts, which they chose to believe as a reason for the murder of his parents and his own suicide. His friend, Lynn, knew that his parents had traveled world-wide seeking medical advice from fertility specialists. His parents thought they had kept their secret well, but David was aware of their strong desire to have a child of their own.

Feelings of rejection and inadequacy were also felt by the character in A Portrait of Myself. Catherine's fascination with a teacher and ultimate rejection by that person caused her depression and attempt to end her life. More bizarre was the exaggerated "crush" the female character displayed in Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness. Effie's obsession for her idol, David Angel, led to her subsequent self-destruction after the rock star killed himself. Effie was barely fourteen-years-old when she ended her life.

⁵⁷ Pfeffer, p. 117.

Another female character, who was slightly younger than Effie, was portrayed as fearing the loss of her childhood and the responsibilities of becoming less dependent on her parents. In Language of Goldfish, Carrie Stokes agonized about the move from her childhood home and close relationship she once had with her older sister. Carrie's reasons for attempting suicide, along with the above mentioned, were not stated specifically in Hypothesis 3. As shown in Table 3, however, other attributed causes represented 60 percent of the total observed in the ten books.

The suicidal adolescents in Vivienne and Tunnel Vision presented additional causes which led to the rejection of Hypothesis 3. Vivienne was described as having more than one attributed cause for her death. First, Vivienne was alienated from peers and others due to her father's position as a clergyman and the family's unusual lifestyle. In reflection on her daughter's death, Vivienne's mother commented,

We weren't tight laced...The neighbors thought we were Communists. Rob had long hair. I never wore a bra.⁵⁸

Furthermore, it was noted that, "...in her growing personal isolation Vivienne could find no comfort or support in the community where her family experienced such alienation".⁵⁹

Secondly, her deep depression and desperate state were revealed in the preoccupation of death expressed often by Vivienne in her diary and in letters to a former teacher. Six months before her suicide, Vivienne

⁵⁸ Mack, p. 92.

⁵⁹ Mack, p. 92.

noted, "I am worthless. I am of no use to anyone, and no one is of any use to me. What good to kill myself - how can you kill nothing?...I need people and there aren't any who care."⁶⁰ Finally, Vivienne's concern about the family's problems and the despair she felt when burdened by them were revealed in letters to her former teacher. In one, she wrote "...I just couldn't handle all of Mummy's problems (which she invariably brings to me now), Daddy's problems, Laurel's problems, and most of all my problems...I've carried them long enough."⁶¹

In Tunnel Vision the protagonist's pressures were also family related, and it was inferred that through Tony's death his troubled sister, Denise, might receive more attention. When Tony's father tried to figure out "why" his son chose to die, his denial of the suicide act was revealed, "That boy could have been anything...done anything."⁶² In response to her father's agony, Denise thought, "I know...he was everything to you... think of all the tennis matches that won't be won and all the A-pluses that won't be earned and the college that won't get him...look at me, Daddy."⁶³

In conclusion, the researcher noted that multiple reasons were indicated for suicidal attempts by the characters in the ten books. A definite pattern of family life and the influences it has on an adolescent character's self-esteem emerged in this content analysis. Seven of the ten books included family problems in the portrayals of the suicidal

⁶⁰ Mack, p. 46.

⁶¹ Mack, p. 66.

⁶² Arrick, p. 53.

⁶³ Arrick, p. 53.

characters. This factor was noted in the literature review but was not selected by the researcher as a discrete element for Hypothesis 3. Yet, it is an accurate portrayal of causes related to the realities of adolescent suicide in our society today.

Hypothesis 4. The majority of the suicidal characters' peer relationships will consist of only one or two close friends of either sex.

Table 4
Peer Relationships Pattern

Peer Pattern	M	F	T	%
One/two-either sex	4	5	9	90
Multiple-either sex	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Unable to identify/none	1	0	1	0
Total	5	5	10	100%

Since 90 percent of the characters were portrayed as having only a few close friends of either sex, Hypothesis 4 was accepted. Only one of the character's relationships with peers was not identified and possibly was non-existent. In The Cop and the Kid, Michael moved around frequently enough to not have established many close friendships.

All remaining characters were portrayed as alienating themselves from their closest friends or relatives shortly before their suicide attempts. Six of the ten books were written from another person's point of view, while three included first person singular viewpoints. The

literary element of flashbacks was used frequently to depict friends and families recalling recent events in efforts to learn "why" each suicide was attempted.

The suicide victim's best friends in Tunnel Vision spent hours analyzing the last few weeks of Tony's life. They were aware of his mood change and depression but had not realized the depth of it. When one of the friends suggested, "...it doesn't seem like something Anthony would do...", the other friend remarked, "He said he was going to do it."⁶⁴ The two friends then recalled a discussion they were having about girls, when Tony had abruptly asked his friends what method they would use to commit suicide. After giving their responses, the friends had asked Tony which way he would choose, but his only reply was, "I'm going to do it...I'm serious."⁶⁵ His friends had not taken him seriously.

Vivienne's character had a close relationship with a teacher, John May, and one other female, Anne. When describing her friend to May, Vivienne wrote, "The thing about Anne is that she understands and feels the same feelings of loneliness, separation, peace and inner riot that I am constantly feeling...She really is one of the most fantastic people I've ever known."⁶⁶ Vivienne had mentioned her numerous attempts of suicide to Anne but in a very basic way Anne did not really believe that Vivienne would kill herself."⁶⁷ John May was also aware of

⁶⁴ Arrick, p. 37.

⁶⁵ Arrick, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Mack, p. 83.

⁶⁷ Mack, p. 81.

Vivienne's severe depression and when she wrote in detail of one attempt, "John did not know what to do when he received this alarming letter."⁶⁸ That letter was received by May the day after Vivienne died.

In See Dave Run, the protagonist's best friend was also aware of Dave's disruptive home situation and not surprised when he learned that Dave had run away again, "We were friends, and friends naturally sense things that other people don't. That may explain why I knew in my bones that Dave had run away even before it became official."⁶⁹

The longest and seemingly closest relationship between friends was portrayed in About David. Lynn and David had lived as neighbors since they were four years old. After his death, Lynn thought, "I loved David, the way you love a friend you've had since before kindergarten, and I thought I knew him...And if we were such good friends, why didn't he come to me?"⁷⁰

It became apparent to the researcher that suicidal adolescents were portrayed as having few close relationships and seemed to avoid large group involvement or many extracurricular activities. Some of the female characters were shown to be as involved in close relationships with peers, as they were involved with family members. Both Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness and The Language of Goldfish displayed characters as being close to older sisters, or at least wanting to be close. In A Portrait of Myself the character's best friend was a cousin, but the story focused more on

⁶⁸ Mack, p. 84.

⁶⁹ Eyerly, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Pfeffer, p. 30.

her relationship with her mother than peers. Even though the protagonist was not suicidal in Close to the Edge, her efforts to renew a friendship with a girl who attempted suicide were presented. The protagonist's relationships in this story consisted of multiple friends of either sex and family.

Based on the portrayal of friendships or relationships in the books, the realities of adolescent suicide were accurately noted and led to the acceptance of this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5. The majority of the characters who commit suicide will be adolescent males.

Table 5
Sex of Completed Suicides

Sex	T	%
Male	3	50
Female	3	50
Total	6	100%

As shown by Table 5, an equally proportionate number of male and female characters in the books completed the suicide act. Since a majority was considered above 50 percent in this analysis, Hypothesis 5 was rejected.

In Tunnel Vision and See Dave Run the male characters hanged themselves. Firearms were used by the third male in About David. A fourth male who committed suicide in Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness, was not analyzed with the others because he was portrayed as being in his

twenties, which was beyond the age limitation used for this research study. The effect of his death and the way he died, however, influenced fourteen-year-old Effie's attempt at suicide.

The other two female characters who completed the act of suicide were Cindy in Close to the Edge and Vivienne's protagonist. Cindy's death was not discussed in great detail, so the method she chose to end her life was not disclosed. Vivienne hanged herself after several trials before the final attempt.

In Chapter 1, the statistics of suicide and ratio of male to female adolescent deaths were discussed. The most current information found by the researcher noted that males will attempt fewer suicides, but will be successful more often. Females were thought to make more frequent attempts but not succeed as often. According to the data shown in Table 5, of the six characters in the ten books, an equal number of males and females were successful. The information in Chapter 1 also acknowledged the difficulty in determining accurate statistics about adolescent suicide because of denial of the act by family or uncertainty of the death's cause. Even though Hypothesis 5 was not accepted, the researcher was not surprised at the outcome of the analysis.

Hypothesis 6. The majority of the female adolescent characters who attempt suicide will try more than once.

In the display shown as Table 6, percentages were given for only the female characters who attempted suicide. Since the term "attempt" was not clearly defined in this research study, the researcher made a subjective decision about what its meaning should include. For the purposes of this

analysis, an attempt was "any action taken to end one's life," regardless of the outcome. Since only 40 percent of the female characters attempted suicide more than one time, Hypothesis 6 was rejected.

Table 6
Female Suicide Attempts

Attempts	T	F	%
One	7	3	60
Two	2	1	20
Three	0	0	0
Four or more	1	1	20
Unable to identify/none	0	0	0
Total	10	5	100%

The character in Close to the Edge attempted suicide the first time by overdosing on pills. A second attempt was presented in the story and ended in a successful completion of the suicide act.

In Vivienne the female suicide victim admitted to her friend that she had made several attempts, "Anne said Vivienne told her of at least five attempts in all."⁷¹ One of the attempts was by a superficial taking of pills, and the rest involved strangulation and hanging, which Vivienne noted in letters and journal entries as practices. The total number of attempts by Vivienne, including her final, successful one, was either six or seven. Of the five females who attempted suicide, only two were portrayed as having tried more than one time. It should

⁷¹ Mack, p. 82.

be noted, however, that of the three remaining females who made one attempt each, one was a successful completion of suicide. Perhaps if that suicide had been described as unsuccessful, the character might have been portrayed as trying again.

In comparison, one of the five male characters was depicted as having attempted suicide more than once. In The Cop and the Kid the teenager made two separate attempts at suicide. One was a threat to jump from a roof. The other was an attempt by slashing his wrists. Of the remaining four male characters who attempted suicide once, three were successful that first time. It might be suggested that had their attempts not been successful, portrayals of further attempts might also have been included in the novels.

Regardless of what might have been displayed, the results of data used to analyze Hypothesis 6 show that less than the majority of the female characters attempted to commit suicide more than one time, as predicted by the researcher, which led to the rejection of this hypothesis. In the course of this analysis, the researcher observed that the one of the females who made multiple attempts was Vivienne; such multiple attempts were described as being characteristic of female suicide attempts in the literature review. Even though the books did not portray this characteristic as typical of fictional suicide attempts, it should still be considered as a factor of adolescent suicide.

Hypothesis 7. The majority of the methods used by characters who commit suicide will be one of the following lethal methods: hanging, firearms, or poison.

Table 7
Methods Used by Six Suicide Victims

Methods	M	F	T	%
Hanging	2	1	3	50.0
Firearms	1	1	2	33.3
Poison	0	0	0	0.0
Other	0	0	0	0.0
Unable to identify	0	1	1	16.7
Total	3	3	6	100.0%

Of the six characters who completed the act of suicide, three hanged themselves. The male characters in See Dave Run and Tunnel Vision used this lethal method to commit suicide. One female, in Vivienne, hanged herself successfully, after five or six previous attempts.

Two of the remaining characters used firearms to end their lives. In Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness, Effie shot herself with a neighbor's revolver. David, in About David, used a shotgun to kill both of his parents and himself.

A sixth character attempted to kill herself the first time by overdosing on pills and, during a second attempt, completed the suicide act. It was not revealed in Close to the Edge how the female actually committed the suicide act.

Since five of the six completed suicides were committed by use of lethal methods, as shown in Table 7, Hypothesis 7 was accepted. A total of 83.3 percent of the characters used lethal methods to end their lives. Factual data about methods used in adolescent suicide were correctly

represented in these ten books. Noting information given in the literature review about the almost equal proportion of hanging and firearms used by male and female adolescents who commit suicide, the methods portrayed in the books analyzed were presented with authenticity.

Hypothesis 8. The majority of the methods used by characters who attempt suicide will be one of the following less lethal methods: slashing of wrists or taking drugs.

Table 8

Less Lethal Methods Used
for Suicide Attempts

Methods	M	F	T	%
Slashing wrists	2	1	3	30
Taking drugs	0	2	2	20
Other	3	2	5	50
Unable to identify	0	0	0	0
Total	5	5	10	100%

As mentioned earlier in this analysis, the fact that "attempt" was not clearly defined presented a minor problem for the researcher in evaluation of this hypothesis. Following the same guidelines mentioned in Hypothesis 6, "any action taken to end one's life," regardless of the results, was considered an "attempt." Therefore, when all attempts were evaluated, whether they resulted in a fatality or not, 50 percent of the characters represented in the books attempted suicide by use of a less than lethal method. By the definition given for a majority, Hypothesis 8 was rejected.

Four of the ten characters made single, unsuccessful suicide attempts by use of less lethal methods. In Ordinary People and A Portrait of Myself the characters slashed their wrists. The male adolescent in The Cop and the Kid also slashed his wrists during a second suicide attempt. An overdose of pills was taken by the female adolescents in Language of Goldfish and Close to the Edge. The latter novel portrayed its suicidal character completing the suicide act during a second attempt. The method used for the second, successful attempt was not disclosed, but the researcher made a subjective decision to consider that same method for the second attempt. It was presumed that the author would have mentioned another method if it had been different from her first.

When comparing the intention of the suicide attempt to the method used, the researcher noted Ordinary People as providing the best description of end results desired by a suicide attempt,

He had tried to explain that he had not been trying to hurt himself, he had merely been trying to die...You do not slash yourself in a dozen places if you are merely trying to die. Nor do you overlook the full bottle of Valium beside the razor blades in the medicine chest. Not for him that quiet, dream-drifted road outward on sleeping pills. Too easy. And too neat.⁷²

Conrad wanted to punish himself for being alive and realized his attempt was not meant to be a final one.

The portrayal of Carrie's suicide attempt in The Language of Goldfish was characteristic of what many female suicide attempts are

⁷² Judith Guest, Ordinary People. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 198.

thought to express, according to experts. There is no real intention of dying, but the exhibition of a suicide attempt is a "cry for help." Carrie took an overdose of pills and locked herself in the bathroom during a party at her parent's home. Seemingly, Carrie knew that she would be discovered within a short period of time. Experts in the field of suicidology, as discussed in the literature review, feel that adolescents who intend to die and want the outcome to be death will choose a lethal method, such as hanging or firearms, and end their lives quickly and irrevocably.

It became apparent to the researcher that the portrayal in books for adolescents about suicide are representative of the outcome intended by the characters. The four characters, who chose methods which were less lethal, attempted their suicides at locations or times when they would be found "in time." On the other hand, those characters, who were portrayed as wanting to be successful at suicide, chose methods that would be unlikely to fail. Both portrayals were accurate descriptions of the realities of adolescent suicide as it is known today.

Hypothesis 9: The majority of the suicidal characters will display one or more of the following symptoms: expression of a desire to die or threaten to commit suicide; display of a significant change in behavior; or depression accompanied by sleep disturbance, loss of appetite and bodily complaints.

For an accurate display of this analysis, it became necessary to show the total number of times(*) the suicidal symptoms were portrayed by the characters because multiple symptoms were displayed by nine

of the ten characters. Twenty-five symptoms were shown by the nine characters. For example, in Ordinary People, Conrad's behavior changed significantly immediately prior to his suicide attempt. He also lost his appetite and had trouble sleeping at night. All three of these symptoms displayed by Conrad were included in Table 9. Each symptom was tabulated once in the category in which it is described.

Table 9
Number of Times Suicidal Symptoms
Were Exhibited

Symptoms	M	F	T	%
Threat	2	2	4	16
Change in behavior	2	3	5	20
Depression with: Appetite loss Sleep disturbance Bodily complaints	4	4	8	32
Final arrangements	2	3	5	20
Gave away possessions	1	1	2	8
Other	0	0	0	0
Unable to identify/none	1	0	1	4
Total	12	13	*25	100%

It became difficult to categorize the characters' symptoms for Table 9. Therefore, the researcher made the decision to individually display all the symptoms portrayed by each of the characters, which resulted in a total number of twenty-five separate incidents of warning signs. The results of this analysis show that 68 percent, or seventeen of the twenty-five times the symptoms occurred, are displayed in Table 9. This

hypothesis was accepted. The researcher noted that all of the symptoms given in Table 9 were suggested in the literature review as important warning signs of possible suicide. It became apparent that the authors of adolescent books about this topic were aware of the symptoms which characteristically accompany self-destructive acts since twenty-four displays, or 96 percent, of the total portrayals were indicative of suicide statistics.

Table 10
Individualized Symptoms
of Characters

TITLES	Threat	Behavior change	Depression with:			Final Arrangement	Gave away Possessions	Other/Unable to Identify
			Loss of Appetite	Sleep Disturbance	Bodily Complaints			
<u>About David</u>						X		
<u>A Portrait of Myself</u>		X		X		X		
<u>Close to the Edge</u>		X		X	X	X	X	
<u>Language of Goldfish</u>	X				X			
<u>Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness</u>		X						
<u>Ordinary People</u>		X	X	X				
<u>See Dave Run</u>	X		X					
<u>The Cop and the Kid</u>								X
<u>Tunnel Vision</u>	X	X		X		X	X	
<u>Vivienne</u>	X					X		
TOTAL	4	5		8		5	2	1

For further clarification of the individually portrayed suicidal symptoms of the characters refer to Table 10. The researcher felt a need to show each book's suicide-related warning signals because of the variety exhibited and because of the difficulties that occurred when attempting to analyze distinctly the characters' portrayals of the multiple symptoms.

The least revealing character in this analysis was Michael in The Cop and the Kid. The researcher was unable to identify warning signs that might have been exhibited by Michael. One reason for this could be his frequent change of environment and displaced lifestyle that was described in the non-fiction book. If Michael exhibited any suicidal symptoms, they were not depicted in this story.

Two of the warning signs were exhibited by five of the characters. Making a final arrangement was the first of these. In About David it was the only significant symptom revealed. David left a will requesting his secret journal be given to and read by his friend, Lynn. The remaining four characters cleaned their rooms to the point of sterility and finished all homework that was due or overdue.

The second most frequently revealed suicidal indication was a significant change in behavior. All five of the characters exhibiting this symptom were described as having mood changes or withdrawal different from their behavior prior to their suicide attempts. Two of the characters reversed their withdrawn behavior and seemed to be coming out of their depressions immediately before their suicides. In Tunnel Vision and Close to the Edge the characters appeared to be greatly improved. In the latter novel, the friend of the suicide victim recalled after her friend's death, "...I went over all the times I'd spoken with Cindy lately,

searching for clues. She'd seemed so normal. Look how she'd pulled herself together."⁷³ The literature review discussed this behavior reversal as a misconception many people have about suicide. People who seem improved after being depressed are often thought to be no longer contemplating suicide, when the opposite is often true. Once a decision has been made to commit suicide, the victims feel relief. This relief was expressed best by the suicidal character in A Portrait of Myself shortly before her unsuccessful attempt, "Very calm I was now. I had decided that I would not live to see my seventeenth birthday...I was feeling a sad heaviness, yet I had never experienced such relief. My decision was made."⁷⁴

The one character in Vivienne, who made several attempts before committing the final act and revealed her suicidal tendencies often, did not exhibit any significant changes in her behavior. "Vivienne gave her parents few clues about the depth of her depression...They knew nothing of what she was writing to her former teacher or telling her friend and sister."⁷⁵ In contrast, Vivienne was one of the characters who left a note, a symptom considered not characteristic of suicide completions.

As pointed out earlier in the content analysis, several fallacies exist concerning suicide. One of these is that the pain and shame of a suicide attempt will prevent further contemplation of suicide. Of the ten books, A Portrait of Myself was the only book to include this myth. Catherine's attempt to slash her wrists was apparently superficial,

⁷³ Miklowitz, p. 147.

⁷⁴ Madison, p. 188.

⁷⁵ Mack, p. 72.

because her mother had only to bandage her wrists and further medical help was not sought. After the attempt, the girl was ashamed and exhibited an extreme fear of death, "Twice during the night I awoke and each time I was seized by the trembling fear that I was dead."⁷⁶

Other symptoms revealed by Table 9 and Table 10 were threats to commit suicide or statements expressing a desire to die, giving away of possessions, and depression accompanied by loss of appetite, sleep disturbances and bodily complaints. Many of the characters exhibited more than one of these symptoms. Those who expressed a desire to die usually did not disclose this threat to family. See Dave Run, Tunnel Vision and Vivienne portrayed characters revealing their threats orally to friends or strangers. In See Dave Run, when informed by law officials that he would be sent back home, David Hendry commented, "I'd die first."⁷⁷ Vivienne was the only character to express her death wishes both orally and in written form. Finally, Carrie's threat was not a definite expression of wanting to kill herself, but was more subtle. She knew something about herself was not quite right, and she tried to tell her family that she was not feeling well and that something was wrong with her. Her expressions of depression were ignored until she attempted suicide. After that display of need, Carrie was helped by a professional counselor.

In summarizing observations made relating to Hypothesis 9, the majority of the characters exhibited at least one or more of the symptoms which are considered indications of suicide.

⁷⁶ Madison, p. 198.

⁷⁷ Eyerly, p. 123.

During the course of this content analysis, a pattern in the ages of characters emerged. The researcher considered this pattern important and made a decision to include the findings in this data analysis.

Table 11
Ages of Suicidal Characters

Age	M	F	T	%
13	0	1	1	10
14	0	2	2	20
15	2	0	2	20
16	0	1	1	10
17	3	1	4	40
	5	5	10	100%

The age limitation for the term "adolescent" was defined in Chapter 1 of this paper as ranging from twelve to nineteen, and this definition was provided in the letter sent to panel members (see Appendix D). It was not unusual, then, to have all characters depicted within this age group. The distribution of the ages in relation to genders and suicidal outcomes, however, was noteworthy. Forty percent of the ten characters were portrayed as being seventeen years old. The remaining six characters ranged in ages from thirteen to sixteen. Of the five male characters, three were seventeen-year-olds and two were fifteen-year-olds. Both of the fifteen-year-olds and one of the seventeen-year-old males completed the suicide act.

The female characters were distributed more evenly by age. The youngest was thirteen years old. There were two who were fourteen, one

who was sixteen, and one who was seventeen. Three of the five females committed suicide; two were fourteen and one was seventeen.

Based on the above data, the researcher generalized that the older adolescent males and younger teenage females were more likely to be portrayed as committing suicide. Furthermore, it might be inferred from this analysis that the fourteen-to-fifteen-year-old age groups, of either female or male gender, were considered by authors to be the most difficult time for adolescents.

The conclusions made were subjective viewpoints of the researcher based on the data analysis for Table 11. The literature review did not include any factual evidence which would support the researcher's viewpoint. Further research would be necessary to learn if the emerging age pattern is a valid factor of adolescent suicide in society and not as reported in the literature.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The major purposes of this content analysis were to analyze the portrayal of adolescent suicidal characters in books which adolescents are currently reading and to attempt to determine if this portrayal was realistic in the entire group of books. According to the data gathered and outcomes accumulated, the following characteristics of suicidal characters emerged:

1. The character will most often exhibit behavior of rebellion and/or withdrawal.
2. The character will most frequently be disciplined by criticism, nagging, and little or no parental approval.
3. The attributed causes for suicide by a character will most often be related to family environment and parent/guardian expectations.
4. The character's peer relationships will most often consist of one or two friends of either sex.
5. The character who attempts or commits suicide will equally likely be male or female.
6. Male or female characters will not be likely to attempt suicide more than one time.
7. The method used by a character who commits suicide will most often be lethal.
8. The method used by a character who attempts suicide will most often not be lethal.

9. The character will display multiple symptoms before attempting suicide.
10. A character is likely to be between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years old.

The accumulated data revealed evidence of realistic portrayals of suicide in adolescent books. Even though four of the nine hypotheses were rejected, the researcher noted that the books were accurately presented, reflecting the findings gathered in the literature review.

Minor discrepancies, in the sex of those who attempt suicide and the methods used, revealed in the books differed from the experts in the field of suicidology. According to the experts, females are more likely to make unsuccessful attempts at suicide, and these attempts will be made by the use of less lethal methods, such as slashing wrists or taking pills. The accumulated data from the analysis of the books revealed that both males and females made unsuccessful attempts and both used less lethal methods. One of the female characters attempted several times, but the majority of these "trials" were by the lethal method of hanging or strangulation. The books, therefore, do not agree with all of the predicted suicidal factors that have been considered characteristic of adolescent suicide.

None of the books suggested for this analysis by the panel members presented an adolescent suicide attempt or completion as a sensationalized phenomenon. On the contrary, the characters were portrayed as generally trying to escape from what they felt were intolerable situations. Many of the books depicted family life as having the greatest influence on characters' subsequent behaviors. A predominant pattern emerged in the element of disciplinary techniques used

by parents or guardians, with criticism, withholding of approval, or lack of attention as having the greatest impact on the characters' lives and their self-esteem.

The researcher concluded that, in general, books currently available with suicidal characters display accurate characteristics of adolescent suicide. The opinions and comments of the panel members tended to agree with the overall conclusion of this content analysis. They concurred that the majority of the books about adolescent suicide which adolescents are currently reading give an accurate portrayal of this topic. Linda Waddle agreed with the researcher that Tunnel Vision was one of the books with the most balanced presentation of suicide, in that it covers almost all factors of the act. Furthermore, Tunnel Vision was named by several panel members as being one of the most popular books on this topic, especially among the younger adolescent age groups.

About David was suggested by Linda Waddle as popular among the high school peer group she serves, but Jane Seeley felt it was too severe for many of her junior high students. In Seeley's opinion, adolescent suicide is a topic that is "really scary" for many junior high students. She proposed that younger adolescents are deeply affected by death, in general, and "do not think of it as a reality" of life. That is why, in her opinion, it is important for more books to be written on the topic. Further, Seeley emphasized the inclusion of suicidal symptoms as being important, "because we tend to ignore or forget about them."⁷⁸

Lucille Lettow has observed the publishing of more books on adolescent suicide in recent years. She suggests there is a "flurry" of adolescent

⁷⁸ Telephone interview with Jane Seeley, library/media specialist, Peet Junior High School, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 14 June 1984.

suicidal characters because suicide is becoming more prevalent."⁷⁹ Linda Waddle referred to this phenomenon as "topical."⁸⁰ Mr. Johnson agreed with these reasons for more available books on the topic of suicide today than in the past. Mrs. Lettow advised the researcher that "more books on the topic of suicide began to appear during the late '70s, when an emphasis on death education began." Prior to that era, suicide and death were considered "taboo" topics, especially for adolescent literature.⁸¹

Linda Waddle contended that the "market is not yet saturated" and that there "could be more materials" published.⁸² Mr. Johnson predicted that "better books on the subject are yet to be written and published, because more adolescents today know people who have suicidal thoughts."⁸³ All panel members were in consensus that the recent adolescent suicides within the state of Iowa alone should support the growing, nationwide concern for all adolescents who may be contemplating the act of suicide.

"Curiosity" was the most predominant response to the question of why adolescents read literature with suicidal characters or the depiction of suicide. Linda Waddle and Jane Seeley hinted that some students are "fascinated" with death, and Waddle further suggested that teenagers "cannot understand why peers would want to do this and read to learn more

⁷⁹ Personal interview with Lucille Lettow, Youth Collection librarian, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 12 June 1984.

⁸⁰ Personal interview with Linda Waddle, library/media specialist, Cedar Falls High School, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 12 June 1984.

⁸¹ Personal interview with Lucille Lettow, 12 June 1984.

⁸² Personal interview with Linda Waddle, 12 June 1984.

⁸³ Personal interview with Duane Johnson, professor of Library Science, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa, 15 June 1984.

about it."⁸⁴ She explained that fictional portrayals are most often read and circulated among the younger adolescents of her media center, while the older students tend to read non-fiction books on this subject. Non-fictional portrayals of suicide are most often available for reading in Jane Hohl's center because of the "community" served by her patient library. Hohl advised the researcher that books on suicide, in general, are not encouraged for adolescent reading because the adolescents in her place of employment are considered well-informed on the subject. Hohl further explained to the researcher that the age limitation given for "adolescence" in this analysis differs from the ages defined at the Mental Health Institute. There, teenagers are not considered "adolescents" until age sixteen, and, therefore, it was difficult for Hohl to suggest books to be used in this analysis which would fit the needs of the study. Finally, Jane Hohl proposed that suicide in adolescent literature might be used for preventative teaching with adolescents, especially if portrayals of the psychological aftermaths of friends and family are realistic and not romanticized.⁸⁵

The reviews (see Appendix C) which were consulted for this research analysis appeared to the researcher to avoid critical discussion of the presentation of suicide in the ten books. The researcher observed that the reviews overlooked important factors about the portrayal of suicide in books for adolescents. Their comments generally were focused on other elements or themes in the books. Suicide or a suicide attempt was

⁸⁴ Personal interview with Linda Waddle, 12 June 1984.

⁸⁵ Telephone interview with Jane Hohl, patient librarian, Mental Health Institute, Independence, Iowa, 19 June 1984.

mentioned in each review, but not emphasized in the reviewer's analysis of each book. The researcher was disappointed in the lack of discussion provided about the portrayal of suicidal characters and/or the depiction of the topic itself. The reviews of Tunnel Vision, Vivienne and About David commented on the effects or aftermath an adolescent's suicide can create for the people left behind, while others did not focus specifically on the topic of suicide. Further research in this analysis of reviews would be necessary to discover if the researcher's judgment was accurate.

Evaluation of the Inventory

The inventory used in this study for the evaluation of the data gathered was designed by the researcher for the purpose of conducting a content analysis of the majority of the elements listed. Problems did occur, with multiple behaviors being exhibited by the characters, resulting in the researcher making some subjective decisions and judgments for completion of the analysis. The characters represented in the books analyzed could be identified as having one or more of the variety of behaviors, symptoms and other characteristics outlined on the inventory. For future analysis, the researcher would recommend more distinction between characteristics for easier identification and less subjective decision-making by the analyzer.

Further Research

This research represented one of the first content analyses of books about adolescent suicidal characters and the first use of this associated inventory. A valuable follow-up study would involve expansion of the inventory to include: the reactions and aftermath of an adolescent's suicide felt by friends and family left behind; the religious dimensions of suicide; and suicide which is presented from the first person singular point of view. Application of this inventory to a different and broader sampling of books on the same topic would be of additional value. This would help determine if the results from this content analysis were valid and if the conclusions indicated in relation to Hypotheses 3, 5, 6 and 8 are accurate.

Some possibilities for additional research activities also exist. A survey of adolescents reading the books could be conducted to discover how adolescents perceive suicide and suicidal characters. In addition, a survey or questionnaire of the reasons why adolescents read books about suicide could be developed. This latter research was discussed in the interviews with the panel members. They suggested that a major reason adolescents might have for reading books about suicide is curiosity. It would be worthwhile to discover if their opinions can be substantiated.

Other sampling techniques could be used for obtaining more and different samples of books about adolescent suicidal characters which could be analyzed by using the inventory from this research. Surveying a group of adolescents who have previously attempted suicide, for example, might result in a different sample.

As given in Appendix A and shown in Table 12, copyright dates ranged from 1964 to 1983. According to Table 12, 65 percent of the books suggested by the panel members were published since 1980. It could be predicted from these results that the publishing of books about suicidal adolescents is increasing.

Table 12
Copyrights of Books Recommended
by Panel Members

Date	N	T	%
1964	1		33.0
1969	1		3.0
1970	1		3.0
1971	3		11.0
1976	1		3.0
1977	1		3.0
1978	1		3.0
1979	1		3.0
1980	4		14.5
1981	4		14.5
1982	5		18.0
1983	5		18.0
no date	1		3.0
Total	29		100%

The researcher noted some additional points for further research during the course of the content analysis evaluation of books about adolescent suicide. First, few of the books with suicidal characters

were written in the first person. Seven of the ten books presented the points of view of the people closest to the suicidal adolescent. The two non-fiction books included information provided by the adolescents even though they were not telling the story and only one of the novels was written in the first person.

In two of the books, a religious dimension was presented as a consideration in the contemplation and attempt of suicide. In A Portrait of Myself, the young girl prayed for forgiveness before and during her attempt. After the unsuccessful suicide, the adolescent's mother urged her to confess her sins and admonished her for committing a "sin". Tunnel Vision's character was portrayed as revealing in a composition for his English class the "peace" he felt death would bring. The religious implication of suicide might be a consideration for further research to discover if other books portray it as an element considered when contemplating suicide.

One of the most noteworthy factors that emerged in this analysis was the psychological aftermath of suicide felt by friends and family. As noted above, few of the books were presented in the first person point of view. A further study of the psychological aftermath depicted in these books could be valuable and is recommended by the researcher to investigate if the pattern that emerged in this content analysis is valid.

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Johnson, Duane. Personal interview. 15 June 1984.

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Waddle, Linda. Personal interview. 12 June 1984.

APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Survey of Recommended Titles

NUMBER OF
RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Anonymous. Go Ask Alice. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
- 3 Arrick, Fran. Tunnel Vision. Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1980.
- 1 Asinof, Eliot. Craig and Joan: Two Lives For Peace. New York: Viking Press, 1971.
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- 1 Calvert, Patricia. Hour of the Wolf. New York: Scribner, 1983.
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- 2 Everly, Jeanette. See Dave Run. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J. B. Lippincott, 1978.
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- 2 Mack, John and Hickler, Holly. Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl. Boston: Little, Brown, 1981.
- 2 Madison, Winifred. A Portrait of Myself. New York: Random House, 1979.
- 2 Miklowitz, Gloria. Close To the Edge. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983.
- 3 Neufeld, John. Lisa, Bright and Dark. New York: S. G. Phillips, 1969.
- 2 O'Neal, Zibby. The Language of Goldfish. New York: Viking, 1980.
- 3 Pfeffer, Susan Beth. About David. New York: Delacorte Press, 1980.
- 1 Plath, Sylvia. The Bell Jar. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- 1 Schulte, Elaine L. Whither The Wind Bloweth. New York: Avon, 1982.
- 1 Sheldon, Mary. Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness. New York; Random House, 1981.
- 1 Strasberg, Susan. Bittersweet. New York: New American Library, 1981.
- 1 Wolitzer, Meg. Sleepwalking. New York: Random, 1982.
- 2 Zalben, Jane B. Maybe It Will Rain Tomorrow. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982.

Appendix B.

Titles Analyzed

1. Arrick, Fran. Tunnel Vision. Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1980.
2. Eyerly, Jeannette. See Dave Run. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.B. Lippincott, 1978.
3. Fox, William. The Cop and the Kid. New York: Congdon and Weed, Inc., 1983.
4. Guest, Judith. Ordinary People. New York: Ballantine Books, 1976.
5. Mack, John E. and Hickler, Holly. Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl. Boston: Little, Brown, 1981.
6. Madison, Winifred. A Portrait of Myself. New York: Random House, 1979.
7. Miklowitz, Gloria D. Close to the Edge. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983.
8. O'Neal, Zibby. The Language of Goldfish. New York: Viking, 1980.
9. Pfeffer, Susan Beth. About David. New York: Delacorte Press, 1980.
10. Sheldon, Mary. Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness. New York: Random House, 1981.

Appendix C.

Bibliography of Reviews

- 1a) Geringer, Laura, review of Tunnel Vision by Fran Arrick, School Library Journal 26 (April 1980): 119.
- 1b) Review of Tunnel Vision by Fran Arrick. Booklist 76 (15 April 1980): 1355.
- 2a) Wooldridge, C. Nordheim, review of See Dave Run by Jeannette Eyerly. School Library Journal 25 (October 1978): 154.
- 2b) Review of See Dave Run by Jeannette Eyerly. Booklist 75 (15 December 1978): 678.
- 3a) Review of The Cop and the Kid by William Fox. Publishers Weekly 224 (5 August 1983): 77.
- 3b) Review of The Cop and the Kid by William Fox. Kirkus Reviews 51 (1 August 1983): 862.
- 4a) Review of Ordinary People by Judith Guest. Booklist 72 (15 July 1976): 1572.
- 4b) Daly, Jay, review of Ordinary People by Judith Guest. School Library Journal 23 (September 1976): 143.
- 5a) Vivian, Nancy, review of Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl by John E. Mack and Holly Hickler. VoYA 5 (February 1983): 59.
- 5b) JME., review of Vivienne: The Life and Suicide of an Adolescent Girl by John E. Mack and Holly Hickler. Booklist 78 (15 September 1981): 74.
- 6a) Shapiro, Lillian, review of A Portrait of Myself by Winifred Madison. School Library Journal 25 (March 1979): 149.
- 6b) Review of A Portrait of Myself by Winifred Madison. Booklist 75 (15 March 1979): 1143.
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- 7b) Review of Close to the Edge by Gloria Miklowitz. Booklist 79 (15 April 1983): 1089.
- 8a) Silver, Linda R., review of The Language of Goldfish by Zibby O'Neal. School Library Journal 26 (February 1980): 70.

- 9a) Vivian, Nancy, review of About David by Susan Pfeffer. VoYA 2 (December 1980): 32.
- 9b) Jaffee, Cyrisse, review of About David by Susan Pfeffer. School Library Journal 27 (November 1980): 87.
- 10a) Waters, Kate, review of Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness by Mary Sheldon. School Library Journal 28 (February 1982): 94.

Reviews

1a.

ARRICK, Fran. *Tunnel Vision*. 192p. CIP. Bradbury. Apr. 1980. CSM \$8.95. ISBN 0-87888-163-8. LC 79-25939.

Gr 7-10—Anthony, a 15-year-old "A" student, star of his high school swim team, respected by his teachers, idolized by his friends, favored by his parents, and nicknamed Mr. Perfect by his more rebellious sister, hangs himself with his father's neckties, leaving no note. Shocked and guilty, his nearest and dearest condemn themselves for not sensing that the boy's terminal depression of several months duration was more than teenage angst. But readers will be at as much of a loss as to why this particular kid wanted to end it all. True, his father is on the road a great deal and rules the roost in absentia; his mother is ineffectual; his English teacher doesn't understand his essays at their deepest level; and his Czech girlfriend, an orphan and rape victim, will not let him kiss her; but are those reasons to die? A nice, neighborhood cop, commenting upon the statistical frequency of juvenile suicide attempts in the American small town he inhabits, attributes the phenomenon to *Tunnel Vision*: "It's like each of them was caught inside a tunnel and they couldn't see any end to it or anything at all outside." Not much of an explanation but it's refreshing to find a realistic problem novel that doesn't read like psychological case study. The small, linked group of people who must come to terms with the tragedy described here are likable and ordinary. They are not particularly marked for disaster. It visits them almost casually. Arrick's spare, understated handling of their struggle to come to terms with the decision of a child they all loved to leave them and life behind rings true, and should prompt some heated discussions.—*Laura Geringer, "School Library Journal"*

Eyerly, Jeannette.

2a.

See *Dave Run*: a novel. 1978. Lippincott, \$6.95 (0-397-31819-7). Galley.

His life made miserable by a harsh stepfather and weak mother, 15-year-old Dave Hendry runs away, heading west to try to find the musician-father he idolized as a kid. Dave's story unfolds episodically in short first-person vignettes by more than 20 persons who know or encounter him—among them, his mother and stepfather, his best friend, a truck driver who gives him a lift, a young hooker who steals his money, a boy about his age who briefly joins him in flight, a VD clinic doctor who treats him, and the sheriff who is holding him in a cell where he finally commits suicide. Dave himself never appears and thus, unfortunately, never emerges as a real person, but his oblique development is offset by the fragmentary glimpses of the more fully realized secondary characters who play a part in his tragedy. *Gr. 7-10.*

1b.

Arrick, Fran.

Tunnel vision. 1980. 167p. Bradbury; dist. by Dutton, \$8.95 (0-87888-163-8). Galley.

It's all here—the shock, the bewilderment, the guilt, and the anger that are the classic symptoms of the aftermath of suicide. Fifteen-year-old Anthony Hamil, model student, model son, is dead. He has hanged himself with his father's neckties, but his character and the decline that marked his last few months live on through the entwining flashback memories of his irresponsible "druggie" sister; his ineffectual mother; his shortsighted, demanding father; and his three close friends, Carl, Ditto, and Jana—all of whom feel somehow to blame. While the motive for Anthony's death may be obvious to readers, Arrick leaves it credibly speculative for her characters and tackles the emotionally charged subject with intensity that approaches the sensational only once—in her handling of the tangential episode of Jana's rape. Noteworthy as well is Arrick's avoidance of a completely downbeat ending—she ensures that at least some of her characters emerge from the tragedy with broadened insight and newfound inner strength. Purposeful, but skillfully and successfully so. Junior high and high school.

Suicide—Fiction [CIP]

79-25939

2b.

EYERLY, Jeannette. See *Dave Run*. 128p. CIP. Lippincott. Oct. 1978. PSm \$6.95. ISBN 0-397-31819-7. LC 78-8139.

Gr 6-10—Eyerly relates the story of misunderstood teenage runaway Dave Hendry through a series of first-person accounts by those who are, in some way, affected by his leaving home to search for his natural father. The "chroniclers" (as they are referred to in the table of contents) range from Dave's stepfather ("That kid hasn't caused me anything but trouble") to a gas station attendant who inadvertently rescues Dave from the advances of a homosexual. The various narrators trace Dave's odyssey from the small Ohio town he runs from through various houses, communes, and barns where he takes refuge, to the midwestern jail cell where he commits suicide. Unfortunately, Dave himself fails to emerge as anything more than a reflection in the eyes of those who tell his tale. This, coupled with the shift in viewpoint among 20-odd characters, leaves readers floundering; attention should be riveted on Dave but somehow the unfinished stories of the hooker, the elderly widow, and the girl back home seem more intriguing.—*C. Nordheim Wooldridge, formerly at Seiden Prairie Elementary School Library, Matteson, Ill.*

Reviews (Continued)

3a.

Fox, William with
Noel Hynd
THE COP AND THE KID
Congdon & Weed—dist. by
St. Martin's \$14.95
9/27 SBN: 312-92101-2

In September 1981 the New York City-area news was full of stories about NYPD emergency-squad officer Bill Fox, who saved a teenage runaway from a suicide-jump by offering him a home. . . and then came through on his promise. Here, then, with an assist (sometimes too noticeable an assist) from novelist Hynd, Fox tells the story—padded out into a short, unpretentious book with lots of vignettes from Fox's everyday police-work. While a few third-person chapters fill in the Tennessee background of young Mike Buchanan (deserting mother, abusive father, foster-homes, petty crimes, reform school), Fox recounts his early interest in the priesthood, his move into police-work (following two brothers), his grimly exciting duties in Emergency Services. Then comes the night of Michael's near-jump from the roof of a Bowery flophouse (soon after his despairing arrival in the city)—with the 17-year-old responding to Fox's promises of a school and a room in the Staten Island house shared by bachelor Fox and his mother. And, despite bureaucratic obstacles, insulting questions and raised eyebrows from his colleagues, Fox manages to get Michael released from Bellevue, winning temporary and then permanent custody (for the months till Michael reaches 18). All was not rosy thereafter: Fox describes, with effective simplicity, Michael's insecure bids for attention (hysterical illness, setting a fire); and when the publicity brought Michael's long-lost mother to the surface, he left to join his rediscovered family down South. But Fox's gentle firmness and understated affection won out on all fronts: Michael returned and "has remained in our family since. That is not to say every moment has been easy. Life isn't like that. But. . . with the important things, I think we are succeeding." Despite passages that don't sound like Fox's real voice, and some drawn-out filler: a small, inspiring story—convincing and likable.

3b.

THE COP AND THE KID
William Fox with Noel Hynd. Congdon & Weed, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-92101-2
Cynics will call it cornball, but this is actually the deeply affecting story of a New York City police officer with enough heart to care for a teenager he first encountered as a potential suicide on the roof of a Bowery flophouse. Fox, from a family of cops, had thoughts of joining the priesthood when he was young, but eventually became a member of the force; he soon distinguished himself as a brave, yet caring, officer. Michael Buchanan, on the other hand, came from a background as chaotic as Fox's was ordered: from a broken home, he found himself in the care of his irresponsible father. He passed through a series of state institutions and foster homes, often running from state to state, and eventually went to New York, where he reached the end of his rope. Fortunately Fox committed himself to helping Michael, and worked with the youngster to overcome most of his problems. A heartwarming tale. *Reader's Digest Condensed Book Club main selection; Literary Guild alternate.* [September 27]

4a.

★Guest, Judith. *Ordinary people.* 1976.
263p. Viking, \$7.95.

Ordinary People is not an ordinary novel: it is an intense, low-keyed success story about a high school student who has attempted suicide and tries to pull his life together. Conrad is helped along the way by a wonderful hip psychiatrist; while no one becomes much happier, the boy and his family and friends understand better. The distinguishing elements in this first novel are lack of sensationalism and recognition of the deep surges of emotion which can modify ordinary settings. C.G.
YA

4b.

GUEST, Judith. *Ordinary People.*
263p. Viking, May 1976. \$7.95. ISBN
0-670-52831-5. LC 76-2368.

YA—Conrad Jarrett, 17 years old, has recently returned home from a mental hospital, to which he was remanded after having slashed his wrists, and now faces the difficult task of living in the outside world. With the help of a sympathetic and slightly unorthodox psychiatrist, Conrad learns to confront his own weaknesses and strengths, as well as those of the *Ordinary People* he loves and whose ranks he wishes so desperately to join. This is an exceptionally perceptive first novel and should do very well with older YA's.—*Jay Daly.* Cambridge Public Library, Mass.

Reviews (Continued)

5a.

5Q 4P Mack, John E. and Holly Hickler. *VIVIENNE: THE LIFE & SUICIDE OF AN ADOLESCENT GIRL*. Little, Brown, 1981. \$13.95. 237p. 0-316-54228-8.

VIVIENNE is the painful and yet ultimately hopeful story of the suicide of a precocious, creative, attractive and yet deeply despairing 14 year old, Vivienne Loomis. The book has a dual focus. Part I narrates the last two years of Vivienne's life using excerpts from her journal, poems, compositions, and letters combined with sections from taped conversations with relatives, a special teacher, and friends. Interspersed are analytical observations of clinical psychiatrist, John Mack. This section is written in hope that dealing with this particular adolescent suicide will yield insight into the general problem of adolescent suicide; thus Part II is a clinical analysis. John Mack discusses how Vivienne's suicide is related to her depression, her poor self-esteem, her inability to establish realistic values and goals for herself, her sexuality, and her culture. He then proceeds to discuss the incidence of, the causes of, the clues to, and the prevention of adolescent suicide. Finally, Holly Hickler, a teacher at the school Vivienne attended, gives us a thoughtful section on the role of schools in dealing with this frightening phenomenon.

Part I will seemingly appeal to all readers but the clinical comments of Part II may prove incomprehensible for those lacking background in psychology. Nonetheless, the book as a whole is honest and sensitive and is packed with excellent insights that may prove invaluable to those persons dealing firsthand with an adolescent facing a suicidal crisis. --Nancy Vivian.

5b.

Mack, John E. and Hickler, Holly. *Vivienne: the life and suicide of an adolescent girl*. 1981. 256p. Little, Brown, \$12.95 (0-316-54228-8). Galley. Nov.

Acknowledging that their subject, 14-year-old Vivienne Loomis, may have been an atypical teenager, Mack and Hickler--psychiatrist and teacher, respectively--reconstruct Vivienne's personality, her place in a complicated yet caring family, and the many kinds of events and pressures that precipitated her profound final depression. Their moving case study relies on Vivienne's poems, journal entries, and letters for substantive evidence of her plunging self-esteem and her desire to resolve conflicts and losses in death. It is followed by a section of inconclusive speculation on the causes of adolescent depression and suicide, picking up parts of Vivienne's story when they seem to fit the authors' preferred psychiatric explanations. This is a tasteful and thoughtful book that is careful not to overstate or to wantonly generalize. As a re-

sult, there is less guidance for parents, teachers, and peers of potential teenage suicides than there might have been. Conscientious bibliography; to be indexed. JME. 616.85'844509 (B) Loomis, Vivienne// Youth--U.S.--Suicidal behavior 81-11752

6a.

MADISON, Winifred. *A Portrait of Myself*. 256p. CIP. Random. Mar. 1979. PSm \$7.95. ISBN 0-394-84021-6; PLB \$7.99. ISBN 0-394-94021-0. LC 78-13897.

Gr 7-9—Living alone with her mother who is divorced and looking for fun, 15-year-old Catherine d'Amato is the recipient of both the warmth and the intrusiveness of her extended Italian family. Her relatives include poor and fertile Aunt Mary, rich and not very lovable Aunt Carol, cousin Joanna who is rough and tough, cousin Anthony who is musically gifted. And, too, there are grandparents of proud, immigrant background who work a small farm and encourage Catherine to find pride in her artistic ability. Cathy's crush on a gym teacher, Miss Alcott, leads her to a loudly telegraphed suicide attempt when her friendship and a gift of drawings are rejected out of hand. The suggestion of homosexuality (unfounded, as it happens) is an unfortunate stereotypical element. Cathy appears more sophisticated in her critical appraisal of famous artists than one would expect of someone her age and background, and her vocabulary occasionally jolts us into an awareness of the author behind the heroine. On the positive side, love and respect between older and younger generations is depicted, along with realistic descriptions of school activities, complete with very human if less than perfectly dedicated teachers.—Lillian L. Shapiro, *School Library Consultant, N.Y.*

6b.

Madison, Winifred.

A portrait of myself. 1979. Random, \$7.95 (0-394-84021-6); lib. ed., \$7.99 (0-394-94021-0). Galley.

Dark, small, and serious 15-year-old Catherine d'Amato yearns for beauty, grace, and self-assurance. Confused about her feelings for her ne'er-do-well father and trapped in a monotonous existence with her divorced mother, whose constant (albeit well meaning) carping makes her feel even more like a loser, Catherine turns to art as her lifeline. When an attractive new teacher whom Catherine obstinately adores rudely rejects a personally tailored portfolio of Catherine's drawings and recommends her expulsion from school, Catherine attempts suicide. She fails, but it takes a visit to the grandmother for whom she was named to renew her faith in life, in her talent, and in herself. Suggestions of lesbianism convincingly evolve into the misplaced affections of a lonely, unhappy teenager; and Madison's strong characterizations and perceptive handling of Catherine's gradual disillusionment easily make up for a conclusion that seems anticlimactic. Junior high and high school.

Artists—Fiction || Teachers—Fiction || Suicide—Fiction [CIP]

Reviews (Continued)

7a.

★MIKLOWITZ, Gloria D. *Close to the Edge*. 155p. CIP. Delacorte. Apr. 1983. PSm (cl.sp.) \$11.95. ISBN 0-440-00990-1. LC 82-72817.

Gr 7-10—Living in an upper middle class southern California suburb, Jenny Hartley appears to have all that the world can offer: friends, Porsche, handsome boyfriend and good looks. However, unbeknownst to her family and peers, she is suffering from a severe case of alienation and depression which at times becomes so acute that she contemplates suicide. Her problems are juxtaposed against those of her former best friend, Cindy, who has already attempted suicide and must return to school to face the curiosity of her classmates. Jenny's willingness to help her and to engage in volunteer work at a local Jewish Community Center brings her back from the brink, but does not enable her to prevent Cindy's eventual suicide. Miklowitz has succeeded in portraying the sense of apathy and despair that so many adolescents experience despite having it all. Her characters' misgivings concerning life's significance are convincing, and her solution of helping oneself by helping others is presented subtly enough for teenagers to accept.—*Kathleen W. Craver, University of Illinois, Urbana*

7b.

Miklowitz, Gloria D. *Close to the edge*. 1983. [160p.] Delacorte, \$11.95 (0-440-00990-1). Galley. Apr. **CH**

Hiding her feelings beneath a facade of self-confidence and disinterested cynicism, but depressed enough by the superficiality of her privileged life to contemplate killing herself, Jenny Hartley takes the news of former friend Cindy Bickford's suicide attempt more personally than most of her classmates and decides to reopen ties with the recuperating girl. About the same time, she begins a stint as accompanist for a "pots and pans" band of Jewish senior citizens and finds herself liking and respecting the old people, whose attitudes toward living are so different from Cindy's and her own. It is the seniors who give Jenny a glimpse of what is missing from her life and, ultimately, when Cindy finally does kill herself, help her put the death into perspective. There's no pretense in Miklowitz writing—her juxtaposition of old versus young in the novel is obvious as are the messages about familial devotion and materialism she puts forth, but they never overwhelm the action, and Jenny's personal dilemma is engagingly and affectingly rendered. Junior high and high school. **SZ.**

Conduct of life—Fiction || Family life—Fiction [OCLC] 82-72817

8a.

★ONEAL, Zibby. *The Language of Goldfish*. 204p. CIP. Viking. Apr. 1980. PSm (cl.sp.) \$8.95. ISBN 0-670-41785-8. LC 79-19167.

Gr 7-10—This is an intelligent, meticulously crafted book on a theme that, though fascinating to young people, has not been well handled in YA novels. Thirteen-year-old Carrie, the middle child in an affluent and happy family, is full of fears about herself and her relations with other people. More precisely, she is afraid of becoming a sexual being—although the underlying sexual basis for her mental breakdown is suggested rather than stated. She sees her older sister growing away from her, becoming more interested in boys and in a separate social life. She is uneasy about the changes in her own body, frightened by the expectations that her parents and school have for her, intensely disturbed by the sensuality she perceives in an exhibit of Art Nouveau upset when a trusted teacher casually refers to the importance of sex in human nature. She attempts suicide and then slowly, through therapy and through the creative stimulus of painting, begins to heal. Why she is so afraid is not explained. The carefully selected, precise details of Carrie's life, including realistic and compassionate character portrayals, establish a tension between external reality and the chaos of Carrie's mind. A serious but not dismal book, enlivened by flashes of humor, this draws out readers' empathetic response and enlarges understanding. It is remarkably good writing!—*Linda R. Silver, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Cleveland*

Reviews (Continued)

9a.

5Q 4P Pfeffer, Susan Beth. ABOUT DAVID. Delacorte, M J S 1980. \$8.95. 0-440-00093-9.

This is an unusually sensitive and insightful portrayal of the changes that occur in Lynn, her friends, and her family when Lynn's 17-year-old friend and classmate, David, murders his parents and commits suicide. Stricken with grief, haunted by memories, plagued by nightmares and confronted by a journal left by David, Lynn begins, with the aid of empathic family and friends, and a sensitive therapist, to come to terms with the tragic situation. Cover art may be too drab and juvenile to capture YA interest. However, Pfeffer depicts the various feelings and phases of the grief process attending suicide with exceptional skill. This will certainly be of great value to the increasing number of YAs who are being forced to deal with this painful subject.--Nancy Vivian.

9b.

PFEFFER, Susan Beth. *About David*. 167p. CIP. Delacorte. Sept. 1980. PSm (cl.sp.) \$8.95. ISBN 0-440-00093-9. LC 80-10581.

Gr 10 Up—David Morris kills his cold adoptive parents and then himself, throwing his childhood friend Lynn, 17 into deep confusion and remorse. As she struggles to come to terms with her grief and anger, Lynn explores her memories of David and her persistent feeling of responsibility because she cannot remember their last conversation. Although we are never convinced that David, however unloved and unhappy, was capable of the act, Lynn's recovery (with the help of a therapist and support from friends and family) is well told and keeps the story from becoming totally grim. Despite the bizarre elements of the plot, this is an earnest and unsensational exploration of the darker sides of human nature.—*Cyrisse Jaffee, Morse Institute Library, Natick, Mass.*

10a.

SHELDON, Mary. *Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness*. 184p. Random. Oct. 1981. \$11.50. ISBN 0-394-51175-1. LC 81-40217.

YA—Two people die of self-inflicted gunshot wounds to the head within 24 hours: David Angel, a fading rock-and-roll star, and 14-year-old Effie. The circumstances that bring them together for one macabre evening form the structure of this first novel. The first half is Effie's story, told by her older sister Susan, in diary form. Effie was a plain-faced girl who always had crushes, who suffered particularly when her parents separated, whose father indulged her passion for David Angel by sending her alone to concerts around the country, and who the night before her suicide arrived home uncharacteristically dressed in a transparent blouse and heavy eye makeup. The last half of the book is the story of David, who at 16 fell in love with Rebecca, went to California and became a rock-and-roll star. Fulfilling a dream and a promise, he returns to rescue Rebecca from her wealthy, protective parents, but is rejected. This affects the rest of David's relationships, according to the seven people who tell much of his story. Interspersed among the portraits by Rebecca, two ex-wives, his daughter, a childhood friend and two band members are Angel's thoughts and actions

during the hours before his death. There are hallucinations, memories, frustrations and "Pills. Needles. Booze." At one point, he tries to seduce Effie (who looks remarkably like Rebecca), but she escapes. Later that evening David Angel shoots himself. Because it is left to readers to form the pivotal connections and determine cause and motive, the effect of this tale is disconcerting. The character of Effie is bland and David Angel is a caricature. The people who tell the story, however, are alive in their hurt, anger, memories, regrets, confusion, affection and tenderness. YAs, especially those who read all and anything about the world of popular music, will be this novel's first audience.—*Kate Waters, Boston Public Library*

University of Northern Iowa

Department of Library Science

Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613
(319) 273-2050

Dear

I am conducting a content analysis of the portrayal of suicide in books which adolescents are currently reading, as my master's research project in Library Science. The purpose of the study is to determine if characters who are attempting or committing suicide are presented realistically or if they tend to fit a traditional stereotype. I will not only be considering the portrayal in individual books, but also the overall balance of the presentation of the genre.

In order to obtain a sample of books for this analysis, I am requesting that each panel member provide me with a list of up to ten books which adhere to the following criteria:

- a. The books may be fiction, biography, or autobiography.
- b. Adolescents must be currently reading the books. The term adolescents is defined as young people from ages twelve to nineteen.
- c. The books must portray at least one character who is contemplating or has attempted/completed suicide. For the purpose of this study, suicide will be defined as the act of taking or attempting to take one's own life.
- d. The sample will not include those books which suggest suicide was committed to end suffering from a terminal illness or was the result of anorexia nervosa.

Panel members assisting me with this project will be:
Mrs. Jane Hohl, Patients Librarian, Mental Health Institute, Independence, Iowa; Dr. Duane Johnson, Professor of Library Science, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa;

Mrs. Lucille Lettow, Youth Librarian, University of Northern Iowa - Youth Collection, Cedar Falls, Iowa; Mrs. Jane Seeley, Librarian/Media Specialist, Peet Junior High School, Cedar Falls, Iowa; and Mrs. Linda Waddle, Librarian/Media Specialist, Cedar Falls High School, Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Once the books have been selected, I am requesting that each panel member mail me the list identifying each book by author and title. Upon receipt of the lists, I will compile them and use the ten most frequently named books as my sample.

Finally, I am requesting that each panel member indicate a convenient time when I would be most likely to conduct a telephone or personal interview, as I am interested in obtaining opinions on the following:

1. The status of the portrayal of suicidal characters in books read by adolescents.
2. The reasons adolescents read such books.
3. The extent to which such books are read by adolescents.

Your cooperation and participation in this research is greatly appreciated. Any questions or concerns regarding this matter should be referred to me at the address or phone number given.

Sincerely,

Roxanne Fox

Roxanne Fox

AUTHOR Arrick, Fran TITLE Tunnel Vision CHARACTER Anthony Hamil

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
 Other: Family environment
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12 16
 13 17
 14 18
 15 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: Non-lethal:
 Hanging Pills/drugs
 Firearms Poison
 Other: _____ Slashed wrists
 Unable to identify Other: _____
 identify Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 1
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Eyerly, Jeannette TITLE See Dave Run CHARACTER David Hendry

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: Hanging
 Firearms
Other: _____
Unable to identify
- Non-lethal: Pills/drugs
 Poison
 Slashed wrists
Other: _____
Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 1
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Fox, William TITLE The Cop and The Kid CHARACTER Michael Buchanan

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12 16
 13 17
 14 18
 15 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: Non-lethal:
 Hanging Pills/drugs
 Firearms Poison
 Other: Jump Slashed wrists
 Unable to identify Other: _____
 identify Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 2
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Guest, Judith TITLE Ordinary People CHARACTER Conrad Jarrett

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12 16
 13 17
 14 18
 15 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: Non-lethal:
 Hanging Pills/drugs
 Firearms Poison
 Other: _____ Slashed wrists
 Unable to identify Other: _____
 identify Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 1
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Mack, John E. TITLE Vivienne CHARACTER Vivienne Loomis

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
 Other: Low self-esteem/family life
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: Non-lethal:
 Hanging Pills/drugs
 Firearms Poison
 Other: _____ Slashed wrists
 Unable to identify Other: _____
 identify Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 5-6
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Madison, Winifred TITLE A Portrait of Myself CHARACTER Catherine d'Amato

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
- Disobedience/rebellion
 - Withdrawal
 - Dropping school
 - Running away
 - Drug/alcohol abuse
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
- Criticism
 - Nagging
 - Withholding approval
 - Whippings/abuse
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
- Divorce
 - Break-up/relationship
 - Death of a loved one
 - Career pressure
 - Academic pressure
 - Alienation/parents-peers
 - Other: Rejection from teacher
 - Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
- One or two/either sex
 - Multiple/either sex
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
- Male
 - Female
6. AGE
- 12
 - 16
 - 13
 - 17
 - 14
 - 18
 - 15
 - 19
7. METHODS USED
- | | |
|---|--|
| Lethal: | Non-lethal: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hanging | <input type="checkbox"/> Pills/drugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Firearms | <input type="checkbox"/> Poison |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Slashed wrists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to identify | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to identify |
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
- Number of attempts: 1
- Unsuccessful
 - Successful/death
 - Both of the above
 - None
 - Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
- Threat/oral or written
 - Final arrangements
 - Gave possessions away
 - Significant change in behavior
 - Depression with:
 - Loss of appetite
 - Sleep disturbance
 - Bodily complaints
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Miklowitz, Gloria TITLE Close to the Edge CHARACTER Cindy Bickford

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
 Other: Family environment
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: _____ Non-lethal: _____
 Hanging Pills/drugs
 Firearms Poison
 Other: _____ Slashed wrists
 Unable to identify Other: _____
 identify Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 2
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR O'Neal, Zibby TITLE The Language of Goldfish CHARACTER Carrie Stokes

- 1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 - Disobedience/rebellion
 - Withdrawal
 - Dropping school
 - Running away
 - Drug/alcohol abuse
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
- 2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 - Criticism
 - Nagging
 - Withholding approval
 - Whippings/abuse
 - Other: Verbal admonishment
 - Unable to identify/none
- 3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 - Divorce
 - Break-up/relationship
 - Death of a loved one
 - Career pressure
 - Academic pressure
 - Alienation/parents-peers
 - Other: Family environment
 - Unable to identify/none
- 4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 - One or two/either sex
 - Multiple/either sex
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
- 5. SEX
 - Male
 - Female
- 6. AGE
 - 12
 - 13
 - 14
 - 15
 - 16
 - 17
 - 18
 - 19
- 7. METHODS USED
 - Lethal:
 - Hanging
 - Firearms
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify
 - Non-lethal:
 - Pills/drugs
 - Poison
 - Slashed wrists
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify
- 8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
 - Number of attempts: 1
 - Unsuccessful
 - Successful/death
 - Both of the above
 - None
 - Unable to identify
- 9. SYMPTOMS
 - Threat/oral or written
 - Final arrangements
 - Gave possessions away
 - Significant change in behavior
 - Depression with:
 - Loss of appetite
 - Sleep disturbance
 - Bodily complaints
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Pfeffer, Susan TITLE About David CHARACTER David Morris

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 - Disobedience/rebellion
 - Withdrawal
 - Dropping school
 - Running away
 - Drug/alcohol abuse
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 - Criticism
 - Nagging
 - Withholding approval
 - Whippings/abuse
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 - Divorce
 - Break-up/relationship
 - Death of a loved one
 - Career pressure
 - Academic pressure
 - Alienation/parents-peers
 - Other: Resented adoption
 - Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 - One or two/either sex
 - Multiple/either sex
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 - Male
 - Female
6. AGE

<input type="checkbox"/> 12	<input type="checkbox"/> 16
<input type="checkbox"/> 13	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 17
<input type="checkbox"/> 14	<input type="checkbox"/> 18
<input type="checkbox"/> 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 19
7. METHODS USED

Lethal:	Non-lethal:
<input type="checkbox"/> Hanging	<input type="checkbox"/> Pills/drugs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Firearms	<input type="checkbox"/> Poison
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Slashed wrists
<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to identify	Other: _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
 - Number of attempts: 1
 - Unsuccessful
 - Successful/death
 - Both of the above
 - None
 - Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 - Threat/oral or written
 - Final arrangements
 - Gave possessions away
 - Significant change in behavior
 - Depression with:
 - Loss of appetite
 - Sleep disturbance
 - Bodily complaints
 - Other: _____
 - Unable to identify/none

AUTHOR Sheldon, Mary TITLE Perhaps I'll Dream of Darkness CHARACTER Effie

1. BEHAVIOR EXHIBITED
 Disobedience/rebellion
 Withdrawal
 Dropping school
 Running away
 Drug/alcohol abuse
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
2. FAMILY DISCIPLINARY TECHNIQUES
 Criticism
 Nagging
 Withholding approval
 Whippings/abuse
 Other: Privileges taken away
 Unable to identify/none
3. ATTRIBUTED CAUSES
 Divorce
 Break-up/relationship
 Death of a loved one: idol/rock star
 Career pressure
 Academic pressure
 Alienation/parents-peers
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
4. PEER RELATIONSHIP PATTERN
 One or two/either sex
 Multiple/either sex
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none
5. SEX
 Male
 Female
6. AGE
 12 16
 13 17
 14 18
 15 19
7. METHODS USED
Lethal: Non-lethal:
 Hanging Pills/drugs
 Firearms Poison
 Other: _____ Slashed wrists
 Unable to identify Other: _____
 identify Unable to identify
8. INTENT OF SUICIDE
Number of attempts: 1
 Unsuccessful
 Successful/death
 Both of the above
 None
 Unable to identify
9. SYMPTOMS
 Threat/oral or written
 Final arrangements
 Gave possessions away
 Significant change in behavior
 Depression with:
 Loss of appetite
 Sleep disturbance
 Bodily complaints
 Other: _____
 Unable to identify/none