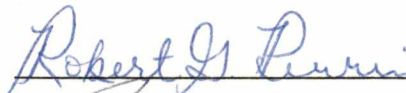
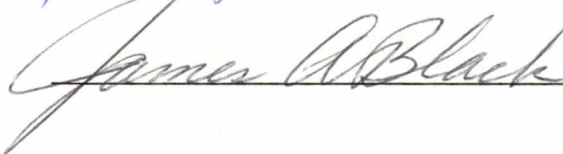


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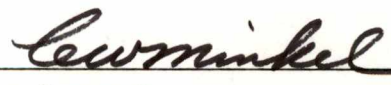
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ADOLESCENT SUICIDE: MEDIA PRESENTATIONS
OF A SOCIAL PROBLEM, 1953-1982

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Judy Vaughan Plummer
December 1985

Dedicated to my husband, Kenneth Plummer, my children,
Debra Moore and James R. Smith and my parents, Ernest
Vaughan and Claudia Vaughan, without whose encouragement
and support this could not have been achieved.

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ABSTRACT

Media presentations of a contemporary social problem, adolescent suicide, are examined from 1953 to 1982. Various conceptualizations of the "emergence" of social problems ascribe an important role to the media as disseminators of particular groups' definitions of issues as social problems. Presentations in two print media are compared to explore the amount and type of information presented to different audiences.

Popular magazine articles indexed in The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature and social science articles listed in The Sociological Abstracts were the media presentations analyzed. The study period was designed to begin shortly before actions by policy makers indicated adolescent suicide was emerging as a social problem and to include the most recent year for which all necessary information could be obtained.

All articles on adolescent (student, childhood) suicide were analyzed using content analysis. Coding categories were developed based on a review of literature on adolescence, suicide, and content analysis, as well as a preliminary review of articles on adolescent suicide. The researcher coded all articles. Validity was checked by coding placement with another rater.

The popular medium focused attention on adolescent suicide substantially earlier than the social science medium. Popular interest in adolescent suicide increased relatively steadily over

the study period, as measured by number and length of articles. Professional interest was slower to develop and did not grow as rapidly until the 1970s using the same measures.

Efforts to medicalize the social problem were pronounced in early popular magazine articles and social science articles. Mental health professionals often were presented as "experts" on the problem.

Information presented in popular media addressed general and specific audiences of parents, teachers, and adolescents, while professional articles either addressed mental health practitioners or teacher-researchers.

The causes of adolescent suicide proposed in popular and social science periodicals changed with the political and social climate in the society. The efforts of special groups appeared to be less important in the definition of the social problem than the general social climate.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Contemporary analyses of social problems by sociologists focus more on how and why specific issues are defined as social problems than on remedies for them. The mass media are recognized as playing an important role in shaping and affirming public definitions of issues as social problems both by groups promoting problematic definitions of issues (e.g., social movements, interest groups) and by sociologists. And, literature on the mass media suggests the media may do more than simply reflect the public's interests; they also may shape the public opinion. Different media may play different roles (e.g., some defining or shaping and others reflecting) in relation to their audiences. And, media may play different roles relative to public opinion at different times, i.e., on some occasions shaping and on others reflecting.

This study examines the treatment of a social problem in print media directed at different audiences: articles in popular periodicals and social science periodicals.

Many issues have been defined as social problems for a long period of time or periodically have been defined as social problems (prostitution, crime, immigration, drug usage). Exploration of media treatment of a social problem required selection of an issue covered in both popular periodicals and social science periodicals.

Preference was given to a problem that had not been publically defined as a social problem in the past, so that residual effects of prior treatment would not be a concern.

Suicide has received attention as a social problem at various times, as has adolescence. Adolescent suicide emerged as an issue some defined as a social problem in the 1950s. Governmental attention was directed to the topic in the late 1950s, for example.

Exploration of variation in media treatment of an issue (the role of the media in defining a social problem) requires a long enough time period over which change could be observed. A thirty year time period was selected as representing an adequate span of time and a period which would cover all contemporary representations of adolescent suicide. Such a lengthy time period must be broken down into smaller units in order to observe variations. Five year periods when popular magazines and social science periodicals devoted the most and least coverage to adolescent suicide (measured by number and length of articles) are identified and explanations for variations in coverage explored.

In recent decades experts have played more visible roles throughout our society and their involvement in portraying some issues as social problems is documented. Of particular interest have been the efforts of experts in medical and mental health fields to define issues as problems of public concern which require their treatment. This study explores what may have been efforts to "medicalize" adolescent suicide by looking at the involvement of such experts in

writing articles and the usage of such experts as sources of credible information about the "causes" of and the treatments for adolescent suicide.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature on social problems, mass media, suicide and adolescence is relevant to this project. This chapter reviews and organizes previous research on social problems. The role of media in shaping and reflecting public definitions is discussed. Perspectives on suicide and adolescence are reviewed in Chapter III.

Evolution of Social Problems

Examination of topics treated as social problems by sociologists over the course of the twentieth century in American society reveals a diverse set of issues: some of which appear, disappear, and reappear albeit with new designations (unadjusted girls, prostitutes, runaways) and some of which are recognized for long periods of time (poverty, racism) and others for very brief periods (traffic). Books used to instruct students about social problems indicate shifts in issues in recent decades. For example in the 1960s, Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet (1961) focused on such social issues as prostitution, traffic, transportation, disasters and suicide. In the 1970s, Jonathan Turner (1977) did not treat traffic, transportation, disasters or suicide as problems, but did address attention to ecology, sexual discrimination and poverty. By the 1980s suicide again was recognized

as a social problem and "new" issues, terrorism and sexual deviance, were identified (Henslin and Light, 1983).

Not only did the problems given attention shift over these decades but also the conceptualizations of problems changed, e.g., in the 1980s suicide became an example of a social problem that emerges from illness. Shifts in focus and conceptualization probably reflect both changes in the society (greater concern about sexual abuse) and differences among sociologists (theoretical perspectives).

American sociologists have not developed full-blown theories to explain the emergence of social problems. The emphasis of theory fragments or frameworks used to describe the emergence of social problems have changed over time. In the early twentieth century various social scientists were social reformers who were concerned with eliminating undesirable social conditions perceived to produce social problems. Thus focus was on social disorganization and social pathology produced in urban industrial areas (Twitchell, 1948; Valien, 1948; Freedman, 1948). By the mid-twentieth century focus began to shift toward explaining why particular issues were recognized as social problems. Social scientists, such as Edwin M. Lemert, began discussing the "interplay of public opinion" (1951:223) in the conceptualization of social problems. Whether emphasis was on how issues are defined as social problems or how social conditions or structures produce social problems depended on what general theoretical orientation the sociologists used (e.g., symbolic interactionism or structural functionalism).

By the 1960s one basic social problems textbook (Merton and Nisbet, 1961:18) identified four social processes that led to the development of "kinds of behavior that is regarded as social problems:" conflict between opposing institutions; social mobility; individual autonomy and anomie. Over the next twenty years social problems researchers turned increasingly to examining how conditions come to be defined as social problems. Some activities, such as prostitution, have existed throughout written history, but prostitution was viewed as a social problem only at certain times and in certain cultures. Recently Helena Lopata (1984) demonstrated the way issues surface, submerge, and resurface, often with different social definitions about the character of the problem by looking at how a society's new members (whether children or immigrants) are viewed as problematic at different times.

Over the twentieth century the question sociologists addressed shifted from what social conditions produce problematic behavior to why is an issue or behavior defined as a social problem. Several problems which social scientists have analyzed thoroughly are used to present contemporary ideas about social problems, although there is no one set of conditions or stages common to all social problems. Contemporary social problems research emphasizes the political struggles which result in issues being labeled social problems; however, such political struggles may not be appropriate focus for examination of some types of social problems.

Who Defines the Problem? Why?

The first step in the political process of definition may occur when undesirable or undesired conditions are singled out by some individuals or groups. The conditions may be either offensive to the group's values or harmful to the group's interest. In any case, they attempt to communicate the undesirable nature of the condition to others. The four types of individuals or groups referred to most often in social problems' research are moral entrepreneurs, social movements, interest groups and experts.

Moral Entrepreneurs

In the early 1960s Howard S. Becker identified the moral entrepreneur as a crusader for what is "right." The definition of what is "right" is the one held by the crusader. Moral entrepreneurs believe that people need to be informed about social "wrongs" so that action can be taken to eliminate them. (Their activities may lead to the emergence of social movements, which promote specific solutions to social problems.)

The role of moral entrepreneurs in defining various social problems is reviewed by focusing on their role in drawing attention to delinquency and treatment of the mentally ill.

During the late nineteenth century various middle class women acted as moral entrepreneurs in making the public aware of the dangers confronting lower class children in urban areas (Platt, 1969). Modern cities were considered sinful, immoral environments for easily

molded youth. The city not only robbed the child of innocence but also encouraged the child toward delinquency.

Mental illness at different times has been categorized as demon possession, sinfulness, enchantment and illness. Professional interest in and definitions of mental illness existed before 1900 but public acceptance of the idea that treatment of the mentally ill was possible was slower in developing (Conrad and Schneider, 1980). In 1908 Clifford Beers, a young Yale graduate who had been a mental patient published a book expressing concern about the inhumane treatment of the mentally ill. Beers mounted a campaign to inform the public of the contemporary nature of mental institutions (asylums) and care for the insane. With the assistance of various members of the medical psychiatric profession, Beers organized a committee that was the forerunner of the National Association of Mental Health.

The goals of the committee included improving the standard of care and treatment in mental hospitals, encouraging prevention of mental illness, promoting the notion that insanity was curable, supporting research, and to the extent desirable, enlisting government help" (Conrad and Schneider, 1980:56).

The definitions of delinquency and mental illness by the moral entrepreneurs were so successful that both issues continue to be viewed as social problems. In some cases it is difficult to separate moral entrepreneurs from the social movements they initiate (e.g., Mothers Against Drunk Drivers).

Social Movements

When people join together to draw attention to something they believe should be changed, they constitute a social movement. A general social movement, such as the contemporary women's movement, initially may have focused on one set of issues and problems, but over time identified additional issues as problems. The women's movement is concerned generally with the position of women in society, so that although it initially focused more on employment, control over reproduction and legal inequities it could later direct attention to another issue, wife battering (McCrea, 1983).

Social movements have to focus on issues that attract public attention and support to survive and succeed. Some battles, such as the half century long struggle for passage of an equal rights amendment, do not arouse the sense of "wrong" that phenomena such as rape and wife battering do. Issues that violate cultural values are more easily defined as problems that need to be changed. Some groups, interest groups, try to convince the public and governmental agencies that issues of particular concern to them are of more general concern.

Interest Groups

Issues may become defined as social problems through the efforts of some group which particularly will gain or lose depending on how the public perceives them. Richard A. Ball and J. Robert Lilly (1982) describe how the dairy industry lobbied against margarine development and the acceptance of margarine.

A possible threat from margarine in the market place led to the organization of strong opposition from the dairy industry. At least part of the controversy about margarine resulted from social forces other than vested interests of butter producers. Margarine epitomized a new technological order, "discovered" in a laboratory, produced in manufacturing plants; it was a synthetic imposter. While interest groups use public attitudes and ideas or other social forces to further their own goals, "experts" are expected to have humanitarian motives for their actions.

Experts

Experts, people who perceive they have knowledge and/or skills to offer in remedying a problem, if only the public recognizes the need to address the problem, may play an important role in defining a social problem.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, a small group of scientists was interested in the relationship between diet and health (Aronson, 1982). They were convinced their knowledge was important to society. Two questions faced these new nutrition scientists: how could an unconcerned public be educated to the need for nutrition knowledge and where could funds be found to conduct research on diet and health issues?

One means of acquainting the public with new issues is to link those issues to existing concerns. The most visible social concerns of that time were tied to industrialization and labor problems.

Thus nutritionalists focused on methods of increasing productivity through better nutrition for workers. Articles in the media, newspapers and magazines suggested "that the problems of poverty and labor unrest could be solved by teaching the masses to shop and to cook economically" (Aronson, 1982:479).

Discussion of who defines a problem leads naturally to consideration of why. Anthony M. Platt (1969) suggests that the middle class women involved in saving the children were better educated than women were in the past. Rapid social changes that accompanied industrialization and urbanization offered opportunities for a larger social role than women had in the past. Concern for children was an acceptable focus of attention for them for it was a "natural" concern given the "nurturing" nature of women.

Experts such as nutritionists can create recognition and generate funds for their activities. Success in defining nutrition as a social problem legitimated federal funding for research on nutrition (Aronson, 1982). Many times experts play a role after some other group has drawn public attention to a problem. In some cases a "new" group of experts is created as the media and government officials seek information. Donileen R. Loseke and Spencer E. Cahill (1984) suggest demand develops for "experts" in prevention or treatment of a problem so there may be a spiral--attention leads to demand for experts, experts draw more attention to the problem and promote the need for more experts.

How the Problem Is "Solved"

People who are trying to establish that an issue is a social problem want to have the support of other people, so that action can be taken to "solve" the problem. The media are used to "educate" the public about the problem and hopefully to gain its support in fighting the problem. Lopata (1984) argues that various forms of mass communication and education have been key influences in defining issues as social problems in the United States. Official response may occur when only a small portion of the public agrees about the undesirable nature of the issue. The amount of power possessed by the defining group is as much a factor in eliciting response as the number of people who share the definition of the problem.

Official responses may take the form of investigations, formation of committees or establishment of agencies to deal with the problem. In the case of margarine, first state laws were passed and then federal legislation (Ball and Lilly, 1982). Regardless of its form, an official response serves to establish the issue as a recognized social concern. The officially adopted position also legitimizes the role of the group or groups who brought the issue to public attention.

Whether or not experts play an active role in the initial definition and recognition of a social problem, in our technological society experts increasingly play an active role in proposing solutions to problems. Loseke and Cahill (1984) point out that by taking

the perspective of the battered women, the experts are not simply educating the public about the problem, but also defining it in ways which shape treatment. The abused woman is portrayed as the victim not only of her mate, but also of social and psychological constraints that render her helpless. In her helplessness, the victim becomes deviant, unwilling to leave a situation that presumably no rational adult would tolerate. The contention that battered women are unable to either understand or control their own lives is accompanied by the claims of the experts that they have the knowledge to render special assistance to these victims. In this manner, a new group of clientele for experts' services is created (Loseke and Cahill, 1984).

In the late nineteenth century, the child savers in the process of defining the delinquency problem and providing solutions, generated many positions in reformatories, children's homes, recreation centers, kindergartens and other children's facilities (Platt, 1969). Defining new problems and solutions to problems is one means of creating new forms of expertise.

Models of Social Problems

Herbert H. Haines (1979) identified two types of social problems: open and closed. An "open" problem is characterized by groups with opposing views who are engaged in a process of conflict and negotiation over an issue. Each group is trying to bend social definitions of the issue to fit its values and interest so there is debate about the "real" nature of the problem.

Open

A current example of an "open" social problem is the issue of abortion, according to Haines. Official response of pro-choice groups led to legalization of abortion. Opponents of abortion see availability of the procedure as problematic and are seeking to redefine the issue in those terms. Another "open" problem, the Santa Barbara oil spill involved conflict between an interest group (oil interests) and a social movement (environmentalists) (Molotch, 1970).

Closed

"Closed" social problems are those issues about which there seems to be agreement as to their undesirability. This consensus reflects culturally instilled biases about the immorality of some conditions, such as incest or child abuse.

The two most important aspects of a "closed" social problem are the acceptance of limitations on those who are qualified to treat or handle the problem, and wide acceptance by the general public of the definition and explanations adhered to by those accepted as "experts." In cases where the social problem can be considered totally "closed" the treatment is viewed as a "professional issue which is linked to a body of technical knowledge" (Haines, 1979:125).

Medicalized

Certain conditions having the characteristics of a social problem at some point in the process of definition become "medicalized."

Medicalization, which is conceptualization of a condition as an illness, may occur before or after official response. Haines (1979) discussed the process of medicalization as also a process of depoliticization. Defining a condition as an illness leads to the acceptance of a cause and cure that exist apart from the social structure. The issue becomes redefined "as some sort of psychological or somatic sickness to be treated therapeutically" (Haines, 1979:122). Medicalization also functions to assign the responsibility for treatment and control of the condition to professionals or some group of socially labeled "experts," and to exclude laypeople from any continuing debate about the issue.

An example of a condition which was medicalized was the discontent and malaise of women past the childbearing years. Conducive social conditions may aid in the development of medical definitions of problematic issues. In the 1960s women were judged by their youth, attractiveness and ability to reproduce. Articles in scientific periodicals and books labeled menopause as an "age-related" disease that affected not only the physical and emotional well-being of the female victim but also "her husband, her family and her entire relationship to the outside world" (McCrea, 1983:114). At the same time physicians were defining the disease, they were promoting the cure. Frances B. McCrea (1983) proposes that grants from the pharmaceutical industry were funding many of the physicians defining the illness making it not surprising that synthetic estrogen, a hormone they already had developed, should be touted as a cure. The public was

quick to accept a "disease" concept of female aging and the middle-aged female was encouraged into accepting the medical label.

Earlier Beers efforts in the first part of the twentieth century to reform mental institutions were discussed. In the late 1940s some popular periodicals again focused on the deplorable conditions in state facilities for the mentally ill. Most patient care was custodial, very little medical treatment was available (Conrad and Schneider, 1980).

The introduction of chemotherapy for treating mental illness in the 1950s led to drastic changes in mental health care. The biggest change was "development of a new social policy 'community mental health'" (Conrad and Schneider, 1980:62).

Despite the public willingness to accept psychiatric definitions of the problem of mental illness, there have been critics of medicalization. Thomas Szasz (1983) considers mental illness a "myth" created by the psychiatric community as a means of controlling those who deviate from social norms and a way of assuring clientele for their services. "Medicalizing" madness did not eliminate all other perspectives for on occasion mental illness is referred to by the media as a "social problem," but it is not an issue that is a major public concern.

Haines (1979) suggests that social problems may appropriately be considered as somewhere on a continuum ranging from "open" to "closed." In most cases, medicalized issues constitute "closed" social problems. Alcoholism, once viewed as a manifestation of personal weakness, sinfulness, or immorality, now widely is accepted as a disease whose treatment requires the expertise of a medical professional. Drug abuse also has been medicalized in that the

individual is viewed as a victim of addiction and helpless to overcome the problem without medical assistance. The medicalization of neither of these two behaviors is complete because both public alcohol intoxication and uncontrolled use of certain drugs are illegal and place the user under the control of law enforcement agents instead of medical professionals.

The Role of Mass Media

Throughout this discussion of the evolution and elaboration of social problems references have been made to public presentation of issues through the mass media. How the media affect public opinion, whether they "reflect" or "shape" public interest, has been subject to ongoing debate. According to the "reflective" view the media mirror topics of interest to the audience (DeFleur and Rokeach, 1975). Holsti refers to this view as the oft stated one "that producers of communication are only giving audiences 'what they want'" (1969:65). Another view is that communication serves to "shape" the interest of the audience. Bernard Berelson ties the two views together when he argues "the American public today may be said to 'demand' or 'call forth' certain types of content and to be affected by that content once it is produced" (1971:28).

Research on mass media has focused on three areas: sources of information, the role of experts, and control over content. Where does the media obtain information that is presented to the audience? Herbert H. Gans (1980) found that most information for media

presentations came from a limited pool of sources. There were two basic types of "sources:" those who seek out journalists in order to provide information and those whom journalists pursue in search of information. Willing and eager sources are often organizations or agencies that advance their own interest by providing information to the media. This exchange of information has favorable consequences for both the media and the source that Gaye Tuchman (1978) describes as mutual fulfillment of separate needs.

Tuchman (1978) views sources as primary information providers but argues "the real" influence over what is presented to audiences is wielded by journalists and other newswriters. Information is molded and shaped to produce a social reality that varies substantially from actual social occurrences. To Tuchman, newswriters create a reality that is presented to the public. On the other hand, David Halberstam (1979) focuses on the role of media experts in shaping content. The upper echelons of modern news organizations have the final say in what is presented to the public. For Halberstam the primary power to recognize or ignore issues rests with media executives.

Clearly there are several views of who or what shapes media presentations. Control over media may rest with the public (DeFleur and Rokeach, 1975; Berelson, 1971), with interest groups (Gans, 1980), with newswriters (Gans, 1980; Tuchman, 1978) or with editors (Halberstam, 1979). Some media researchers suggest private agreements may serve as a force behind media presentations. Gans (1980) points out that issues are often addressed or ignored based on agreements

between newsgatherers and sources. Story suitability is decided in terms of agreement with cultural norms and values or as the result of "tradeoffs" between media personnel and sources. Tuchman suggests that media depictions of women not only mirror the current status of women in American society, but also support the traditional social values of newsgatherers, media policy makers and portions of the public. In an unspoken and possibly unconscious agreement the broader public is offered information that maintains the status quo.

Focus of Current Study

The literature on social problems and mass media research provides a focus for this study of how and when a social problem receives attention in lay and professional print media. How much attention is directed to the issue and whether it is in the popular or professional literature will be explored. A contributing factor to the amount of attention directed to an issue appears to be the action of "experts," special interest groups and social movements. The identification of these groups and their apparent role in defining the issue of adolescent suicide as a social problem is examined.

Research on the mass media points out the importance of the audience in media presentations. This study will identify intended audiences and explore any changes in targets during the study period.

Elaboration of Social Problems

Once public attention is directed toward a problem, related problems may emerge because of investigations by journalists and academic researchers. Identification of wife battering apparently led to recognition of husband abuse and to the designation of spouse abuse as the problem. Reports then began to surface on abuse of the elderly. Suicide was generally viewed as a problem among adults. Adolescent suicide emerged as a related problem in recent decades and as an "epidemic" problem in some communities in the 1980s. Adolescent suicide actually involves the merging of two "problems" for adolescence has been designated a problematic age category for some time. The next chapter reviews the relevant literature on suicide and adolescence.

CHAPTER III

PERSPECTIVE ON SUICIDE AND ADOLESCENCE

Suicide

Suicide occurs in all societies and American society is no exception. The cultural value placed on "being alive" has led to an assumption that individuals who choose to die and implement that choice through self-destruction must be mentally ill (Maris, 1981). Individual pathology often is considered the cause (Haim, 1974). As a consequence, there are numerous psychological explanations of suicidal behavior.

The 1950s began an era of social interest in increasing the quantity and quality of life. Accidental deaths increased with the greater use of the automobile and larger numbers of younger drivers. Refinements in mortality reporting methods indicated that another cause of death was statistically significant, suicide. In fact, some accidents were apparently suicides in "disguise" which meant that suicide rates were even greater than reported (Bollen and Phillips, 1982; Bollen, 1983).

In 1957 the first suicide prevention center was established in Los Angeles, California. A project of the U.S. Public Health Service, this center grew out of a growing concern for the emotional and mental well-being of all people at a national level. Interest in mental health increased throughout the 1960s. Federal support

encouraged communities to establish local mental health centers. In 1966 the National Institute of Mental Health created a center specifically to study means of suicide prevention.

The availability of government funding for research and the concern with suicide prevention led to an increase in studies of suicidal behavior. Population statistics indicated suicide increased with age (Maris, 1981; Seiden, 1969). Research also indicated that suicide had become the fourth leading cause of death among adolescents (Seiden, 1969; Bakwin, 1966).

Adolescence

Adolescence is a common designation for the age when one is no longer a child but still not quite an adult. Adolescence as an age category is a social invention. The origins of a separate category between childhood and adulthood can be traced back to nineteenth century Europe.

Strict discipline in secondary schools during the early twentieth century was aimed at protecting the student from the evils of idleness and corruption. "We should transplant the human saplings. . . as early as eight, but not before, to the schoolhouse. . . he must be subjected to special disciplines. . . (Hall, 1904:xii). As adolescence was recognized as a separate age category, it was labeled as a "problem" age. Maturity and independence were negative traits and discouraged in "model adolescents" (Hall, 1904). Yet adolescence was expected to prepare the child for the responsibilities of adulthood.

Psychological literature of the early 1900s began focusing on the emotional turmoil, vulnerability, and instability of adolescence, defining the period as "problematic." Public attention was directed to the importance of social, educational, and spiritual well-being in future adult development. Areas of life once left to the control of the family became subjects of public concern. By 1914 laws were being enacted to provide special courts, prison systems, and welfare agencies to deal with adolescents. Mandatory education placed even more control of youth outside the family (Gillis, 1974).

Thinking about adolescents has changed since the early 1900s. The adolescent period continues to be considered "problematic" although for different reasons.

Young men did not reach full physical growth until they were about 23 in 1900 and might remain students until they were 30. In the 1980s males physically mature at 17, can vote or marry at 18, and have usually completed their education by the time they reach 21 (Gillis, 1974; Hall, 1904). Young, white, middle and upper class women of the 1900s were "protected" by their fathers until marriage, then they were "protected" by their husbands. Today adolescent females enjoy many of the same freedoms of the adolescent male. Since the 1950s adolescents have enjoyed increased mobility through greater access to automobiles. Greater mobility has led to decreased adult supervision. The results have been both more freedom for male and female adolescents but increased demands to "behave as adults."

Adolescents now have freedoms and privileges once associated with young adulthood, but adulthood can only be reached when certain social requirements are met, such as separation from parents and establishment of membership in the everyday working world.

According to Hans Sebald, "Adolescence in the sociological sense refers to the experience of passing through a phase that lies between childhood and adulthood" (1984:3). Such definitions are difficult to apply. In this study, adolescence will be defined by media reference to adolescents, youths, teens or students.

Some contemporary ideas about adolescent suicide are similar to ones presented thirty years ago. In 1984 U.S. News and World Report indicates that strengthening family ties will prevent suicide. Adolescents are encouraged to ask for help from parents or other adults. Teen Magazine, in October 1983, listed warning signs of potential suicides among friends and prevention measures such as asking questions, indicating your concern, and contacting parents or other adults. Adolescents are depicted as helpless against socially imposed stresses of changing values and attitudes.

Suicide rates are highly correlated with age. Adolescents have a lower suicide rate than older age groups and total suicide rates for all ages were lower in the 1950s than at anytime this century. Why was there a sudden social interest in adolescent suicidal behavior? One possibility was its relative position as a cause of death. Many "childhood" diseases had been eliminated by scientific advances in preventive medicine and health care. With the decline

of deaths from disease, suicide advanced in "rank." Besides, adolescent suicide deaths were unnecessary and perhaps preventable by adults. Popular periodicals such as Newsweek, Time, and P.T.A. Magazine "blamed" parents for youngsters who attempted or committed suicide.

In 1958 an important change occurred in the reporting of mortality rates. Self-inflicted injuries and accidents resulting in death were classified as suicide even when suicide notes or other proof of intent was missing. The result of these changes was a "dramatic" rise in the suicide rate in all age groups. Suicide was labeled a "problem" particularly among youth. Social interest was translated into increased scientific inquiry (Seiden, 1969).

Suicide is difficult to study. The unique character of suicide precludes certain types of research methods. Suicide places the subject beyond the reach of the scientists who would investigate the act. The suicide is not available for questioning. The minimal information available after the suicide often consists only of second-hand data, death certificates or records retained by psychologists and other therapists of individual cases. Difficulties in data collection have resulted in extensive use of unsuccessful suicide attempters as subjects. There is disagreement among scientists about the "sameness" of the population of attempters and the population of suicides. There may be an unrecognized difference in those individuals who succeed at suicide and those who fail or are prevented. Maris (1981) points out that only one in ten suicide attempters later die by suicide.

Maris' conclusion is based on records commonly considered incomplete. Concealment of attempted and completed suicides, particularly among children and adolescents is thought to be widespread (Seiden, 1969).

In some cases, individuals who attempt suicide and fail are referred for psychological and psychiatric counseling. Since counseling produces data for case studies, many researchers have chosen to study those who attempt or threaten suicide. The most common failing of these studies is lack of a comparison group. Without such comparisons, factors that are unique to death by suicide are speculative (Maris, 1981).

Causes of Suicide

A number of psychological and social characteristics at different times have been considered factors in suicidal behavior among adolescents. Psychological characteristics may be mental disorders such as neurosis or psychosis. Displacement of aggression, manipulation, and revenge are other psychological characteristics identified in studies of adolescent suicides (Toolan, 1968; Wolfgang, 1968; Kreider and Motto, 1974). Social determinants, such as loss of intact family, mobility, socioeconomic status, religion and gender play a role in suicidal behaviors.

Psychological Characteristics

Mental Illness

Despite the long acceptance of suicide as an indication of mental illness the actual relationship between the two is unclear. Harry Baldwin (1966) considers mental illness a minor cause of suicide among youth. Other scholars consider mental disorders, i.e., neurosis, such as depression and schizophrenic reactions to be the primary cause of at least one third of all adolescent suicides (Husain and Vandiver, 1984; Knight, 1968; Seiden, 1969). Syed Arshad Husain and Trish Vandiver (1984) point out that almost sixteen percent of adolescent suicide attempters are diagnosed as psychotic. Personality disorders such as alcohol or drug abuse appear to be more common than neuroses among suicide attempters but less common for completed suicides (Maris, 1981). James A. Knight (1968) concluded that stress imposed by the academic environment served to increase the sense of helplessness thereby intensifying students' depression. Such depression might lead to suicide.

Case studies often treat suicidal behavior as a direct result of depression, ignoring or discounting the role of social conditions. Seiden (1969), in a report of the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children, defined depression as feelings of personal worthlessness, guilt, or pessimism. Such characteristics, often descriptive of adult suicides, were usually absent among youthful suicides. Seiden (1969) concluded that if depression was a cause of adolescent

suicides, its manifestation was different than it was for adults.

Knight (1968) reached the same conclusion and proposed that depression was often exhibited by adolescents as fatigue, boredom, poor work habits or study problems.

Aggression

Suicidal behavior of adolescents appears to be correlated with other psychological states, such as displacement of aggression. James M. Toolan (1968) studied admissions of adolescent suicide attempters to New York City's Bellevue Hospital and identified five causes of suicidal behavior. The most significant cause was anger or hostility toward another person. Anger instead of being directed outward was internalized and was translated into aggression against the self. Psychoanalysts think that individuals who attempt suicide feel hate for someone which becomes redirected. Suicide becomes self-inflicted punishment for aggressive or violent wishes toward another usually loved person. Marvin E. Wolfgang (1968) considered internalized aggression a major factor in victim precipitated homicide, which he identified as suicide undertaken through an external agent.

Among adolescents, anger or hate internalized as aggression actually may be directed toward a parent or parent substitute. Motives of revenge sometimes are translated into suicide attempts (Seiden, 1969; Toolan, 1968; Kreider and Motto, 1974). Our culture disapproves of expressions of aggression, particularly toward authority figures. Children are socialized to expect negative reactions if

they engage in aggressive actions. With no outlet for feelings of anger and hate, self-destruction becomes a means of "making them sorry" or "making them pay."

Social Characteristics

Parent-Child Relationships

Adolescents may try to manipulate significant others through suicide attempts (Toolan, 1968; Kreider and Motto, 1974; Seiden, 1969). Such attempts presumably result in death only through miscalculation. Some professionals perceive such manipulation to be a "cry for help" which is ultimately the fault of the individual who has "failed" in the parent role. Douglas G. Kreider and Jerome A. Motto (1974) considered the suicide attempts and threats engaged in by their sample to be a result of poor parenting. The parent-child relationship had become reversed with the adult seeking emotional support and reassurance from the child. This role reversal situation cast the child in the parent role and occurred most often in single parent, mother headed households. Suicidal gestures and threats were used by both adults and adolescents in such role reversal situations to manipulate each other (Kreider and Motto, 1974).

Loss of Family

The structure of the family unit influences the behavior of all members. Certain factors in family relationships are considered potential indicators of suicidal behavior among adolescent members.

The most frequently cited variable in adolescent suicide studies is loss of an intact family through death, separation, or divorce (Knight, 1968, Toolan, 1968; Haim, 1974; McArnarny, 1979; Cosand et al., 1982). Knight (1968) considers loss of a father particularly salient in influencing male students toward suicide while Toolan (1968) found that a majority of the female adolescent suicides in his study were fatherless. Adolescent suicides with normal family situations are in the minority (Haim, 1974).

Loss of family may be perceived rather than actual. Friedrich V. Wenz (1979) argued that suicidal behavior could result from parent-child conflicts when the child interprets the conflict as loss of parental love and approval. Family estrangements, quarreling between parents and child, conflicts with step-parents, as well as real or imagined rejection by parents may all lead to perceived loss of a life sustaining relationship for the adolescent (Haim, 1974; Yusin, 1973).

Destructive parent-child relationships were reported for some adolescent suicides. Backgrounds of these adolescents are characterized by parents who are cruel and abusive, mentally ill, alcoholic, or uncaring. Adolescents may have been abandoned by parents (Seiden and Freitas, 1980). Billie F. Corder et al., (1974) found that suicidal adolescents in their sample were more likely to have a parent who committed suicide than the control group of non-suicidal adolescents. Another type of destructive parent-child relationship was studied by Kreider and Motto (1974). Parent-child role reversal may occur in one-parent families. The dependency the parent exhibits

towards the child may induce feelings of inadequacy, failure, or anxiety. Suicide threats and attempts may be the result of the adolescent's inability to perform the role expected of him or her (Kreider and Motto, 1974).

Mobility

Disruptive, chaotic lifestyles are common among suicidal adolescents. Modern family mobility leads to frequent moves with changes in schools, neighborhoods, friends, churches and other support networks. Adolescents may interpret these moves as disintegration of their world. "Rising suicide rates among adolescents . . . correlate with and reflect changing family patterns" (Cosand et al., 1982:928). Family mobility is probably not the cause of suicide but the resulting disruption may emphasize existing problems which limit the adolescent's ability to adapt to and cope with externally produced stresses. When stresses become overpowering, some adolescents may see suicide as a problem solving option.

Social Isolation

Emile Durkheim (1951) was the first to identify isolation as a factor in suicidal behavior. The greatest protection against isolation which often preceded suicide was what Durkheim called a strongly integrated society. In support of Durkheim's work, Jack P. Gibbs (1982) found that suicide rates decreased when social relationships in a population were stable and durable, protecting against isolation. John P. Miller (1975) identified social isolation among

adolescents as the result of any environmental factor from a disorganized home to frequent residential mobility. Adolescents who have attempted suicide often indicate estrangement from other members of the social world. Corder et al., (1974) found that a majority of youths in their sample could not remember ever feeling "warmth or closeness" towards any adult. Maris found that adolescents who were suicidal had been more socially isolated than a non-suicidal adolescent control group and were "less optimistic about any future change in their isolation" (1981:111).

Contact with peers is particularly important in social integration of adolescents. The less involvement with peers, the greater the feelings of powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation (Wenz, 1979). Andre Haim (1974) suggested that young suicides may have appeared to belong to groups, but that appearance was usually deceptive. When suicidal adolescents were members of a group, the group was small and tended to be isolated from the larger society.

Few studies have explored the relationship between isolation and suicide among adolescents. Social isolation may be a symptom or a cause of suicide among adolescents. The adolescent may withdraw into voluntary isolation because of a preoccupation with suicide or existing isolation may lead the adolescent to attempt suicide.

Gender Differences

"Woman kills herself less, and she kills others less" (Durkheim, 1951:341). Durkheim was the first sociologist to point out gender

differences in those who commit suicide. All studies that refer to gender differences agree that females attempt suicide more often than males but suicide deaths occur more often among males than females. Sex is usually used as a control variable in studies of suicide. There has been little research addressing the issue of why that difference exists.

Durkheim (1951) noted that male suicides increased and female suicides decreased in societies where divorce was common, that marriage must affect males and females differently. Ronald W. Maris' (1981) study substantiated Durkheim's by finding that "male suicides were more highly associated with divorce than were female suicides" (1981: 272). In a recent study of suicide among adolescents, (Cosand et al., 1982) a greater proportion of female suicides in the 20-24 year age group were married than the general population.

Using sex as a control variable, Maris (1981) found that suicides by males and females peaked at specific but different ages. For males the age period from 55 to 59 was a time of increased suicide rates while for females, the suicide peak occurred between the ages of 45 and 49. Maris (1981) suggests these peaks coincide with major transitions in social roles and life stages. Males' social roles and lifestyles center around work. Men usually have achieved occupational satisfaction before reaching mid-life. The ages of 55 to 59 for those men who have not achieved satisfactory occupational roles are periods of negative self-image and downward social mobility. Anticipation of financial loss through approaching retirement often adds to the

stress of male mid-life stage. Maris concluded that:

The greatest absolute prevalence of suicide for white males is between the ages of fifty-five and fifty-nine. Suicide and non-fatal suicide attempters are more likely than natural deaths to fail to master development tasks of appropriate life stages and thus are more likely to experience failed or abortive transitions and resultant developmental stagnation" (1981:297).

Females experience major life transitions between the ages of 45 and 49, the same ages at which female suicides are most prevalent. Role loss often occurs for women at these ages. Children growing up and leaving home mean loss of the mother role for many women. The 45 to 49 year old female with or without children is subject to social "devaluing."

Husain and Vandiver (1984) analyzed case studies to identify gender based characteristics among adolescent suicides and suicide attempters. Males ranked higher than females on traits such as restlessness, anxiousness, impulsiveness, instability, and immaturity. Females ranked higher on hysterical behavior and passiveness. All available information indicates that adolescent females attempt suicide more frequently than at any other age or gender group (Husain and Vandiver, 1984).

Findings of the Yale Depression Research Unit discussed in the April 1983 issue of Mademoiselle deal with gender differences of potential suicide attempters. Female suicidal adolescents were depicted as more lonely, helpless, and emotionally dependent on

others while male suicidal adolescents were considered more critical and more demanding of themselves.

Speculation on male aggressive behavior is often presented as an explanation for the males' greater likelihood of killing themselves. Socialization of males and females results in basic behavior differences. Males, socialized to be more aggressive than females, are more likely to engage in violent actions. When males attempt suicide, they chose more violent methods and therefore succeed more often. Females have been taught to feel an aversion toward violence. Less violent methods of suicide take longer to kill. Females often choose less violent methods which allows more time either to change their minds and seek help or for outside intervention (McAnarney, 1979; Seiden and Freitas, 1980; Palmer, 1980).

Implications for This Study

Suicide research presents alternative perspectives on the causes of suicidal behavior. This study explores the ideas presented in popular print media about causes at various times. Are these ideas consistent throughout the study period or have they changed over time?

The social problems literature suggests some individuals or groups promote definitions of events or issues as social problems. This study explores the role of experts in media presentations.

The current study examines how gender differences are presented in popular print media and explores the implications of those presentations.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research questions require a method that can examine print media over an extended period of time. Content analysis is the appropriate research method for investigation of changes over time in treatment of a social "problem" in popular and social scientific periodicals. It is both a nonreactive method of observation (Budd, et al., 1967) and a method of data analysis. Content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1971: 18).

Time Periods

Various sources (e.g., Seiden, 1969; Haim, 1974; Cosand et al., 1982) indicate interest in youthful suicide has increased since the early 1950s. Official government interest was apparent in 1957 when the U.S. Public Health Service established the first suicide prevention center.

This study focuses on changes in the nature and amount of attention directed toward adolescent suicide in print media. This necessitates a time frame that encompasses the first official response to the "problem." Materials published in the early 1950s should indicate if and how adolescent suicide was presented before it became the subject of official attention. The most recent year that all

information needed was available was 1982. By designating 1953 as the beginning of the time frame a thirty year period was established. Thirty years is a manageable period of time which is long enough to observe temporal changes in communication content.

Sampling

Newspapers, books and magazines are print media which communicate about various topics, including suicide. Magazines and journals have different audiences: magazines address a diverse audience and journals disseminate scientific theory and research. Unlike newspapers, they do not appear too frequently and share a form of division into articles. Book publication is a slower process so books cannot as quickly reflect shifts in public opinion as the other print media.

A sample of popular and general interest magazines were considered by the researcher to be preferable to other print media. The sheer number and limited circulation and duration of some periodicals make it difficult to identify all magazines for inclusion in a sampling frame. Use of the population of periodicals indexed in The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature simplifies magazine selection. This index categorizes articles from periodicals of general interest published in the United States. Publications, such as Newsweek, The Saturday Evening Post, and Reader's Digest, appeal to wide audiences. Some of the magazines, such as Aging, Parents, Teen, U.S. Catholic and Working Woman are directed to substantial

sub-populations. The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature includes all "popular" or general interest magazines of relevance to this study.

The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature is published biennially. Articles in the guide are indexed by subject. Suicide is a subject heading in each guide throughout the study period. Categorization under this heading was the criterion for possible inclusion in this study. There was no separate heading for articles focused on adolescent suicide, so each article indexed under suicide was examined by the researcher. All articles that pertained in whole or part to adolescent, student, youthful or childhood suicide were identified. Fiction was omitted to obtain consistent information from both media, for social science journals do not publish fiction.

Articles indexed in The Sociological Abstracts were chosen as the population for social science journals because this is a sociological study. Social science journals disseminate information to social scientists. Journals published by sociological associations, groups, and faculties, as well as journals serving related disciplines such as anthropology, economics, education, medicine, community development, philosophy, statistics, and political science are indexed in The Sociological Abstracts.

Articles are indexed by subject topic (e.g., suicide). Each article indexed is then listed under sub-headings according to the primary focus (e.g., an article identified under the subject heading of suicide might be listed as "self attitudes toward"). The abstract for every article listed under the heading of suicide from 1953 through

1982 was examined. Unless the abstract clearly indicated the article as not related to adolescent suicide, the article was examined by the researcher. Every article pertaining to adolescent, student, youthful or childhood suicide or attempted suicide was included in the analysis of social science articles.

Although The Sociological Abstracts are published every year, an article may be indexed some time after the publication date. To assure the inclusion of all social science articles published within the time frame The Sociological Abstracts up to the current issue were examined. All appropriate articles with publication dates in the study period are included in the population.

Analysis of articles indexed in The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature and The Sociological Abstracts was carried out at the Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, and the University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, and further pursued through interlibrary loan. Two articles listed under the heading of suicide could not be obtained for analysis (one in Crawdaddy, July 1978, and one in Teen Magazine, May 1979).

Categories

Categories serve to "differentiate and describe the content being investigated" (Budd, et al, 1967:39). The portion of each article that dealt with adolescent suicide was the unit of analysis. To classify information in the article that pertained to research questions categories were established. Certain information typically

is recorded when content analysis is conducted, such as the number of units, the length of the unit of analysis and the type of unit (e.g., feature, editorial). This information was recorded. Literature on mass media and social problems suggested categories addressing the issues of adolescent suicide. Review of this literature guided construction of other coding categories.

To develop coding categories, articles which clearly focused on adolescent suicide were assumed to be most useful. Beginning with the first study year each article in The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature which specifically mentioned adolescent, youthful, teenage or childhood in the title was examined. Each article listed in a year was analyzed until it appeared that a useful set of categories had been developed. Twenty articles were used for this initial category formulation which was guided generally by a review of content analysis literature, mass media research and social problems articles. Changes that occurred in the coding categories as the study progressed are noted as the coding scheme is presented.

Holsti states that "subject matter categories are probably the most frequently used in content analysis" (1969:104). Subject matter categories were developed to identify the data base of the article, one suicide case, a set of cases, or statistical data. Other categories were developed to identify the authority behind the communication. Authority for presentation of content in the print media may be vested in either the author or the source of the information being relayed to the reader. Finally, categories were developed

to identify the various perspectives present in popular print media about adolescent suicide during the research period.

Ideas about suicide include attempts to explain why people engage in suicidal behavior. Initial categories identified three basic types of explanation: family life experiences; individuals' social and psychological experiences; and relationships to the social world. Problems viewed as based in the family are lack of proper parenting, disrupted homes, loss of an intact family, rejection, abuse or neglect, parent-child conflict and real or perceived parental pressure to "grow-up" or to excel.

Social and psychological experiences include mental characteristics ranging from anger to aggressiveness and from depression to despair. Alcohol or drug abuse, sexual identity confusion, feelings of guilt or worthlessness and motives of revenge or spite are considered internal attributes that may be relevant to explaining why people engage in suicidal behavior.

Interaction between the individual and the social world includes such things as "imitation" of other suicides. The stress evoked by "the times we live in" or rejection by friends or lovers are other social factors. Lack of interaction resulting in alienation, anomie or isolation is also viewed as a social cause.

Causes were divided into three general categories: family, victim, and social. Family causes included any factor that originated with the family such as loss of a family member, rejection or perceived loss of parental love and approval, abusive parents, parent-child

conflicts or simply "poor parenting." Causes that are based in the victim include such things as depression, neurosis or psychosis, alcohol or drug abuse, sexual identity confusion, feelings of guilt or worthlessness and motives of spite or revenge. Social precipitators were factors in the broader society that affected individual behavior such as isolation, institutional or peer pressures, imitation of other's suicidal behavior, the stress of the "times" or rejection by friends or lovers.

Expertise, the Author

One source of authority for a publication is the author. In popular magazines, items are often part of a regular column written by a staff reporter and no by-line is mentioned. Articles without a by-line were coded as "none" for author. When the author's name was listed but no credentials were presented the article was coded as written by an "unknown." Articles were written by "experts" if the author's name was familiar to the researcher or if credentials establishing expertise on the topic of adolescent suicide were presented.

For analysis of professional journal articles an "expert" was defined as an author whose credentials were presented identifying some expertise in the subject area or an author whose name was familiar to the researcher as a specialist in the field.

Data Base

Some articles dealt with a single case of adolescent suicide or a set of cases and others focused on rates, numbers or other statistics. Other articles omitted specific cases or figures and

were more editorial or general in coverage of the topic. Yet other articles did both, referring to one case or a set of cases and statistics. Articles in which more than one data base was evident were coded in both applicable categories.

Sources of Information

Articles concerning adolescent suicide in popular magazines based their information on a variety of sources. One source identified was the report of a study or meeting. Studies of meetings involved members of the social scientific or medical communities. These studies and meetings are referred to as "professional." The government studies or meetings code refers to committees or sub-committees of judicial or legislative bodies or their affiliates. The other studies or meetings code refers to studies carried out by periodicals, meetings of interested persons or other groups. Reports of publications appeared in articles that reviewed research findings from other publications. Interviews are another source of information. The subject of interviews were people who were authorities in research concerning adolescent suicide, suicide attempters, or family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, etc. of suicides or suicide attempters. Other articles were biographical, focusing on the life story of the attempter or the suicide. Articles which used more than one source were coded in all applicable categories.

Amount of Coverage

One measure of the importance of an issue is the amount of coverage that issue receives in the media. The length of each article in the popular periodicals was noted as a measure of importance beginning with articles of less than one half page, progressing through articles of more than one half page but less than a page and then articles that were one or more pages.

The Data Sheet

A data sheet was completed for each article. The magazine or journal, date of publication and the title of the article were recorded. The length of each article was noted in Category I. The code numbers 1, 2, and 3 respectively designated articles of less than one half page, of more than one half page but less than one page and of one or more pages in length.

The author of the article was identified in Category II. The following coding scheme was used: (1) articles that were part of a regular column or had no by-line; (2) the author's name was listed but no credentials were presented so the author was considered "unknown;" (3) the author was an "expert" either because credentials establishing expertise were presented or the name was familiar to the researcher as a social scientist; (4) the author was a national news service reporter. To correctly categorize the authorship of articles, the researcher examined footnotes and appendages to the articles. Editorial notes were examined in magazines that presented information about the authors of articles in the current issue.

Category III designated the type of article. Initial analysis of popular magazines indicated that many adolescent suicide articles appeared in regular medical, education, or current affairs columns. The type of articles were coded: (1) a feature article; (2) a medical column; (3) an education column; (4) a current affairs column; (5) any "other" type of article. The "other" designation was added after initial analysis indicated some articles were more editorial in style and format and were lacking in the characteristics of a feature article. For each article, the researcher checked the name of the column if the article was part of a column, the table of contents and the format of the article itself to ascertain if the article was a feature or an editorial article and entered the appropriate number in Category III of the coding sheet.

The data base of the article, Category IV, related to whether the article dealt with: (1) a single case of adolescent suicide; (2) a set of cases; (3) rates or other statistics or (4) was more general in coverage, omitting specific cases or data. The researcher read the article and when more than one data base was evident, all applicable codes were used.

For Category V the source for information in the article was identified. Initial formulation of categories produced four major sources of information: (1) report of a study or meeting; (2) report of a publication; (3) interviews; (4) biographical. Three of these four sources were further divided so that the report of a study or meeting could be designated as: conducted by (a) social science or medical

professionals; (b) government affiliated; (c) "others," such as studies conducted by periodicals, meetings of interested persons or other groups. Interview sources were further divided into: experts or people considered authorities in research concerning adolescent suicide; suicide attempters; "survivors" such as the family, friends, acquaintance, teachers, etc. of suicides or suicide attempters; and other persons. Biographical sources were coded as suicide attempters and suicide completers. Many of the articles drew on more than one source of information so each article was coded by all applicable source codes.

Any reported gender differences in adolescent suicide were noted in Category VI. This category resulted from the review of suicide literature rather than from the analysis of the initial sample. The first designation in the gender category was whether or not the article mentioned gender differences in rates. There were three designations: (1) no mention of differences; (2) differences mentioned, and (3) severity of intent or lethality of method referred to as differing between males and females. The differences were further divided if they specifically referred to: (a) suicide attempters or; (b) suicide completers. Each applicable designation was coded.

Category VII was developed to identify the goals of the article. In the initial analysis for category formulation three major goals were identified. These goals were: (1) information; (2) explanation; (3) prevention. Another code (4) was added for "other" when part

of the sample articles failed to fit the three major goals. The primary goal was decided by the researcher from content within the article. An example of a prevention goal is this excerpt from P.T.A. Magazine, May, 1961.

The great majority of these tragic youthful attempts at self destruction can be prevented . . . if parents, teachers, and guidance counselors were able to spot, long in advance, the conflicts and personal stresses that eventually lead young children and adolescents to self destruction, most of these lives could be saved.

Although some articles discussed more than one goal such as information and prevention, the article was coded according to the one goal most emphasized.

Articles in popular publications sometimes address specific audiences. When the issue in the article relates to a social problem it becomes important to identify the audience whose attention is being sought. Initial analysis of the sample of popular magazine articles identified four audiences. Four designations were used for Category VIII: (1) adolescents; (2) parents; (3) teachers or other educators; and (4) general public. When analysis of professional journals began, another designation (5) other social science and medical professionals had to be added. No popular magazine articles were aimed primarily at professionals but by definition articles in professional publications were aimed specifically at other professionals. Some magazine articles referred to specific audiences such as adolescents, parents, or teachers. Articles in magazines that

were labeled "educational" were assumed to address teachers and educational administrators. When the magazine was of general interest and no reference was made to specific audiences, the article was coded as addressing the general public.

The final section of the coding sheet focused on the causes of suicide discussed in the article. Initial sample analysis indicated that a number of causes might be mentioned but the article usually emphasized one cause as the "real" reason. One section (definition) of Category X was used to identify how many causes were mentioned as possibilities and which of these was proposed as the primary cause. Three basic types of causal explanations of adolescent suicide were identified in formulation of initial categories: family related causes; victim related causes and social precipitators. After the researcher read the article, counted and entered the number of causal explanations mentioned, and identified the primary cause proposed by the article, the primary cause was entered in Category X as family, victim, or social. All articles except one (Science News Letter, March 21, 1979, which mentioned no possible cause) proposed a cause that "fit" into one of the three explanation categories.

Coding of the professional publication articles was conducted using the same categories and the same coding sheets. Only one change was necessary in the categories. "Other professionals" had to be added to the category of audiences addressed by the articles. No professional publication article addressed the lay public.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important considerations in any research project. Holsti (1969) identifies two types of reliability, individual and category, as important when conducting content analysis. The consistency of coding can be verified by recoding, in the case of a single researcher, or by agreement between coders. Constraints on time and money made it necessary to choose a method that could be undertaken by one researcher and completed within a limited time. An independent coder, another graduate student, was chosen to verify consistency of coding. Pre-testing of the categories was conducted by the researcher (intrarater reliability) with analysis of five articles in current popular magazines relating to adolescent suicide. All five articles were published in 1984 and were not included in the study population. The second coder used the same categories (intrarater reliability) to analyze the same articles. Both coders agreed on definition of categories and inclusion of each item in each category. There were no disagreements or differences between coders. Budd, et al., refers to this type of reliability check as the test-retest method which "requires more than one coder using the same instructions to classify the same material" (1967:67).

Validity is concerned with how well the research in question measures what the researcher wants to measure. Budd, et al that "direct validity is often assumed by the content analyst. This method of validation presumes that a measure self-evidently measures

what it is supposed to if the categories are rigidly defined and coding has a high degree of reliability" (1967:69). Holsti agrees that a researcher's "informed judgment" can be assumed to establish content validity (1969:142), particularly if the results are consistent with existing information.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATIONS IN POPULAR MAGAZINES

Information about the extent of suicide (number of articles, type of article and amount of space allotted) is presented first. The targets of this information are examined by looking at the type of magazines publishing the articles and the apparent audiences. The bases for credibility are author characteristics, sources of information, and the data base. Finally the nature of the presentations are reported: gender differences, goals of the articles and causes suggested for adolescent suicide.

Extent of Coverage

Number of Articles

A total of 108 articles about adolescent suicide appeared in popular magazines from 1953 through 1982. There was an increase in the number of articles during each five year period except one (Figure 1).

From 1953 through 1957 ten articles about adolescent suicide appeared in popular magazines. Eleven articles were published during the next period, 1958 through 1962. The number of articles increased substantially from 1963 through 1967 when 19 appeared. The increase continued with 23 articles appearing from 1968 through 1972. The only decline in the number of articles during the study period occurred

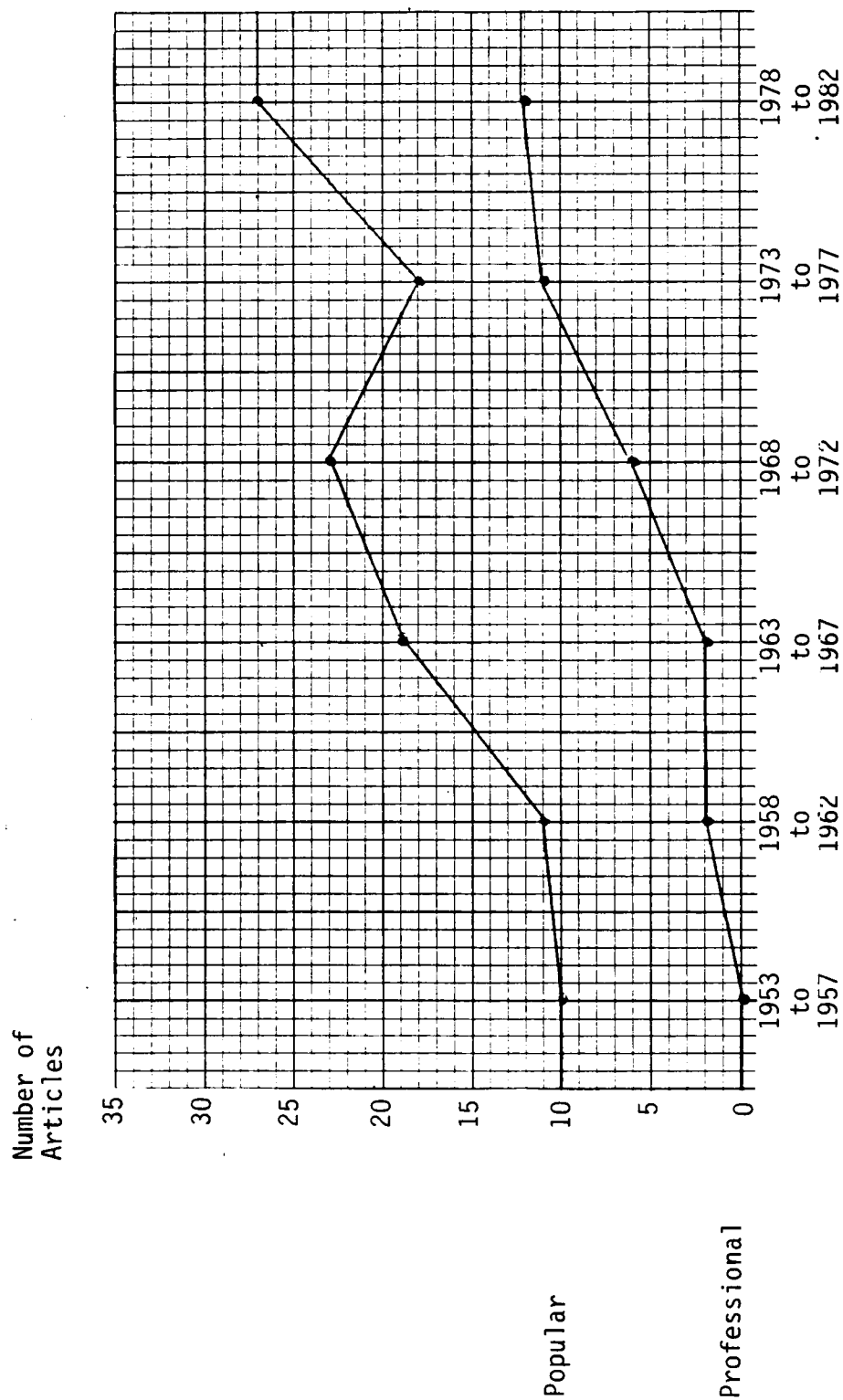


Figure 1. Number of adolescent suicide articles in popular and professional periodicals from 1953-1982.

when only 18 articles were published from 1973 through 1977. The number of articles rose again from 1978 through 1982 to the largest total (27) of any time period during the study.

Type of Article

Only 20 percent of the adolescent suicide articles published from 1953 through 1957 were feature articles (Table 1). The percentage of articles that were features in the next five years (1958-1962) increased to 36 percent. Although the proportion decreased (31.5 percent) in the period from 1963 through 1967, there was a tremendous increase (52 percent) in the proportion of adolescent suicide articles featured in the 1968 through 1972 period. From 1973 through 1977 the proportion of feature articles again increased (77.8 percent) but returned to nearer one half (51.8 percent) of the total sample from 1978 through 1982. Almost half (48 percent) of the articles for the entire study were feature articles.

The number of articles in medical columns decreased over the course of the study period. From a high of 50 percent in 1953 through 1957, the number of medical column articles fell to 36.3 percent of all articles in the period from 1958 through 1962. Although the total number of articles substantially increased from 1963 through 1967, the number of articles in medical columns decreased (21 percent of all articles). Medical column coverage dropped again (13 percent of all articles) from 1968 through 1972. The total number of adolescent suicide articles declined from 1973 through 1977 to 18 and

Table 1
Type of Article in Popular Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Feature Article	Medical Column	Education Column	Current Affairs Column	Other	Total
1953-1957	2 (20.0%)	5 (50.0%)	-	3 (30.0%)	-	10 (100%)
1958-1962	4 (36.3%)	4 (36.3%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	-	11 (100%)
1963-1967	6 (31.5%)	4 (21.0%)	1 (5.0%)	4 (21.0%)	4 (21.0%)	19 (100%)
1968-1972	12 (52.0%)	3 (13.0%)	1 (4.0%)	3 (13.0%)	4 (17.0%)	23 (100%)
1973-1977	14 (77.8%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	2 (11.0%)	-	18 (100%)
1978-1982	14 (51.8%)	2 (7.4%)	2 (7.4%)	7 (25.9%)	2 (7.4%)	27 (100%)
Totals	52 (48.0%)	19 (17.5%)	6 (5.5%)	21 (19.4%)	10 (9.2%)	108 (100%)

medical column entries followed with only one medical column article published during those years. Only 7.4 percent of articles during the final period from 1978 through 1982 appeared in medical columns.

Current affairs columns accounted for 19.4 percent of all articles in popular sources. Almost one third (30 percent) of the articles from 1953 through 1957 appeared in current affairs columns. About one sixth (18.2 percent) of the articles published from 1958 through 1962 and 21 percent of those published from 1963 through 1967 were in current affairs columns. From 1968 through 1972 the representation decreased to 13 percent and then decreased still further (11 percent of all articles) from 1973 through 1977. In the final study period, 1978 through 1982, approximately one fourth (25.9 percent) of the adolescent suicide articles were part of current affairs columns.

Of the total sample, 9.2 percent did not appear in medical, education, or current affairs columns nor did they have the characteristics of a feature article. Over one fifth (21 percent) of the articles from 1963 through 1967 were more editorial in style and format. From 1968 through 1972, 17 percent of the articles were in the "other" category with the balance of "other" articles (7.4 percent) appearing between 1978 and 1982.

Education columns included the smallest proportion of articles on adolescent suicide during the study (5.5 percent). The period from 1958 through 1962 had the greatest percentage (9.1 percent) of articles in education columns. The coverage of adolescent suicide

articles in education columns did not vary very much in the next three time periods with 5 percent from 1963 through 1967, 4 percent from 1968 through 1972 and 5.6 percent from 1973 through 1977. There was a slight increase to 7.4 percent in the final period from 1978 through 1982.

Length of Articles

From 1953 through 1957, 50 percent of the articles pertaining to adolescent suicide in popular periodicals were less than one half page in length, 30 percent were more than one half page and 20 percent were one page or more (Table 2). From 1958 through 1962, 11 articles dealt with the research topic: 54.5 percent of these were less than one half page; 9 percent were more than one half page, and 36 percent were one page or more.

From 1963 through 1967, 42 percent of the articles were less than one half page in length, 21 percent were more than one half page and 36.8 percent were one or more pages with a total of 19 articles during the period. Between 1968 and 1972, 23 articles appeared in popular periodicals on the topic of adolescent suicide. Of these articles, 26 percent were less than one half page, 13 percent were more than one half page and 60.8 percent were one or more pages. Of the 13 articles appearing from 1973 through 1977, 22 percent were more than one half page and the remaining 78 percent were one or more pages in length.

From 1978 through 1982, 27 articles were published, 11.1 percent less than one half page in length, 20.6 percent more than one half page and 59.2 percent one or more pages. The number of pages devoted

Table 2
Length of Articles in Popular Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Less than one half	More than one half	Pages-one or more	Total
1953-1957	5 (50.0%)	3 (30.0%)	2 (20.0%)	10 (100%)
1958-1962	6 (54.5%)	1 (9.0%)	4 (36.0%)	11 (100%)
1963-1967	8 (42.0%)	4 (21.0%)	7 (36.8%)	19 (100%)
1968-1972	6 (26.0%)	3 (13.0%)	14 (60.8%)	23 (100%)
1973-1977	-	4 (22.0%)	14 (78.0%)	18 (100%)
1978-1982	3 (11.1%)	8 (29.6%)	16 (59.2%)	27 (100%)
Totals	28 (25.9%)	23 (21.3%)	57 (52.8%)	108 (100%)

to coverage of adolescent suicide increased with each successive time frame because more longer articles appeared.

Targets

Types of Magazines

The first adolescent suicide articles to appear in popular periodicals during this study were published in "news" type magazines. Some "news" magazines such as Coronet and Science News Letter relate current happenings in brief, simply written articles. Other "news" magazines such as Time, and Newsweek report the same current happenings but cater to a different audience. The articles referring to adolescent suicide published during the 1950s appeared only in "news" magazines.

In the early 1960s publications which focused on education such as Senior Scholastics and P.T.A. Magazine began voicing concern with student suicides and attempted suicides. In 1965 and 1966 Christian Century, a magazine with a religious orientation, published three articles about adolescent suicide. In 1967 a widely read general interest magazine, The Saturday Evening Post, published an article titled "Why Children Commit Suicide." Another type of magazine, represented by Mental Hygiene, addressed to the better educated person, joined the ranks of publications that voiced concern with youthful suicides. By 1970 adolescent suicide articles appeared in magazines focusing on general news, education, religion, parenting, women's concerns, teen interests and intellectual issues. This diversity existed also in the early 1980s.

With each succeeding time frame from 1953 through 1982 the publications where adolescent suicide articles appeared became more polished and professional. Some of the magazines, such as Mental Hygiene, Human Behavior, and Psychology Today are quasi-professional journals addressed to the better educated lay person.

The Audiences

Although adolescent suicide is an age specific occurrence, only seven articles in the study were addressed to adolescents (Table 3). The majority (66.3 percent) of the articles addressed the general public. During the first period (1953 through 1957) most articles (81.8 percent) were aimed at the general public. Parents (9.1 percent) and teachers (9.1 percent) were the audience of the remainder of articles. General public oriented articles dropped slightly in prevalence (75 percent) from 1958 through 1962, while articles addressing teachers increased to 16.7 percent. Parents were referred to in 8.3 percent of the articles for this period.

From 1963 through 1967, over three-fourths (76.2 percent) of the articles were for the general public. Teachers were referred to in only 9.5 percent but articles addressed to parents increased to 14.3 percent. An article in the National Education Association Journal of November, 1964, stated that

Suicide, particularly in the young, is considered a taboo subject for the lay public, and even professional people are sometimes reluctant to discuss or study the problem.

Table 3
Audiences of Articles in Popular Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Adolescents	Parents	Teachers	General Public	Total
1953-1957	-	1 (9.1%)	8 (9.1%)	9 (81.8%)	11 (100%)
1958-1962	-	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	9 (75.0%)	12 (100%)
1963-1967	-	3(14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	16 (76.2%)	21 (100%)
1968-1972	2 (7.4%)	4(14.8%)	4 (14.8%)	17 (62.9%)	27 (100%)
1973-1977	3 (13.0%)	5(21.7%)	3 (13.0%)	12 (52.3%)	23 (100%)
1978-1982	2 (7.1%)	3(10.7%)	5 (17.9%)	18 (64.3%)	28 (100%)
Totals	7 (5.7%)	17(13.9%)	17 (13.9%)	81 (66.3%)	122 (100%)

The increase in articles aimed at parents (14.8 percent) continued into the next period (1968 through 1972), matched by an increase to 14.8 percent in the articles aimed at teachers. General public articles declined slightly to 62.9 percent and the first articles addressed to adolescents (7.4 percent) appeared.

During the period from 1973 through 1977 general public oriented articles decreased to around one-half (52.3 percent). Articles addressing adolescents slightly increased (13 percent) as did articles addressed to parents (21.7 percent). Teachers were referred to in only 13 percent of the articles.

During the final period (1978 through 1982) the general public focus increased (64.3 percent). All other categories decreased except teachers which increased slightly to 17.9 percent. Parents were addressed in 10.7 percent of the articles and adolescents in 7.1 percent.

Bases for Credibility

Authorship

The majority (46.3 percent) of all articles had no by-line and ones with "unknown" authors accounted for over one quarter (27.8 percent) of all articles. Of the remaining articles 16.7 percent were written by experts, authors whose credentials were presented indicating expertise in the area of adolescent suicide. "Other" authors (9.3 percent) were national news service reporters (Table 4).

From 1953 through 1957, 80 percent of the articles listed no author, 10 percent were written by "unknowns" and the other 10 percent

Table 4
 Authors of Articles in Popular Periodicals
 1953-1982

Period	None	Unknown	Expert	Other	Total
1953-1957	8 (80.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	-	10 (100%)
1958-1962	7 (63.6%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)	11 (100%)
1963-1967	10 (52.6%)	5 (26.3%)	3 (15.8%)	1 (5.3%)	19 (100%)
1968-1972	11 (47.8%)	5 (21.7%)	5 (21.7%)	2 (8.7%)	23 (100%)
1973-1977	2 (11.1%)	10 (55.6%)	4 (22.2%)	2 (11.1%)	18 (100%)
1978-1982	12 (44.4%)	7 (25.9%)	4 (14.8%)	4 (14.8%)	27 (100%)
Totals	50 (46.3%)	30 (27.8%)	18 (16.7%)	10 (9.3%)	108 (100%)

by "experts." Between 1958 and the end of 1962, the majority (63.3 percent) of the articles again had no by-line, while 18.2 percent of the authors were "unknown" and 9.1 percent were "experts." The remaining 9.1 percent were "other reporters."

From 1963 through 1967, the number of "expert" authors increased to 15.8 percent but the majority (52.6 percent) of articles still listed no by-line. The percentage of "unknown" authors increased (26.3 percent) while articles written by "others" declined to 5.3 percent. From 1968 through 1972, the decrease in no by-line articles to 47.8 percent was offset by an increase in "expert" authors to 21.7 percent. "Unknown" authors were responsible for another 21.7 percent of the articles and 8.7 percent were written by "others."

Between 1973 and the end of 1977, the articles with no by-line decreased to 11.1 percent. "Unknown" authors increased to over one half (55.6 percent) of the sample and "expert" authors increased slightly to 22.2 percent. "Other" authors made up the final 11.1 percent of this time frame.

During the last time frame (1978 through 1982) no by-line articles increased again to 44.4 percent. "Unknown" authors wrote 25.9 percent of the articles and "other" authors 14.8 percent. The number of articles written by "experts" fell sharply (14.8 percent) during this time.

Sources of Information

When reports of studies or meetings were mentioned, they typically were in the category called professional. Specifically, one government study or meeting was referred to in the time period 1958 through 1962

and one study or meeting of "other interested persons" was the basis of an article published in the time period 1973 through 1977. The analysis revealed that reports of studies or meetings were predominantly (39 out of 41) carried out by social science or medical professionals. (Subcategories were not used in table formulation.) A total of 36.6 percent of the articles referred to professional studies or meetings. Of those published from 1953 through 1957, 50 percent were based on studies or meetings. Over one fourth (27 percent) of the sample from 1958 through 1962 were based on reports of studies or meetings. Again from 1963 through 1967 more than one fourth (26.3 percent) of the sources for the articles were studies or meetings. In 1968 through 1972, the percentage of articles that treated studies or meetings as a source increased to 54 percent. Although the number declined from 1973 through 1977 (36.8 percent) and again from 1978 through 1982 (27.5 percent), studies and meetings were second only to interviews as a source in popular magazine articles on adolescent suicide (Table 5).

Interviews were treated as sources in 38.4 percent of the articles. Of these over three fourths (76.7 percent) were interviews with "experts," either doctors, psychologists, social workers or other professionals. Some articles had more than one source, such as an interview with suicide attempters and an interview with experts. Only five articles during the study interviewed attempters, survivors, or some other party without also interviewing an expert (Table 6).

Table 5
Source of Information in Popular Periodical Articles
1953-1982

Period	Study or meeting	Report of Publication	Interviews	Biographical	Total
1953-1957	5 (50.0%)	-	3 (30.0%)	2 (20.0%)	10 (100%)
1958-1962	3 (27.3%)	2 (18.1%)	3 (27.3%)	3 (27.3%)	11 (100%)
1963-1967	5 (26.3%)	3 (15.8%)	6 (31.6%)	5 (26.3%)	19 (100%)
1968-1972*	13 (54.2%)	5 (20.8%)	5 (20.8%)	1 (4.2%)	24 (100%)
1973-1977*	7 (36.8%)	1 (5.3%)	9 (47.4%)	2 (10.5%)	19 (100%)
1978-1982*	8 (27.6%)	2 (6.9%)	17 (58.6%)	2 (6.9%)	29 (100%)
Totals	41 (36.6%)	13 (11.6%)	43 (38.4%)	15 (13.4%)	112 (100%)

*Coded in more than one category when more than one applied.

Table 6
Interview Sources of Information in Popular Periodical Articles

Period	Experts	Attempters	Survivors	Other	Total
1953-1957	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	-	-	3 (100%)
1958-1962	2 (66.7%)	-	-	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)
1963-1967*	5 (71.4%)	-	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	7 (100%)
1968-1972	3 (60.0%)	-	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	5 (100%)
1973-1977*	8 (61.5%)	2 (15.4%)	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)	13 (100%)
1978-1982*	13 (65.0%)	2 (10.0%)	4 (20.0%)	1 (5.0%)	20 (100%)
Totals	33 (64.7%)	5 (9.8%)	8 (15.7%)	5 (9.8%)	51 (100%)

*Coded in more than one category when more than one applied.

From 1953 through 1957, 30 percent of the articles were based on interviews. Over one fourth (27.2 percent) of articles in the next period, 1958 through 1962 used interviews. The number of interview articles increased slightly (31.5 percent) from 1963 through 1972 but declined to 21 percent in the next period, 1968 through 1972. From 1973 through 1977 interview articles increased to 47.3 percent. By the final time period, 1978 through 1982, over one half (58.6 percent) of the articles were based on interviews. Professional sources, either interviews or reports of professional studies or meetings, accounted for three fourths (75 percent) of the total sample of articles.

As Table 7 indicates, the remaining sample, biographical articles, comprised 13 percent and reports of publications made up the balance (12 percent). Almost three fourths (70.6 percent) of the biographical articles focused on completed suicides with only 29.4 percent referring to attempted suicides. The table of biographical sources reports in ten year time intervals because of the limited number.

Data Base of Articles

In Table 8, the data bases for articles are reported. During the period from 1953 through 1957, 45.5 percent of the articles were based on statistics while 54.5 percent were based on case studies. Popular magazines, such as Woman's Home Companion, Life and Science News Letter described slight increases in the rate of suicide in the early 1950s but adolescent suicide was discussed as "unusual." Newsweek magazine in July 1957 contended that suicide was actually the second most common

Table 7
Biographical Sources of Information
in Popular Periodical Articles

Period**	Attempters	Completers	Total
1953-1962	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)	5 (100%)
1963-1972*	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	7 (100%)
1973-1982*	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)	5 (100%)

**Reported in ten year intervals.

*Coded in more than one category when more than one applied.

Table 8
Data Base of Articles in Popular Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Case Studies	Statistics	Other	Total
1953-1957	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)	-	11 (100%)
1958-1962	4 (36.4%)	5 (45.5%)	2 (18.2%)	11 (100%)
1963-1967	7 (36.8%)	12 (63.2%)	-	19 (100%)
1968-1972	7 (30.4%)	12 (52.2%)	4 (17.4%)	23 (100%)
1973-1977	5 (26.3%)	14 (73.7%)	-	19 (100%)
1978-1982	11 (40.7%)	14 (51.9%)	2 (7.4%)	27 (100%)
Totals	40 (36.3%)	62 (56.4%)	8 (7.3%)	110 (100%)

cause of death among college students. Suicide among older people, who were often perceived as ill and alone, might be understandable but adolescents had hardly begun to live. Despite greater quantity and quality of life, adolescents in the "prime" of life were committing suicide. Statistics were the topic of another 45.4 percent of the articles between 1958 and 1962, while 36.4 percent were case studies and 18.2 percent adopted a general tone.

Over the next two time periods, from 1963 through 1967 and from 1968 through 1972, articles focusing on statistics increased. Statistical articles comprised over one half (63.2 percent) in both the first period and again in the second time period (52.2 percent). Case studies accounted for 36.8 percent of the first period sample and 30.4 percent of the latter. During the time period from 1973 through 1977 the majority (73.7 percent) of articles were statistical in focus with slightly more than one quarter (26.3 percent) based on case studies. The total number of articles relating to adolescent suicide increased in the final time period (1978 through 1982). Of the 27 articles published during this period, 40.7 percent were based on cause, 7.4 percent were general and the majority (51.9 percent) were statistical.

Nature of the Presentation

Gender Differences

Statistical differences are reported consistently in the frequency of male and female suicides and attempted suicides. None of the articles in the thirty year study period explored the gender differences. Over one half (56.5 percent) of the articles made no

mention of gender differences at all while 30.6 percent mentioned numerical differences in male and female attempters or completers (Table 9). Sixteen articles (12.9 percent) referred either to the severity of intent or lethality of method as differing between males and females. A January, 1971, article in Today's Health spoke of gender differences as: "Girls, by contrast, seldom suffered quietly before killing themselves."

Eight out of the ten articles published from 1953 through 1957 made no reference to gender differences while the other two refer to the differences in number of males and females. From 1958 through 1962, over one half (58.3 percent) of the articles did not mention gender differences, while one third referred to differences in frequency by gender and 8.3 percent alluded to the severity or lethality of intent.

By the next period (1963 through 1967) the proportion of articles that made no mention of gender differences had increased to 84.4 percent. Only 15.8 percent referred to numerical differences. During the next period (1968 through 1972) the articles that referred to rate differences increased to 46.6 percent while 17.9 percent spoke of severity of intent or lethality of method. An article in the December, 1972, issue of Mademoiselle suggested that "If more young women are committing suicide it means that they are cut off from the love of their fellow beings-- or believe that to be the case." The number of articles that made no reference to differences fell to 35.7 percent and decreased again (26.9 percent) in the next period (1973 through 1977). The articles

Table 9
Gender Differences in Popular Magazine Articles
1953-1982

Period	No differences	Number differences	Severity or lethality	Total
1953-1957	8 (80.0%)	2 (20.0%)	-	10 (100%)
1958-1962	7 (58.3%)	4 (33.3%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100%)
1963-1967	16 (84.2%)	3 (15.8%)	-	19 (100%)
1968-1972	10 (35.7%)	13 (46.4%)	5 (17.9%)	28 (100%)
1973-1977	7 (26.9%)	11 (42.3%)	8 (30.8%)	26 (100%)
1978-1982	22 (75.9%)	5 (17.2%)	2 (6.9%)	29 (100%)
Totals	70 (56.5%)	38 (30.6%)	16 (12.9%)	124 (100%)

referring to frequency differences during this time (1973 through 1977) declined slightly (42.3 percent) while those referring to severity or lethality increased to 30.8 percent.

From 1978 through 1982, over three fourths (75.9 percent) of the articles made no reference to gender differences. Less than one fifth (17.2 percent) referred to numerical differences and articles alluding to severity or lethality declined to 6.9 percent.

Goals of Articles

Articles about adolescent suicide presented information about what was occurring, explained why it was occurring or presented ideas about how to prevent its occurrence (Table 10). Of the articles published during the study 37.9 percent were informational; 31.4 percent focused on prevention; 25.9 percent explained why adolescent suicide was occurring; and the remaining 4.6 percent appeared to have other goals. In the first period from 1953 through 1957, 40 percent of the articles were informational, 40 percent explanatory and 20 percent focused on prevention. Over one half (54.5 percent) of the articles appearing from 1958 through 1962 were informational. Explanation was the focus of 36.4 percent of the articles and 9.1 percent were preventative. Again in the period from 1963 through 1967 almost one half (47.4 percent) of the articles were informational. The goal of over one fourth (26.3 percent) was explanation and 10.5 percent were primarily concerned with prevention. The remaining three articles (15.7 percent) had other goals.

Table 10
Goals of Articles in Popular Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Information	Explanation	Prevention	Other	Total
1953-1957	4 (40.0%)	4 (40.0%)	2 (20.0%)	-	10 (100%)
1958-1962	6 (54.5%)	4 (36.4%)	1 (9.1%)	-	11 (100%)
1963-1967	9 (47.4%)	5 (26.3%)	2 (10.5%)	3 (15.7%)	19 (100%)
1968-1972	9 (39.0%)	5 (21.7%)	7 (30.0%)	2 (8.7%)	23 (100%)
1973-1977	3 (16.7%)	5 (27.8%)	10 (55.6%)	-	18 (100%)
1978-1982	10 (37.0%)	5 (18.5%)	12 (44.4%)	-	27 (100%)
Totals	41 (37.9%)	28 (25.9%)	34 (31.4%)	5 (4.6%)	108 (100%)

From 1968 through 1972, the greatest number of articles again focused on information (39 percent) but the emphasis on prevention was increasing with almost one third (30 percent) more prevention oriented. A January, 1969, article in Parents Magazine with an orientation toward prevention suggests "As long as a child has some emotional support from his parents . . . he will not be driven to think of self destruction." The number of explanatory articles dropped to 21.7 percent and 8.7 percent focused on other goals. The emphasis on prevention increased still more from 1973 through 1977 with a total of 55.6 percent of the adolescent suicide articles focusing on that goal. Over one quarter (27.8 percent) focused on explanation but only 16.7 percent of the total sample for that period was informational.

In the final period, 1978 through 1982, prevention remained the most common goal (44.4 percent) with information the goal in 37 percent and explanation the goal in 18.5 percent. An article in Harper's, May, 1979, proposes as an explanation that

Parents who two decades ago were willing to suffer genuine material hardships in order to have and raise children are now . . . balancing the needs of yet another generation against their own desire for a country house, a larger air conditioner, a microwave oven.

The 4.8 percent of the articles that had genuine goals other than information, explanation or prevention were published in religious publications during the ten year period from 1963 through 1972.

"Causes"

All but one of the magazine articles (in Science News Letter, March 21, 1959) dealing with adolescent suicide suggested a cause of suicidal behavior. For the thirty year study period, family factors were "blamed" in 37.4 percent of the articles, social factors in 36.4 percent and the victim in 26.2 percent. However, victim related factors were viewed as the cause of suicidal behavior in most articles appearing in the 1950s. During the 1960s family factors were most often suggested as the cause. Social factors were viewed as precipitating most adolescent suicides during the 1970s. Adolescent suicide in the 1980s is again being blamed on the family (Table 11).

From 1953 through 1957, one fifth of the articles (20 percent) suggested family causes of suicide. For example, Time magazine, April 5, 1954, discussed a series of suicides among students ages nine to sixteen. The problems that led to the series of suicides were thought to begin with parents who demanded superior scholarship from their children. Another 10 percent proposed social causes while the majority (70 percent) blamed the victim, usually by suggesting that the suicide was mentally ill. From 1958 through 1962, 50 percent of the articles mentioned family causes, 40 percent mentioned social causes and 10 percent indicated victim related causes. During the period from 1963 through 1967, over one third (37 percent) of the articles blamed the family, another 37 percent blamed the victim and 26 percent pointed to social factors as the cause. An article in Time magazine on October 14, 1966, suggests social factors contribute to suicidal behavior.

Table 11
Causes of Adolescent Suicide Proposed in Popular Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Family	Victim	Social	Total
1953-1957	2 (20.0%)	7 (70.0%)	1 (10.0%)	10 (100%)
1958-1962*	5 (50.0%)	1 (10.0%)	4 (40.0%)	10 (100%)
1963-1967	7 (36.8%)	7 (36.8%)	5 (26.4%)	19 (100%)
1968-1972	8 (34.8%)	5 (21.7%)	10 (43.5%)	23 (100%)
1973-1977	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)	10 (55.6%)	18 (100%)
1978-1982	14 (51.9%)	4 (14.8%)	9 (33.3%)	27 (100%)
Totals	40 (37.4%)	28 (26.2%)	39 (36.4%)	107 (100%)

*One article listed no cause.

Deeply immersed in youth's natural agonizings and inclinations toward the dramatic, many college students take their grades, their specialized studies and themselves far too seriously.

From 1968 through 1972, family factors were suggested as the cause in 35 percent of the articles, the victim was blamed in 22 percent, while most articles (43 percent) referred to social factors. Newsweek on April 1, 1968 suggested

The incidence of suicide can only be reduced when the public recognizes it as a social problem rather than a disgrace to be covered up.

From 1973 through 1977, over one half (56 percent) of the articles again spoke of the cause as social while 22 percent suggested victim related factors and the remaining 22 percent referred to family factors. From 1978 through 1982, the blame shifted back to the family with 51 percent of the articles assigning familial blame. For example, a March 31, 1980, article in Macleans stated

He seemed untroubled that his parents both worked . . . but minutes after his mother left for work, 12 year old _____ took a neighbor's stepladder and hanged himself

Only 15 percent of the articles suggested factors related to the victim as the cause while 33 percent suggested social factors.

The next chapter presents comparable data about articles in professional periodicals. Comparisons of the findings in these two types of periodicals are presented and interpreted in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER VI

PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL FINDINGS

Professional journals differ in content and format from popular magazines. Professional journals include articles, research notes, comments and replies, and book reviews. Articles and research notes from journals which dealt with adolescent suicide were included in the study. Articles focusing on adult suicide were included if some part of the articles addressed the issue of youthful suicides. All articles were listed in the table of contents of a periodical and were defined by the researcher as "feature" articles. All articles were greater than one page in length. No tabulation of these findings is included for it was ascertained that the length and type of articles remained consistent during the study period.

Research findings are communicated in professional journals. Articles dealing with adult suicide behavior appeared occasionally in the 1950s but the first articles concerned with youthful suicides did not appear until the 1960s. In 1962, The American Journal of Psychiatry published two articles which focused on suicidal behavior of adolescents and children. During the next five years, 1963 through 1967, two more adolescent suicide articles appeared in professional journals. Six articles appeared from 1968 through 1972, eleven from 1973 through 1977 and twelve from 1978 through 1982. Although the number of articles increased in each study period, total articles

for any one period were far fewer than those appearing in popular magazines (Figure 1, page 52).

During the study period, there was an increase in the number of specialized journals beginning with the publication of Adolescence in 1966 and followed by Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior in 1971 and Death Education in 1977. Specialization meant that authors from varied professional sources contributed articles and research on specific topics (i.e., adolescence, suicide, death) to one publication.

Types of Journals

The following types of journals indexed in The Sociological Abstracts published articles about adolescent suicide: social science publications from social work, sociology, and psychology; medical publications with a social science or psychiatric orientation, and special topic journals related to adolescence or death. The type of journal was derived from the title. Social science publications include Social Research, Indian Journal of Social Work, Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology and Journal of Psychology. Medical journals are Psychiatry, American Journal of Psychiatry, International Journal of Social Psychiatry, Social Science and Medicine, Journal of Psychiatric Research and American Journal of Psychotherapy. Special interest journals in the sample are Adolescence, Children and Youth Services Review, Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior, Omega and Death Education (Table 12).

Special interest journals accounted for 48 percent of the total sample of articles about adolescent suicide, even though these

Table 12
Types of Professional Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Social Science	Medical	Special Interest	Totals
1953-1957	-	-	-	0 (100%)
1958-1962	-	2 (100.0%)	-	2 (100%)
1963-1967	-	2 (100.0%)	-	2 (100%)
1968-1972	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	4 (66.6%)	6 (100%)
1973-1977	1 (9.1%)	7 (63.6%)	3 (27.3%)	11 (100%)
1978-1982	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	9 (75.0%)	12 (100%)
Totals	4 (12.1%)	13 (39.4%)	16 (48.5%)	33 (100%)

journals first appeared in the late 1960s and 1970s. Adolescence, which focuses on adolescent behavior and is multi-disciplinary in nature began publication in 1966 and during the remainder of the study period accounted for almost one third (31.3 percent) of the total articles in special interest journals. Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior, established in 1971, published 43.8 percent of the adolescent suicide articles in special interest journals. Two thirds (66.6 percent) of all articles that appeared between 1968 and 1972 and 27.3 percent of the articles in the 1973 through 1977 period were in these two special interest periodicals. In the final time period, 1978 through 1982, the number of articles in these and other special interest journals increased to three fourths (75 percent) of the total sample of adolescent suicide articles. Journals focusing on loss of life, such as Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior, Omega, and Death Education included 27 percent of all adolescent suicide articles during the study.

Through the study period, 39 percent of all professional articles about adolescent suicide appeared in medically oriented journals. This concentration in medical journals in part reflects the fact that for the first decade adolescent suicide articles only appeared in these journals. From 1968 through 1972, only 16.7 percent of the articles were in medical journals. After an increase to 63.6 percent in articles from 1973 through 1977 only 8.3 percent of the total sample articles appeared in medical journals during the last time frame explored in this study.

Overall, only 12 percent of the articles appeared in social science periodicals. The first adolescent suicide article in a social science journal from 1952 appeared in the 1968 through 1972 time period. Social science articles comprised 16.7 percent of the total for this period. From 1973 through 1977, coverage in social science journals decreased to 9 percent of the total articles. For the final time period, 1978 through 1982, 16.7 percent of the adolescent suicide articles appeared in social science journals.

The Audience

By definition professional journals are addressed to professionals. Some research journals report research findings simply to further understanding. Other professional journals provide information to help professionals in the practice of their occupation.

The first adolescent suicide articles appeared in professional journals addressed to medical or psychiatric professionals and were predominantly case studies (3 out of 4). It was not until the end of the 1960s (1968 through 1972) that adolescent suicide articles began appearing in other professional journals. Two special interest journals, Adolescence and Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior began publication about this time. Articles in Adolescence addressed both professional interests, academic and occupational. Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior was occupationally oriented. Only 12.1 percent of the articles primarily addressed academic professionals.

The Authors and Source of Information

It is assumed that editorial policies assure the credentials of authors publishing articles in professional journals. All authors of professional articles about adolescent suicide during the study period were coded as experts.

The information for all professional journal articles was original research or pre-existing research. The source for all articles in the study were professional. No tabulation for the authors or source of information is included since neither varied during the study period.

Data Base of Articles

Of the adolescent suicide articles in professional periodicals during the study, 61.3 percent looked at a case study or set of cases. Statistical comparisons were presented in 38.7 percent of the articles analyzed. Two articles were not included in this analysis because they were general, mentioning neither cases nor statistics.

From 1958 through 1962, all of the articles dealt with case studies. From 1963 through 1967 articles were equally likely to present case studies (50 percent) as statistics (50 percent). During the next period (1968 through 1972) two-thirds (66.7 percent) of the articles focused on case studies while one-third were statistical. Case studies were the topic in the majority (63.6 percent) of articles in the next period (1973 through 1977). Statistics were presented in only 36.4 percent of the articles (Table 13).

Table 13
Data Base of Articles in Professional Periodicals
1953-1982

Period	Case Studies	Statistics	Total
1953-1957	-	-	0 (100%)
1958-1962	2 (100.0%)	-	2 (100%)
1963-1967	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	2 (100%)
1968-1972	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6 (100%)
1973-1977	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)	11 (100%)
1978-1982*	5 (50.0%)	5 (50.0%)	10 (100%)
Totals	19 (61.3%)	12 (38.7%)	31 (100%)

*Two articles were not coded because they were general.

During the final period (1978 through 1982) again one half of the articles looked at case studies while one half used statistics. Although statistically oriented articles increased in the final period, case studies or sets of case studies accounted for the topic in over one half of the articles in each time frame.

In preparing Table 13, the researcher combined codes (1) and (2) which both referred to "case studies." The fourth designation, "other" was omitted due to the small number of articles in professional journals (2) in this category.

Gender Differences

Gender differences between suicide attempters and completers are well documented but little explored. Data indicate that females attempt suicide more often than males but suicide deaths occur more often among males than females. None of the professional articles in this study focused on gender (Table 14).

In 38.5 percent of the professional journal articles, no mention was made of gender differences. Less than one half (46.2 percent) of the articles discussed the number of male and female suicides and attempted suicides. Speculation about gender differences often focuses on the severity of the attempt (did they really mean it) and the lethality of the chosen method (guns were considered more fatal than drugs). Severity or lethality were referred to in 15.4 percent of the total articles, always in conjunction with numerical differences between males and females.

Table 14
Presentation of Gender Differences in
Professional Articles
1953-1982

Period	No Differences	Number Differences	Severity or Lethality	Total
1953-1957	-	-	-	0 (100%)
1958-1962*	-	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)
1963-1967	-	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)
1968-1972*	2 (25.0%)	4 (50.0%)	2 (25.0%)	8 (100%)
1973-1977*	6 (50.0%)	5 (41.7%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100%)
1978-1982*	7 (53.8%)	5 (38.5%)	1 (7.7%)	13 (100%)
Totals	15 (38.5%)	18 (46.2%)	6 (15.4%)	39 (100%)

*Articles were coded in more than one category where applicable.

Articles in the first two time periods were equally unlikely to focus on gender differences. From 1958 through 1962 and again from 1963 through 1967, two articles referred to numerical differences. One article in each period mentioned severity or lethality also.

During the next period (1968 through 1972) even though one half of the articles reported rate differences (and one half of these mentioned severity or lethality of intent) the remaining articles did not mention gender differences. From 1973 through 1977 the proportion of articles with no mention of gender differences increased to 50 percent. Rate differences were discussed in 41.7 percent but only one article (8.3 percent) suggested a connection to seriousness of intent or lethality of method.

The number of articles on adolescent suicide increased again from 1978 through 1982, but the number of articles referring to statistical gender differences remained constant and only one article mentioned severity or lethality.

Goals

The purpose of the majority (61 percent) of the professional articles was to explain why suicidal behavior occurred among adolescents. About one fifth (21 percent) focused on prevention while the remaining 18 percent were informational focusing on "what" was occurring. Of the few articles published from 1958 through 1962 and from 1963 through 1967, one half focused on explanation and one

half on prevention. From 1968 through 1972 when articles began appearing in non-medical journals, one half were informational and one half were explanatory. From 1973 through 1977, over 80 percent of the adolescent suicide articles focused on explaining, 9 percent on information and 9 percent on prevention. From 1978 through 1982, one half of the articles were most concerned with explanation, one sixth with information and one third with prevention (Table 15).

Although articles focusing on prevention comprised only 21 percent of the total sample, there was a noticeable increase in their frequency from the mid-1970s through 1982. From only 9 percent for the period from 1973 through 1977, prevention directed articles increased to 33.3 percent of the total published from 1978 through 1982. While articles focusing on prevention increased, the proportion of articles concentrating on explanation decreased from a high of 81.8 percent in the period from 1973 through 1977 to 50 percent in the final time period, 1978 through 1982.

Causes Suggested in Professional Journals

The cause of adolescent suicidal behavior most often cited in the professional journals was some factor related to the family. In 42.4 percent of the articles, factors such as faulty family relationships, conflict with parents, lack of proper parenting, or family disorganization were considered the principal cause of suicide or suicide attempts. Social factors such as alienation, isolation, age related stress (the strain of being an adolescent in our society)

Table 15
Goals of Professional Articles
1953-1982

Period	Information	Explanation	Prevention	Total
1953-1957	-		-	0 (100%)
1958-1962	-	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	2 (100%)
1962-1967	-	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	2 (100%)
1968-1972	2 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	-	6 (100%)
1973-1977	1 (9.1%)	9 (81.8%)	1 (9.1%)	11 (100%)
1978-1982	2 (16.7%)	6 (50.0%)	4 (33.3%)	12 (100%)
Totals	6 (18.2%)	20 (60.6%)	7 (21.2%)	33 (100%)

and institutional pressures were treated as the chief cause in 30.3 percent of the articles. Mental illness, self derogation, a sense of worthlessness, loss of hope and alcohol and drug abuse were victim related causes cited in about one-fourth of the articles (Table 16).

From 1958 through 1962, the period when the first adolescent suicide articles appear in professional journals, both articles cited the family situation of the suicide as the cause of the behavior. Also, from 1963 through 1967, both articles indicated that the primary cause of adolescent suicide lay within the family.

From 1968 through 1972, one-third of the articles treated the family as the primary cause of youthful suicide. Social factors were most prominent in explaining suicide and attempted suicide in one-half of the articles. Only 17 percent of the articles indicated the cause lay within the individual. Yet, from 1973 through 1977, 45 percent of the professional articles assigned individual mental and emotional states primary importance in adolescent suicidal behavior. Family factors were cited as the cause in 27 percent of the articles and 27 percent indicated social factors as the cause.

The number of articles citing family factors (42 percent) as the primary cause of suicide increased from 1978 through 1982. In one-third of the articles social factors were considered the primary cause and in one-fourth individual factors were most important.

During the study period, all three sets of factors, family, individual, and social, were referred to as "causes" of adolescent suicidal behavior. Family factors were considered slightly more

Table 16
 Causes of Adolescent Suicide Proposed
 in Professional Articles
 1953-1982

Period	Family	Victim	Social	Total
1953-1957	-	-	-	0 (100%)
1958-1962	2 (100.0%)	-	-	2 (100%)
1962-1967	2 (100.0%)	-	-	2 (100%)
1968-1972	3 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	3 (50.0%)	6 (100%)
1973-1977	3 (27.0%)	5 (45.0%)	3 (27.0%)	11 (100%)
1978-1982	5 (42.0%)	3 (25.0%)	4 (33.3%)	12 (100%)
Totals	14 (42.4%)	9 (27.3%)	10 (30.3%)	33 (100%)

important in 42.4 percent of the total published studies. Social factors were more important in 30.3 percent of the articles and individual factors were listed as the cause in 27.3 percent.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Actions and conditions treated as social problems may exist long before they are identified as social problems and persist long after attention is no longer directed to them. A number of recent studies (Conrad and Schneider, 1980; Aronson, 1982; McCrea, 1983) refer to the part popular publications play in defining social problems. The increase in coverage of suicide in popular magazines over the last thirty years presumably reflects an increase in public interest and further the increased recognition and elaboration of a social problem.

Summary

Popular magazine articles about adolescent suicide outnumbered professional journal articles throughout the study and, consequently, overall (108 to 33). Although evidence of increased public concern about adolescent suicide appeared in the 1950s, the first professional articles (after 1952) on the subject did not appear until 1962. The popular media began directing attention to the issue prior to the study period and increased rather steadily throughout the study period. The findings indicate the popular media played a greater part than professional articles in defining adolescent suicide as a social problem.

The number of feature articles in popular magazines in each five year period was greater than the number of articles in professional journals for that period. Popular articles of one or more pages in length were more numerous than articles in professional journals. Of course, there were more popular publications than professional publications in which articles could appear.

Contrary to instances when opposing groups debate problematic conditions, there are no groups with opposing views about the fundamental undesirability of adolescent suicide. Initial articles in popular periodicals in the 1950s pointed out the suicide rate to indicate there was a problem, but gradually the focus shifted from "what" the problem was to "who" the experts were, the means of prevention, and who was to blame.

Targets

Popular magazines addressed two types of audiences, specific and general public. Specific audiences were parents, teachers and adolescents. Articles became more consistent in the direction toward specific audiences as the study progressed. Adolescents, who were largely ignored as an audience for the first half of the study, became a specific audience from 1968 through 1982. Articles addressed to parents and teachers also increased over the study period.

Professional journals also addressed two types of audiences. Research findings intended to contribute to academic knowledge were addressed to academicians. Other professional journal articles

focused on aiding professionals in the performance of their occupations. The sparsity of adolescent suicide articles in "social science" journals combined with the overall increase in such articles in "special interest" journals indicates an applied focus. Information about adolescent suicide in professional journals often was addressed to an audience of professionals to assist in the practice of their occupation.

Medicalization

Efforts to medicalize the problem of suicide are apparent in attempts to convince the public to accept professional explanations for what is occurring and depiction of professionals as "experts" in solving the problem. (One journal, Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior first published in 1971, apparently evolved out of increased interest in suicide.) Articles in professional journals for the study period were predominantly geared to explanation. Acceptance by the general public of professional explanations for a behavior is a necessary step in medicalization of a problem. Although professional studies and publications or interviews with professionals were the source of information for the majority of popular magazine articles the goals of such articles varied from the goals of professional journal articles. The primary goal in 37.9 percent of the popular magazine articles was to inform the public about the issue of adolescent suicide. Once a problem has been defined as the domain of medical professionals--medicalized--the public presumably accepts

professional explanations. If adolescent suicide was medicalized, the explanations in popular periodicals should echo professional explanations. Another indication of the popular media resistance to medicalization is apparent in the decrease in coverage of the issue in medical columns of popular magazines. From a high of 50 percent in the first period of the study (1953 through 1957) medical column coverage of adolescent suicide dropped to 7.4 percent in the final period (1978 through 1982). The findings indicate a move away from medical definitions of the problem and apparently resistance to medicalization of the issue.

Although professional articles focused on prevention comprised only 21 percent of all articles, the number noticeably increased in the last time period. By the final study period (1978 through 1982), one-third of the articles were prevention directed and application oriented. During the same period, 44.4 percent of the popular magazine articles focused on prevention. Almost one-fifth (17.9 percent) of the popular articles during the final period (1978 through 1982) were aimed at teachers and educators and emphasized preventive measures. Even the few (7.1 percent) magazine articles that addressed adolescents during this period focused on how and where to seek help for oneself or a suicidal friend.

Experts

Professional journal articles predominantly were based on case studies (61.3 percent). Many case studies are based on mental health

counseling records, so there is an implicit message that case studies portray "treatment" of the problem. The case study approach at least implicitly portrays mental health professionals as the experts qualified to treat the potential victim. An article in The New York Times Magazine section on January 14, 1979, quoted from a case study: "When he was about six, after the divorce, I was working and he went to live with my cousin for a year . . . They say it may have started with that separation," (emphasis added). The "they" referred to were mental health professionals.

Popular magazine articles recognize the expertise of mental health professionals, but refer to other qualified and effective help sources also. The popular magazine findings indicate mental health professionals are seen as only one of several qualified sources of intervention with potential suicide victims.

Data Presentation

The data sources for popular magazine articles differed from the case study approach of professional articles. Over one half (56.4 percent) of the adolescent suicide articles in popular magazines presented statistics. Statistics present empirical evidence about the number of deaths that have occurred.

Professional articles were more likely to refer to statistics in conjunction with gender differences than popular articles. In 46.2 percent of the professional articles differences in the number of male and female suicides or attempters were mentioned. Only 30.6

percent of popular articles referred to statistics or gender differences. The amount of attention paid to the severity of the intent or lethality of method was more similar with references in 15.4 percent of the professional articles and 12.9 percent of the popular articles. Popular magazines are more likely to ignore gender differences. In 56.5 percent of the articles there was no reference to gender while 38.5 percent of the professional articles made no reference. Gender differences were more likely to be introduced in application oriented professional articles and prevention oriented popular articles addressed to specific audiences. Apparently concern with gender is tied to interest in identification of potential suicides.

"Causes"

The causes of adolescent suicide proposed in most professional journals related to family life. While popular "news" type magazines in the 1950s referred to victim related factors in cases of adolescent suicide (noting mental disorders or emotional disorders as underlying causes of youthful suicide), professional journal articles only dealt with adult suicide. During the 1960s popular news magazines were joined by publications focusing on education, religion, parenting and intellectual issues in publishing articles about adolescent suicide. Family characteristics most often were suggested as the cause of adolescent suicide in the majority of popular and special interest magazine articles in this period.

The 1960s were a time of sweeping social changes, many of which were tied to two major social movements, the civil rights movement and the women's movement. The media and public figures directed attention to the rising divorce rate and the changing composition of the American family. Both popular magazine articles and professional journals tended to identify faulty parent-child relationships as causing adolescent suicide. Specifically, "disrupted" or "broken" homes were treated as the primary problem. Occasionally, during the 1960s, religious magazines and educational publications mention the stress of the Vietnam War as a factor in adolescent suicide.

By the 1970s both popular and professional publications were suggesting social factors as precipitating adolescent suicide. Popular magazines continue to mention such social factors as isolation, imitation, and age related stress throughout the 1970s, but professional journals during the mid 1970s assigned primary importance to the individual's emotional and mental state when explaining adolescent suicidal behavior.

By the final period of the study (1978 through 1982) both popular and professional sources again were presenting family factors as the primary cause of adolescent suicide. "Lack of proper parenting" was the problem more than "broken" or "disrupted" homes.

Changes on Problem Presentation

The "problem" of adolescent suicide has not been resolved. Although interest has waxed and waned as indicated by popular and

professional publications, the issue is currently viewed as an "epidemic" problem in news magazines as well as other media. Newspaper coverage ranges from the comics ("Gil Thorpe," Spring, 1985) to letters to Ann Landers (The Knoxville Journal, Knoxville, Tennessee, July 19, 1985) to actual occurrences (Houston, Texas, August and September, 1984). Recording artists write and record songs ("You're Only Human: Second Wind" by Billy Joel) and T.V. networks produce teenage suicide movies ("Hear Me Cry" and "Silence of the Heart"). The label "epidemic" not only focuses attention on a condition but also serves as a new handle with which to make an old story new.

Varied and changing definitions of adolescent suicide as an individual or a social problem were revealed by the content analysis of popular magazines and professional periodicals. There is general consensus about the undesirability of adolescent suicide. Its occurrence has become the focus for various interest groups at different times. The "hidden" agendas of such interest groups may reflect the political and social climate of the time.

Discussion

The traditional values of home, family, and children and the changes in birth and divorce rates espoused during the post WWII period of economic prosperity have led to the popular belief that the 1950s were the "good old days." Andrew J. Cherlin (1981) suggests that the 50s were in fact an aberration produced by social forces in reaction to twelve years of depression and a world war.

Childbearing, as influenced by Dr. Spock and other experts, took on a psychological flavor. Children's conduct and misconduct was often interpreted in terms of psychological states or "needs" (Skolnick, 1983).

Mention of youthful or student suicides was unusual in popular print media and nonexistent in professional periodicals. Adolescent suicides who were the topic of popular magazine articles in the 1950s were usually treated as having psychological problems in keeping with the prevailing views of all childhood and adolescent behavior. Categorized as "victim" related in this study, such causes as "psychopathic states," "depression," "emotional disorders," and "mental illness" often were used to explain why adolescents committed or attempted suicide.

Although the divorce rate rose fairly steadily after 1900, the sharp decline in divorces during the 1950s made the rise in the 1960s appear more dramatic. Both the increased labor force participation of women and the rise of the women's movement (with its questioning of traditional values and attitudes) were blamed for the increased divorce rate. Social scientists (Skolnick, 1983; Cherlin, 1981) consider none of the changes in women's position in society an adequate explanation for the rising divorce rate. The prevailing political and social climate of the 1960s was one of protest and dissent. The civil rights movement, war protests and the generation gap all emphasized the growing division within many families (Skolnick, 1983). The unrest of this era gave rise to groups of individuals concerned

with the decline of the traditional family. This concern was echoed in the way adolescent suicide was at times defined. Adolescent suicide articles in popular magazines aimed at parents and educators reflected this perspective. The causes of suicidal behavior suggested by these articles were disrupted homes or loss of family.

Religious groups also were concerned with changes in family structure. Yet, other social forces caused even more concern. The Vietnam War and the anti-war movement as well as changing values and morals were the focus of Christian groups who proposed that adolescent suicide was a protest against social conditions. Youthful suicides "lacked" Christian values and were searching for meaning in a chaotic world of war and change.

In the 1960s the civil rights movement and President Lyndon Johnsons' "Great Society" program focused on social reform aimed at wiping out racial and economic inequalities (Skolnick, 1983). Women moved into the work force in expanding service industries as part of the continued economic growth. Cherlin talks about "the parallel increases in the employment of younger married women and in divorce" (1981:50) that occurred during this time. Anti-feminists concerned with the male-female structure of the labor force also found reasons for the occurrence of young suicides. Neglect or perceived lack of love were possibilities when both parents worked or when homes had only one parent present.

The "me" decade of the 1970s was considered a "major cultural revolution" (Skolnick, 1983:36) in American life. Americans experienced

changing ideas about family, work, and their own ambitions. Earlier ideals of "hard work, savings and the repression of impulse" gave way to new ideals of "mass consumption, spending and immediate gratification" (Skolnick, 1983:40). Businesses, through advertising promoting their products, encouraged self-indulgence and discontent with one's self image.

Advances in technology meant more luxury items were mass produced and available to more people. Concern about self-fulfillment and material gains replaced worry about the changing family. There were groups which voiced concern that emphasis on self-fulfillment provoked social problems.

Two groups, one focusing on black issues and one focusing on parenting expressed similar concerns about the problem of adolescent suicide in the 1970s. Both groups indicated a belief that the causes of suicide were present in the current family structure. The group focusing on black issues spoke of youthful black suicides as the "fault" of poor parenting. The "interest in parenting" group addressed both teens and parents, blaming the interest in finding self-fulfillment for the problem of adolescent suicide. "Failure to communicate," "parental pressure to excel," and "perceived loss of love: were failures in parenting that were considered part of the new parental need to "find personal fulfillment."

Another group that surfaced in the 1970s was mental health professionals that addressed the better educated upper middle class through publications such as Mental Hygiene, Psychology Today, and

Human Behavior. In these publications adolescents who committed suicide were portrayed as suffering from socially produced isolation. American society had become so self-involved that it isolated youths at a time when they most needed help, the turbulent teen years. Educators also blamed social isolation for the continuing problem of adolescent suicide.

The 1980s have brought more changes in the social and political climate and in the definition of the problem of youthful suicides. Although moves in the 60s, 70s, and 80s to "medicalize" adolescent suicide generally failed, mental health care professionals continue to treat the issue as if they were the only "experts" qualified to deal with the problem.

The social and political climate of the 1980s reflects a resurgence of traditionalism reminiscent of the 1950s. Women are encouraged to return to the gender roles of an earlier era, to look for self-esteem and fulfillment in the God-given roles of wife and mother. In this climate, various special interest groups voice concern about the continuing problem of adolescent suicide. These concerns often surface in popular magazines such as Parent's Magazine which in August, 1982, suggested that "While young people need more adult guidance than ever, they have to manage with less." "Parent failure" or "poor parenting" are suggested in other popular magazines as the cause of most adolescent suicides.

Conclusions

A framework for explaining the waxing and waning of interest in some social problems can be drawn from findings in this study on adolescent suicide. The behavior, whether adolescent suicide, child abuse, or divorce, has existed for some time. Attempts at elimination have been unsuccessful as evidenced by the continuation of the problem. Actual occurrences may decrease or increase somewhat independently of the amount of public attention. The problem is "adopted" by various groups who then suggest that certain other groups, structures or norms are to blame for the problem. Usually the blame is placed on the ideological adversary of the group. Similar to the moral entrepreneurs, the group believes it is "right" about the cause of the problem. In this manner, several groups may define the problem, at one time or at different times, but the problem continues relatively unchanged. The defining groups may continue to work for a resolution to the problem or may retreat and adopt some new issue. Although the problem remains relatively unchanged, actions addressed to the problem stimulate more enduring changes, such as establishment of new areas of expertise, proliferation of bureaucratic regulations and loss of power and recognition for groups or individuals who are currently out of social favor.

The problem of adolescent suicide could be placed on a continuum between open and closed as Haines (1979) suggested in his model. The findings indicate that suicide has not been medicalized

or solved so the problem would not fit the closed category. Neither would adolescent suicide be considered an open problem for there is general agreement about the undesirability of the occurrence. The findings in this study are more consistent with sociological frameworks that explain social problems through politicalization. The undesirable condition singled out for action by the group or groups is adolescent suicide. Group activities are directed at communicating the seriousness of the condition to others. One means of communication to the general public is through the print media. The group or groups hope that an increase in the number of articles about adolescent suicide will lead to an increase in public interest.

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