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### A STUDY OF THE MANIFEST CONTENT OF SUICIDE NOTES FROM THREE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: L. BINSWANGER, S. FREUD AND G. KELLY.

ANTOON A. LEENAARS

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A STUDY OF THE MANIFEST CONTENT OF SUICIDE NOTES  
FROM THREE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:

L. Binswanger, S. Freud and G. Kelly

by

© Antoon A. Leenaars

Hon. B.A., Brock University, 1975

M.A., University of Windsor, 1976

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Psychology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1979

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There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.

A. Camus

This dissertation is dedicated with love and  
respect to my parents Mr. Cornelius Leenaars  
and Mrs. Anna Leenaars.

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From Clues to Suicide by Shneidman, E. and Farberow, N.  
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### Abstract

The present archival study analyzed the manifest content of suicide notes from the theoretical perspectives of L. Binswanger, S. Freud and G. Kelly. Thirty three genuine and 33 simulated notes were investigated. The method of investigation involved the deduction of 30 specific classes of content from the three theories of suicide; the classifications were concerned with figural aspects of each theory. The classifications served as the hypothesis for the study. Three independent judges, unaware that some notes were simulated, rated the correspondence of the classifications to the suicide notes. The results indicated a significant inter-judge reliability; the concordance was .70. Differences between the genuine and simulated notes were found. Specific aspects and the overall classifications that were deduced from S. Freud's theory were found to correspond significantly to the genuine notes; one specific aspect of S. Freud's theory corresponded significantly to the simulated notes. The classifications that were related to S. Freud's suggestions about the suicidal person having experienced an object loss or object rejection; the suicidal person being preoccupied in his thought process with the object loss; and the suicidal person identifying himself with the lost or rejecting object were found significantly more frequently in genuine notes. The classification that was related to S. Freud's suggestion about suicide being a form of regressive behaviour was found significantly more frequently in simulated notes. Specific aspects but not the overall classifications that were deduced from L. Binswanger's theory were found to correspond significantly to simulated notes. The classifications that were related to L. Binswanger's

suggestions about the suicidal person attempting to isolate his life, his problems, and/or dread by his suicide; and the suicide being an act of liberation and freedom for the suicidal person were found significantly more frequently in simulated notes. Neither specific aspects nor the overall classifications that were deduced from G. Kelly's theory were validated. Discussion of the results and their relation to previous investigations about suicide notes were offered. A discussion about the clinical importance of the fact that people who simulate a suicide note frame suicide in essential different ways than people who are suicidal and write a note was presented. Suggestions for future research were offered.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to Dr. William D. G. Balance who served as the chairman for my dissertation. His help and encouragement were greatly appreciated. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Frank Auld, Dr. John Benjafield and Dr. Ron Frisch for their assistance and participation in the present study. The cooperation and labour of Pam Arnaut, Cheryl Loughner and Don Rudzinski who served as the judges for the present study is also gratefully acknowledged. I want to extend appreciation also to Mrs. Dorothy Desjardins for her assistance and typing skills. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
Chapter	
I INTRODUCTION	1
II METHOD	32
Judges	32
Materials	32
Procedure	33
Analysis of Data	35
III RESULTS	37
IV DISCUSSION	45
Appendix	57
A SUICIDE NOTES THAT WERE USED IN THIS STUDY	58
B A PROCEDURAL PACKAGE THAT WAS USED BY THE JUDGES	75
REFERENCES	82
VITA AUCTORIS	89

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LIST OF TABLES

Table

Page

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Results of the Count of the Number of Times<br>That, at Least, 2 out of 3 Judges Agreed<br>About a Classifications Correspondance to<br>the Genuine and Simulated Notes |
|---|---|

39.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

No one seems to know why someone commits suicide. Indeed, a very serious question that has been asked is: "Why do men kill themselves?" (e.g., Jackson, 1957; and Shneidman, 1975). The present author, however, believes that that question is very difficult to answer and may not even be answerable. However a possible approach to the question of suicide would be to look at the "frame" that a person takes when he kills himself (Watzlawich, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; and Watzlawich, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). By "frame", the present author means the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced. The present paper is an attempt to look at the "frame" of a suicidal person by using suicide notes as a key to understanding that person and suicide itself by a literature review and, then, formulating a research project that will be undertaken here.

Every suicide or suicidal attempt is preceeded by a cry for help (Shneidman, 1975). Shneidman and Mandelhort (1970) have shown that the proposition, "People who talk about suicide don't commit suicide", is indeed a fable. The fact is, that of any ten persons who kill themselves eight have given definite warning of their suicidal intention. And, furthermore, studies reveal that the suicidal person does give many clues and warnings regarding his

suicidal intention. Among those clues are suicide notes (Shneidman & Farberow, 1957). It has been argued elsewhere (Frederick, 1969) that suicide notes provide remarkable insight into the suicidal cry. In fact, the present author believes that suicide notes provide the researcher and/or clinician with a unique form of data for the understanding of suicide.

An immediate problem, however, with the present undertaking is the question of generalizability. The question that is posed is: Can the information that is obtained from people who write suicide notes be generalized to other people who do not write a note? Logical and scientific norms specify that one can generalize an observation to conditions other than those under which it was made if the conditions under which it was made reflect an adequate example of those conditions to which one wishes to generalize (Hempel, 1966; and Anderson, 1971). Hence, in this project, the question is whether one can generalize an observation that is made of suicidal people who write notes to suicidal people who do not write notes. Furthermore, the question also is whether one can speak about suicide generally from investigation of notes or whether one cannot. Hence, in this project, the attempt to look at the "frame" of a suicidal person and suicide itself via suicide notes may be questioned since one may make accidental generalizations as well as faulty conclusions about suicide from the notes. Since only 12 to 15 percent of those persons who take their lives leave suicide notes, (Frederick, 1969), the question of generalizability is, indeed, important in this project. Caution seems to be in order from a scientific point of view; yet, one can begin to

speculate about transferring the data from the suicidal people who write notes to other people who do not write notes. However, the present author will refrain from such speculation at this time and readdress this problem later.

Our ideas about the suicidal person come from various sources. Case histories, informants, psychological tests, etc. provide us with remarkable data. However, the present author believes that the unsolicited productions by the suicidal person himself are more useful in our understanding of that person. In the case of attempted suicides, such data are available retrospectively from the person's self-reports; however, in the case of suicides, such direct data are not readily available. Here, the data are usually obtained from others; however, suicide notes are possible sources of direct information. The suicide note that the person writes just before he takes his own life provides us with an overt form of communication about suicide. Furthermore, suicide prediction is extremely difficult (Zubin, 1974; Diggory, 1974; Lester, 1974, and Murphy, 1974) and suicide notes may help prediction by giving us some direct communication about suicide.

Suicide represents a form of communication (Hayakawa, 1957; Murphy & Robins, 1961; and Beall, 1967). Among persons who commit suicide, the manner of communication varies greatly about the suicide (Murphy & Robins, 1968); the suicide note is one such manner. Suicide notes have been viewed as a communication about the communication of suicide (Frederick, 1969). A few examples of suicide notes<sup>1</sup> follow:

To the Police. No note--one was written before this. Los Angeles Police already have a record

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<sup>1</sup>All notes are reprinted with permission of the author and the publisher from: Shneidman, E. & Fareberow, N. Clues to Suicide. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1957.



of one attempt. Notify--Anne M. Jones, 100 Main St., Los Angeles, tel. BA 00000. I live at 100 Spring St., Los Angeles. I work at Ford, 100 Broadway. That is all.

I can't find my place in life.

J. William Smith

I hope this is what you wanted.

This is the last note I shall ever write. No one should feel bad about my going as I am not worth it. I don't want to go but there is nothing else to do.

My Love kept after me until I lost control and struck at the only one I ever loved. The only thing that meant anything to me. Then I got tight. When I struck at her something snapped inside my head. I could feel it. I didn't want to hurt her ever. She is Mary Jones of 100 Main St. Los Angeles. Her aunt's phone is BA 00000. She lives close by. Please get in touch with them at once. She kept after me until this is all I can do. I must.

My last request is not to be put 6 ft. under but burned and my ashes scattered over the mountains.

Please don't let my brother know how or why I died. To her it must be an accident. Mary is the most wonderful person on earth. I just wasn't the right one for her. It is not her fault I fell so madly in Love with her.

I have never been much good. I have only hurt everyone.

Well at least I have loved. I loved her and her two girls more than words could ever tell. They were like my own girls to me.

Well, that's it.

John W. Smith

My Dearest Wife: I cannot endure this situation any longer. I cannot believe I have been so bad a husband as to merit this. Something is certainly wrong. I honestly don't know what it is.

Whatever you may be searching for I hope with

all my heart you find. Please be good to little Betty, our daughter, I love her so.

I am talking over this Cyanide deal to myself. God knows what I'll do. I have it here. Possibly 20 grains--5 more than is necessary. I still love you. Be good to Betty Please.

Dearest darling i want you to know that you are the only one in my life i love you so much i could not do without you please forgive me i drove myself sick honey please beleave me i love you again an the baby honey don't be mean with me please I have lived fifty years since i met you, I love you--I love you. Dearest darling i love you i love you. Please don't discraminate me darling i know that i will die dont be mean with me please i love you more than you will ever know darling please an honey Tom i know don't tell Tom why his dady said good by honey. Can't stand it any more. Darling i love you. Darling i love you.

I'm tired. There must be something fine for you. Love.

Bill

I specifically request that my body be disposed of by cremation. To my good friends, Joe Smith and Mary Jones I give my deep and undying affection. Me dear parents, Henry W. and Betty C. Brown have done their best for me and it is my failure, rather than anything they have failed to offer that has brought this about. My sister, Helen White of 100 Main Street, New York, is closest and dearest to me and, with her consent, I ask that she take and raise my son. My phonograph records, now in storage with my parents, I give to my former wife, Wilma Brown, 200 Broadway, Los Angeles, Calif.

Explanations would be useless, suffice to say I have tried and failed. Given unto my hand this ninth day of June in the year of 1943, A.D., in the city of Los Angeles, California.

Jack Brown

Regarding the credibility of the notes themselves, Mintz (1968) has stated that suicide notes must always be taken as an indication of heightened suicidal risk. Tuckman, Kliener and Lovell (1960) have also concluded from their research that credence can be given to the reason for the suicidal behaviour in suicide notes. Tuckman et al. (1960) compared the reason given in the note with that elicited from informants. They found that there was considerable agreement in about 90% of the cases that they studied. Hence, Tuckman et al. (1968) concluded that confidence can be placed in the notes as providing a valid communication about the suicide. However, this credence is as high as the credence to be given the informants and one can question that confidence. Also, other concerns than agreement on reason may be important in terms of reliability as well as validity. There is also the fact that deep dynamics may go into the play of suicide which may not be reflected in what informants tell us or in information from notes. Be that as it may, the present author believes that suicide notes do provide us with some "valid" information about the suicide because the suicide note is a direct, unsolicited source of data about that suicide. Hence, there is a "phenomenological" validity in the notes.

The first methods of investigation in the notes were mainly post hoc evaluations of suicide notes with incorporation of historical information. The first published study of suicide notes appeared in 1931 by Wolf. Wolf's work was merely an anecdotal resume of the content of suicide notes, citing such themes as poverty, unrequited love, ill health, sacrifice etc. A similar study was presented by Morgenthaller (1940)

citing the importance of the emotional states of the writers. After these early presentations, more complex analyses of the notes were undertaken. A summary of these investigations follows.

1) Shneidman and Farberow (1957), utilizing a comparison between genuine and simulated notes, have concluded that the person about to take his life is in-part confused, illogical and paradoxical in his motivation for his act. Also, the notes include orders and admonitions as though the writer has reached his final decision in solving his problems although he is confused about whether he will continue to be around.

2) Shneidman and Farberow (1957), utilizing a linguistical analysis of notes, concluded that the person about to commit suicide is prone to commit particular fallacies in his logical process. The person is confused about his concept of self; i.e., he shows problems of identification. Specifically, the person exhibits fallacious identification between the self as experienced as self and the self as experienced by others; this erroneous equation enables him to leap into oblivion.

3) Farberow and Shneidman (1957), utilizing a comparison between genuine and simulated notes, concluded that the pattern of dynamics in suicide varies with the age of the suicidal person. Specifically, with the younger person intense interpersonal motives and/or depressive feelings are operating; while with older persons pain and suffering, and/or feelings of discouragement or uselessness, and/or the idea of being a burden are operating.

4) Shneidman and Farberow (1957) utilizing a comparison between genuine and simulated notes, have concluded that the suicidal person departs with hate, grief and self-blame and that he leaves instructions and restrictions on those he has purposely left behind.

5) Tuckman, Kleiner and Lovell (1959), assuming that the content of suicide notes represent the thoughts and affect of the suicidal person, utilized notes as a projective technique. They found that hostility was not the only emotion in the notes; in fact, they found that half of the notes contained a positive feeling tone; e.g., gratitude, affection, concern, etc., and one-quarter contained a neutral feeling tone. Also, they found that older people showed less affect and that separated or divorced persons showed more hostility.

6) Osgood and Walker (1959) utilizing an analysis of motivational levels of genuine notes, simulated notes and ordinary letters, concluded that suicide notes are very stereotyped and display disorganization of language. They also found that suicide notes reflect the motives leading to self-destruction and reflect conflict of responses if more than one motive is operative.

7) Wagner (1960), utilizing an analysis of suicide notes in terms of object of aggression found that the cry of help was aggressive. He concluded that one-third of the notes manifested aggressive feelings to surroundings, one-third toward themselves, and one-third toward a combination of themselves and others.

8) Shneidman and Farberow (1960), utilizing a socioeconomic

study of notes, found that, although suicide occurs in all socio-economic levels, the content of notes varied with different socio-economic levels. Specifically they found that notes from the lower status spoke of physical illness and the stress of everyday living and that the notes from the higher status spoke of "being tired of living".

9) Gottschalk and Glesser (1960) utilizing an analysis of verbal content of genuine notes, simulated notes and personal letters, found that a number of language differences in notes relate to points of speech, person of pronouns, use of inanimate objects, special relationships, etc. A major conclusion, that they found, was that notes have a high reference to others as a final act of verbal communication, although this reference is often vague and tenuous.

10) Capstich (1960), utilizing an analysis of notes in terms of age, stated reasons for suicide, motivation for suicide, and attachment to objects and persons, found that the content of the notes tended to vary with age although all groups showed emotional abnormality. Specifically, complaints of physical illness, references to the hereafter, and a concern for relations occurred by the older suicides, and was the age-group in which depression was commonest; while messages showing harmful and malicious motives occurred by the younger suicides, and was the age-group in which normal demeanors and emotional disturbances other than depression predominated.

11) Spiegel and Neuringer (1963), utilizing a comparison of genuine and simulated notes for an analysis of dread, found that

suicidal individuals minimize the experience of dread as exhibited by lack of explicitness, few mentions of suicide or its synonymous, many instructions to the reader and significant disorganization in genuine notes.

12) Tuckman and Ziegler (1966), utilizing a comparison of genuine and simulated notes for analysis of social maturity, found that people who commit suicide do not exhibit social immaturity in notes.

13) Darbonne (1967), utilizing a comparison of genuine and simulated notes, found that suicidal individuals exhibit heightened dependency needs, low self-esteem and self-centered goals, a high degree of activity and an expressive style of veiled aggression including hurting the self in order to hurt and manipulate others. He also concluded that individuals who commit suicide differ from those who threaten suicide by a greater degree of activity.

14) Bjerg (1962), in an effort to analyze the suicidal life-space in terms of Lowenian Topological model from suicide notes, found that suicidal individuals exhibit unfulfillable desires, intolerable inner states, personal devaluation, expectation of others, non-responsibility for the act, wishes to hurt or help someone else, much grief, and dissatisfaction of desires, etc.

15) Frederick (1968), utilizing a handwriting analysis of notes, found that experts could significantly distinguish genuine from control notes; however, specific clues were difficult to assess.

16) Darbonne (1969), utilizing a replication of an earlier study by Farberow and Shneidman (1957), found significant differences regarding suicidal ideation with age.

17) Ogilvie, Stone and Shneidman (1969), utilizing the General Inquirer procedures with a dictionary of tag words in genuine and simulated notes found that: (1) references to concrete things, persons and places was higher in genuine notes; (2) use of the word "love" in the text was higher in suicide notes; and (3) total number of references to processes of thought and decision was lower in suicide notes.

18) Tauber, R. (1970), utilizing a comparison between genuine, simulated and hoax notes, found that suicidal individual's communication was short, constricted, disorganized and brief in subject matter. He also reported that the notes lacked expression of emotion except mild love and affect.

19) Lester (1961), utilizing a comparison of genuine and simulated notes for analysis of affiliative motivation, found no significant differences.

20) Lester (1971), utilizing analysis of suicide notes and method of suicide, found no differences. There were no differences in the notes of individuals who used active methods from those who used passive methods.

21) Jacobs (1971), utilizing a phenomenological analysis of suicide notes, found notes dealing with illness, direct accusations,



direct instructions to someone else, and precautions taken to exclude their problems from "the next world".

Each of the above pieces of work has made its own unique contribution to the study of suicide notes. Although the investigation of suicide notes is at an elementary stage and further research is necessary, I shall now attempt a synthesis of the data:

First and foremost, the studies on the notes clearly show that suicide notes are distinguishable from other control material such as simulated notes. Most of the studies reviewed analyzed genuine suicide notes by a controlled experimental method of comparing them with simulated notes elicited from nonsuicidal people. More specifically, simulated notes are notes written by people who have been asked to write suicide notes that are as real as possible. These simulated notes can be seen as something like, yet not identical to genuine notes. Then, with control for homogeneous groups, by focusing on the difference between genuine and simulated notes, one can learn the figural characteristics of the genuine notes. The studies above show that genuine notes differ from control material on various dimensions. Furthermore Frederick (1960) utilizing a handwriting analysis showed that notes could be differentiated from simulated notes by this handwriting method of comparison. Clearly, suicide notes are a unique form of communication that stand away from different control communications including simulated notes.

The studies have shown that suicide notes are characterized by, at least, the following characteristics and, hence, imply the "frame"

of the suicidal person. However, a unitary "frame" does not seem to be possible since factors such as age, socio-economic class, physical illness, divorce, type of external stress and other factors have been shown to affect the person's "frame". Even-so, the general findings and the suggestions of Frederick (1969) show that suicide notes can be separated from control material on the following features: (1) the presence of language, logic and, hence, thought processes that are unusual and, at times, paradoxical; (2) the presence of a strong negative feeling tone (e.g., depression, hate, self-blame, aggression etc.) and/or a strong positive tone (e.g., love, affection, concern, gratitude, etc.); (3) the presence of a deep forlorn (or dread) quality although this may be minimized by the person; (4) the presence of much grief; (5) the presence of needs especially love that are not met; (6) the presence of numerous references to others which are often related to the person's demise, and (7) the presence of communication to, instructions to, and restrictions for those left behind.

Overall the synthesis of the data to date shows that the suicidal individual when writing a note is attempting to solve his problems by his own demise. Suicide is construed as a way of solving a problem(s). However, the suicidal person's language and logic show that his action may be taken by unusual and faulty reasoning. His reasoning is also often stereotyped and constricted as well as paradoxical especially in terms of his confusion around his self concept; e.g., he confuses his social and personal self. The present author believes that the suicidal

person's reasoning probably allows the person to see suicide as a solution.

The suicidal person's action seems to be influenced by a pervasive sadness and much grief. The person expresses numerous references to interpersonal and personal losses; he seems to be often experiencing a pronounced depressive feeling. The person's depression seems related to the presence of needs; e.g., love, that are not met. The person is also experiencing feelings of uselessness, hopelessness and low self-esteem. However, depression is not the only negative affect present; aggression, hate and self-blame often occur. The aggression may be other directed, but is often inner directed and, hence, this anger may be assumed to be related to the person's sadness. Also, a strong positive feeling tone may occur including feelings of love, affection and concern; in fact, the word "love" is frequently used. It seems likely that the person is not only paradoxical and conflictual in thought but also in affect. However, a pervasive forlorn quality, although sometimes minimized by various communicational means, seems to prevail the person's "frame" in a significant amount of people.

The notes also show that the person's demise is cast in the presence of significant others. The person by the note is communicating to someone. The note is an interpersonal message; in fact, it seems clear that the person's "frame" is enmeshed in an interpersonal field including spouses, family, friends, etc. And it seems likely that the

person by the note is trying to tell the "receiver" of the note about his present suicidal "frame". However, the communication is also manipulative and restrictive on the "receiver". The note often contains messages of hate, anger etc. and suicidal person often relates his demise to the "receiver's" behaviour including not meeting his needs and desires especially dependency and love. In summary, the suicide note as a form of communication implies an interactional view of the person's "frame".

A problem with the above analysis may be determining whether such an analysis reflects manifest and/or latent aspects of the message. It seems likely that it merely reflects the manifest "frame" of the person; however, this is certainly an important aspect for our understanding of suicide especially if one is interested in looking at the "frame" of the person who is about to kill himself. However, determining the more latent aspects of the message is also very important. Such an analysis implies a going beyond the notes themselves and the introduction of some theoretical conceptions about latent aspects of suicide. The present author believes that such an approach would be an important next step in the analysis of suicide notes.

The investigation of suicide notes is at an elementary stage and further research is necessary. A further problem regarding the investigation of suicide notes has been raised by one of the major authorities. In a recent paper (Spector, 1977) Shneidman was quoted as saying:

Suicide notes are typically very dramatic and somewhat terse. And yet, as one reads hundreds

of them, one finds that a great many tell pretty much the same story. They are written at the most dramatic moment of a person's life, yet they are often surprisingly commonplace, banal even poignantly dull. It is obviously difficult to write a different or informative suicide note, and impossible to write a comforting one....I think that one is doomed to disappointment if one looks to other suicide notes to tell very much about the event itself.

The suicide note, which purport to tell a great deal, in fact tells very little. It says, in effect that (without using these words) the man is in an existential crisis and is suffering from psychic pain. That he is sensitive; that he had overreaching ambitions which he could not bring to realization. But it doesn't distinguish him from a number of people in his same position. It doesn't say why he committed suicide rather than modify or give up his ambitions. It is banal. For example, he wills his car to someone and adds parenthetically that it needs a tune up.....?

Indeed, suicide notes do not give an unequivocal answer to "why" people kill themselves. They do, however, give us some communication about the person's "frame" and this is a key by itself. Furthermore, the present author earlier suggested a next step in the investigation of the notes. Such a study would call for the review of different theories of suicide; e.g., Freudian, Jungian, Sullivanian, etc. and then the application of these theories to the notes via methods used in archival analysis. The present author believes that such a latent analysis of the notes could help in our understanding of manifest aspects of suicide notes.

The basic procedure of such an investigation is as follows and follows the suggestions of Balance (1973) and Bringmann (1975) about historical investigations. Essentially, the method calls for the recasting of the suicide notes in different theoretical contexts and

"to pursue lines of evidence for each of the available alternative or control hypothesis" (Balance, 1973). More specifically, the antecedent variable(s) to a person's demise have already occurred and, hence, are not experimentally researchable. The research will begin, then with the investigation of the consequent variable; i.e., the suicide note. However as noted by Bringmann (1975), the major problem with this type of investigation, is the control of extraneous variables. In order to overcome this problem, not just one but several theoretical hypothesis which specify the antecedent variable must be formulated. Hence, the method calls for the formulation of control hypotheses about the antecedents of suicide from different theoretical perspectives and, then, predicting the contents of the notes. The research essentially calls for the collecting of evidence in support of several predictions, and, then, establishing from suicide notes, as the archival source, which explanation of suicide is most plausible. Essentially, the notes would be recast in a theoretical context and, hence, it may be hoped the more latent aspects of suicide notes would be revealed.

The present research project is an attempt at carrying out the above type of analysis of suicide notes. Since there are so many different theoretical perspectives, the present author chose a priori three divergent perspectives for investigation. Specifically, this project will take a look at the theories of L. Binswanger, S. Freud and G. Kelly.

Of course, the present author in no way intends or sees the

present project as a crucial experiment. First, the present research is not a true experiment (Hempel, 1966; Anderson, 1971; Isaac, 1971) and; furthermore, it in no way meets the criteria of a crucial experiment (Hempel, 1966). Rather, it is a type of ex post facto research (Kerlinger, 1964; Anderson, 1971) or a type of research, as noted earlier, similar to archival research (Balance, 1973; Bringmann, 1975).

A major step in developing the type of present research is the establishment of antecedent statements. In order to produce these statements, a review of L. Binswanger, S. Freud, and G. Kelly in regard to their view of suicide was undertaken and will be reported briefly below and, then a statement of the researchable hypothesis will be made.

L. Binswanger's view (1958, 1963) of suicide is presented in the case of Ellen West. Binswanger's understanding of suicide begins with the assumption that one can only understand suicide if one approaches suicide without any pre-judgement not even the perspective of "healthy common sense" in which one 'looks down with pity and horror' upon anyone who kills himself. Binswanger, in short, advocates a phenomenological method, which he believes leads to the existential view of suicide.

First and foremost, Binswanger sees suicide as a possible active part of life that can be understood in terms of a person's temporality. Temporality according to this argument, is the key to understanding a person's life including his suicide, if he kills himself. The person who kills himself is seen as ruled by the past and its problems. He is seen as cut off from the future and living in a bare empty present

that is largely devoid of meaning for the person. The person experiences being caught, as it were, by his painful past; and he can see no alternative to this type of existence. This lack of alternative expectation is experienced with a pronounced feeling of dread. Suicide, then, becomes a way of introducing a meaning to the person's life; the suicidal person sees it as an alternative to a dreadful life and empty temporality. Suicide, hence, is a way of solving one's problems and of reducing the guilt about one's dreadful life. Death as the absolute annihilation of existence is seen as giving meaning to the person's present and a way of escaping from the past. Suicide is seen as a way through which a person becomes clearer about his existence by active and voluntary choice; it is a painful awakening that is freely chosen in the face of death about one's dark past and life. As Binswanger (1958) states:

"The suicide is the necessary voluntary consequence of this existential state of things" (p. 295).

Suicide is seen by Binswanger, as the last active practical act of the suicidal person. The suicide, therefore, stems from deliberation, planning, and action and not from fantasies or wishes for Binswanger. Suicide is an act of affirming oneself - an act of being oneself. Life that is lived with dread is seen by the suicidal person as negating himself. The death is seen, therefore, as providing an isolation from the life, the problems and the dread. The suicide is an absolute negation of the life that was lived and, hence,



introduces a meaning to one's life by a choice in one's present. The suicide allows the person to be different and have things different because the suicide allows the person to be himself in a new meaningful temporality. Suicide, hence, takes on a positive meaning. It is a self-introduced action; it is an act of liberation and freedom from the fetters of life. Suicide, therefore, can be seen as a desperate act of authenticity; i.e., affirming oneself in one's temporality. Yet, as Binswager (1968) notes:

where existence can exist only by relinquishing life, there the existence is a tragic existence (p. 298):

S. Freud's view (1910, 1917, 1920a, 1920b, 1923, 1930, 1933, 1941) of suicide is described by him in the following manner:

Analysis has explained the enigma of suicide in the following way: probably no one finds the mental energy required to kill himself unless, in the first place, in doing so he is at the same time killing an object with whom he has identified himself, and, in, the second place, is turning against himself a death-wish which has been directed against someone else (1920b, p. 162).

Essentially, for Freud, suicide involves two major factors or set of wishes: a fulfillment of displaced murderous wishes and a fulfillment of punishment drives. The process of a suicide can be understood as follows:

First, a person invests substantial energy (libido) into a certain person; i.e., an object choice, during the time of the relation. The person, then, becomes attached to this object. How-

ever, this object-relationship becomes undermined due to a real or imagined rejection or injury concerned with the loved object (Freud, 1917, 1941). Essentially this is a severe trauma which the person meets in his life (Freud, 1910). Consequently, the person does not, as occurs normally, withdraw his energy and transfer it to a new object, but something different happens. The free libido is withdrawn and not directed to another object. Rather, the person undergoes a regression by establishing an identification with the abandoned object and, thus, "the shadow of the object" falls on the person (Freud, 1917). As a result of this object loss, the person begins to lack an interest in life (Freud, 1910). In the normal process of loss, the person would also become angry at the rejecting object. However, in the suicidal person, the person tries to repress any feelings of anger over the loss and, in fact, the person turns the anger against himself (Freud, 1923). Furthermore, the person also sees himself deserted by his superego; i.e., a psychic intrapersonal structure that includes among other things the person's conscience and introjects of value regarding the loved-object. As Freud said, "the ego sees itself deserted by the superego and lets itself die." In fact, the superego rages mercilessly against the ego for any feelings of anger against the object through a sense of guilt or rather criticism (Freud, 1923). As a result, the person also experiences extreme stress and anxiety. The person, however, in the end, takes revenge by self-punishment and in tormenting the

rejecting object by means of his illness and ultimate demise. The suicidal person, hence, develops these later means of expression to avoid the necessity of directly expressing his hostility because the object to whom the suicidal person is angry is one of his nearest 'neighbours' and such direct expression would result in severe harshness of the superego. However, essentially the person does have an unconscious death wish for the object. The person, however, who harbors thoughts of suicide is not consciously aware of murderous impulses against others, and, indeed, cannot be aware of the death wishes; rather, he redirects them upon himself. He turns his death-wish on himself. And it is this displaced sadism that aids in the solving of the riddle of suicide (Freud, 1917, 1920B). Essentially, the person punishes himself to punish others. The person turns his anger on himself. Furthermore, the "shadow of the object" with which the person has identified via regression allows the person to launch his anger against himself. According to Freud (1917), a person can become self destructive only by a combination of identification and regression where the person treats himself as an object and "thus in the regression from narcissistic object-choice the object is indeed abolished" (Freud, 1917, p. 247); i.e., the person kills the object that rejected him first by identification with the object than by killing himself. Suicide, therefore, involves a symbolic murder of the object as well as a severe self punishment. It can be explained as a striving for relief from the painful tensions generated by both

unacceptable anger and intolerable guilt. Finally, although suicide is an enigma to the lay person, Freud (1920b) believed that suicide is understandable and not surprising in any person because as he wrote:

Since the unconscious of all human beings is full enough of such death wishes even against those they love" (p. 62).

G. Kelly's view (1955, 1965, 1969) of suicide is based on the assumption that individuals contrive to make sense out of whatever happens. Kelly postulates that 'a person's processes are psychologically channeled by the ways in which he anticipates events.' Man, says Kelly, is a construer of events. Kelly (1965) believes that we can understand suicide only "if we look at the act itself and what it accomplishes from the point of view of the person who performs it" (p. 257). To understand suicide, we need to know what the person died for. As Kelly (1965) stated: "What personal constructions of life and truth, what anticipation formulated from his structured world seemed to be validated by so drastic an act" (p. 259). Suicide can be regarded as 'an act designed to validate' one's anticipations - one's meaning of life. Such validation can occur either when one's worst expectations are confirmed or when one's expectations are invalidated and, hence, collapse.

For Kelly (1955, 1965, 1969) conventional psychological notions (e.g., learning and reinforcement, motivation, feeling and emotion,

cognition) are abandoned and new categories of explanation are introduced. First and foremost, in Kelly's ideas, is the notion that people try to validate their anticipations; i.e., a person tries to sense the similarity between his anticipation and realization. If the person anticipates the worst possible expectation and he senses the realization of this expectation, he may kill himself. If, however, the person's anticipations are not similar to the realization, he may dilate or constrict his expectation, i.e., the person may grasp at more and more things to make better sense out of the events or he can shrink his anticipations into more predictable size. Severe constriction, for Kelly, can lead to suicide, because the constriction may result in more minute predictions which would all be tragic; i.e., the person's anticipation's would be the worst possible, or the constriction may not help in preventing a person's expectations from being invalidated. However, before the person kills himself, he may experience anxiety and/or threat. Kelly (1965) notes that one will experience anxiety if one is aware of events of which one cannot make adequate sense. Threat occurs when the forthcoming events are all too plausible and these events call for a deeply significant change in the person or complete invalidation. Kelly (1955, 1965) also makes use of the concept of hostility and guilt in his understanding of suicide; however, these concepts again are defined differently than traditional construal of these concepts. For Kelly, when a person's attempts at validation or any

other exploratory method do not work that person is experiencing pronounced anxiety and/or threat and is confronted with the decision of either significantly changing his construal of himself and hence undergo severe threat or he may become hostile; e.g., he may somehow force events to fit his anticipations and, thereby, prove him right. Such hostility, of course, would be directed toward the significant threatening object. Of course, the experience of hostility may produce pronounced anxiety and the hostility itself may not be sufficient to stop the person's sense of personal invalidation of his world and it is this personal invalidation that can lead to suicide since the person will not be able to anticipate his future or make sense of his present. Central to this invalidation would be a person's sense of role; i.e., the anticipations of significant people about the person that the person has accepted or identified as part of himself. During the experience of invalidation, one's role can also be invalidated and, hence, leave the person with no role; this, for Kelly, is guilt. And this guilt since it involves the loss of one's basic maintenance process in relation to significant people (Kelly, 1955) can aid in the undertaking of the suicidal act. Essentially, for Kelly (1955, 1965, 1969) people anticipate events freely. However, a person's anticipation may be invalidated and this invalidation can lead to constriction, anxiety, threat, hostility and/or guilt and ultimately to suicide unless the person relearns to validate his sense of himself and his world. In fact, the person can be seen as killing himself as a validation act; i.e.,

the suicide is a solution to his problem of invalidation. The person attempts to make sense of himself by suicide for he sees no alternative to suicide, and, hence, he introduces a meaning in his life by suicide. In summary, as Kelly (1965) has stated:

We are apt to say that a person has committed a suicide....when it seems clear by our lights that the problem he faced had a better solution ...We think we would have known better. Perhaps so. Nevertheless, the fact remains that none of the alternatives that beckon so clearly in our minds was quite so visible in his. So the suicide makes his choice, and not ours.  
(p. 259).

In order to determine whether all or any or any part of the above theories of suicide are true or false one can check their correspondence to suicide notes as suggested earlier. Essentially, in this project, a way of verifying the truth or falsity of the theories needs to be undertaken, i.e., a method for a verification procedure is needed. Specifically, the problem is as follows: How can the statements of the different theories be formulated, so that, they correspond to the statements of the data; i.e., the suicide notes. A procedure presented by Carnap (1932) presents such a method.

First, the theories of suicide are embodied in language. However, according to Carnap (1932) the sentence of the language must be formulated in a "physical language" in order for the theories to be verifiable. He presents the procedure of formulating such a language as follows:

A persons test (verifies) a system-sentence by deducing from it sentences of his own protocol language and comparing these sentences with those of the actual protocol (Carnap, 1932, p. 66).

Essentially, Carnap suggests that the sentence of a general psychological theory must be translatable into antecedent singular specific sentences (protocol sentences) in order to test the theory. A basic component of the present procedure is that one must be able to make an observation to determine (test) the truth or falsity; i.e., the falsifiability. The procedure, hence, calls for deducing statement in the form of classifications from the theories that are publicly verifiable. Therefore, for any of the theories to be meaningful they must be translated into observable protocol sentences. The protocol sentences will, hence, be the meaning of the theory for observational purposes. However, a major possible problem with this method is that the deduced sentences must form a classification and, hence, cannot be too specific since they need to be compared with the data; i.e., the actual protocol, and if they are too specific they will not allow for numerous cases to be subsumed under it. So, in the present research, the different theories of suicide will be tested by deducing antecedent protocol sentences and comparing these sentences with the statements in the suicide notes.

The next step of the present procedure is the method of induction to the discovery of general ideas. However, the general ideas cannot be established "except by the so-called method of induction from the available singular sentences" (Carnap, 1932, p. 168). Therefore, the method calls for the deduction from the theories testable protocols and, then, the induction to the more general again. Basically, this is the method of the logical



empiricist (Ayer, 1959). And, it may be hoped that this method will allow us to test the theories about suicide in our investigation of suicide notes.

Therefore, the next and final step before the method in the present project is the deduction of the antecedent protocol sentences. These sentences, of course, will provide the hypotheses that are to be tested in this project. The following are, hence, the deductions of the theories presented earlier:

The antecedent protocol sentences for L. Binswanger are as follows:

- 1) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is preoccupied, absorbed and/or engrossed by his past.
- 2) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is cut off, detached and/or disinherited from his future.
- 3) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is living in a bare empty present that is meaningless and/or purposeless.
- 4) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is experiencing pronounced dread; i.e., he seems to be anticipating and/or experiencing great fear or anxiety.
- 5) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he sees his suicide as a meaningful event against the background of an otherwise meaningless, and/or purposeless life.
- 6) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is voluntarily choosing to kill himself.
- 7) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his

suicide is basically a consciously planned action.

- 8) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act undertaken to isolate his life, his problems and/or his dread from himself.
- 9) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act of liberation and freedom from his life, his problems and/or his dread.
- 10) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he sees his demise as giving him some personal meaning or purpose.

The antecedent protocol sentences for S. Freud are as follows:

- 1) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has experienced the loss or rejection of a significant person.
- 2) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is preoccupied with a person that he has lost or who has rejected him.
- 3) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is in some direct or indirect fashion identifying himself with a rejecting or lost person.
- 4) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is not angry at a rejecting or lost person; however, he appears indirectly to be angry at that person.
- 5) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is angry at himself.
- 6) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is overly critical of himself - he seems to be quite harsh

on himself.

- 7) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he wants to punish himself.
- 8) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he wants to torment someone else by his demise.
- 9) In the suicide note, the person communicates directly and/or indirectly that he wants to kill someone else.
- 10) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicidal behaviour is a retreat to a less mature form of behaviour.

The antecedent protocol statements for G. Kelly are as follows:

- 1) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an attempt to make sense out of whatever has happened to him.
- 2) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is killing himself because his worst expectations are coming true.
- 3) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his expectations/anticipations about himself, others and/or the world are not coming true.
- 4) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is expecting less and less from himself, others and/or the world.
- 5) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is helpless in understanding an unpredictable and senseless world.

- 6) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is aware of events that don't make adequate sense to him.
- 7) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he needs to change himself in order to handle forthcoming events in a way that seems to be impossible to himself.
- 8) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has been trying or is trying to make people or events fit with what he expects is the right thing.
- 9) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he does not seem to fit into or be able to do what other people expect of him.
- 10) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is killing himself because he sees no alternative to this action and he sees the suicide as giving him some meaning in his life.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Judges

Three independent judges\* were used in this study. The judges were individuals who are graduate students working on or recently completed their Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Windsor; Windsor, Ontario. The reason for the professional judges is due to the nature of the investigation and the possible moral and ethical concerns associated with asking someone to think about suicide and work with suicide notes that would be necessary in this project.

#### Materials

An often encountered problem in the area of research in suicide notes is the obtaining of the notes themselves (Fredrich, 1969). Although the present author attempted to obtain current notes from local facilities, he finally chose to utilize previously studied notes that have been published (Shneidman & Farberow, 1955)\*\* Permission to use these notes for the present research was obtained from the authors and publishers.

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\*The present author wishes to thank P. Arnaut, C. Loughner & D. Rudzinski for serving as judges in the project.

\*\*From Clues to Suicide by Shneidman, E. & Farberow, N. Copyright, 1955 by the McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc. Used with permission of McGraw-Hill Book Co.

The data consists of 33 genuine notes, that were obtained from the files of the Office of the Coroner, Los Angeles County. Seven Hundred and Twenty One suicide notes had been collected. The notes had been written between 1945-1954 and included notes from both sexes - almost three males to every one female - and from individuals who ranged in age from 13 to 96. From this sample, 33 notes were selected.

As noted earlier in this paper, a procedure that has been devised in the area of investigation into suicide notes is the comparison of genuine vs. simulated notes. The reason for the use of simulated notes is to introduce some controlled observation. Hence, 33 simulated notes will also be used. These 33 simulated notes were obtained from the same source as the genuine notes.

In order to introduce homogeneity into the two different sources of data, the 66 notes were selected from those written by individuals who were male, Caucasian, Protestant, native-born, and between the ages of 25 to 55. This data will be reproduced in the appendix of this paper (See Appendix A).

#### Procedure

Before the administration of this research project, the judges were asked to undertake a pilot study. The pilot study was undertaken as a training session for the judges and to determine whether any problems existed in the study. The pilot study called for the judges to correspond the actual antecedent protocol sentences and 10 practice suicide notes. From this pilot study, which indicated some judging

problems related to the instructions, the procedure of this study was refined especially in terms of specific instructions to the judges. After the training session, the experimental set of notes and instructions were given to the judges.

In this project, the judges were asked to rate the notes according to the antecedent protocol statements that were developed for this project. All subjects judged all 66 notes and were not aware of the control methods.

Specifically, the judges were instructed:

Enclosed, you will find a collection of suicide notes. Your task will be to verify whether the statements provided below correspond or compare to the contents of the suicide notes. The statements provided below are a classification of the possible content of suicide notes. You are to determine whether the contents in the suicide notes are a particular or specific instance of that classification or not. Your comparison should be observable; however, the classifications may be more abstract than the specific instances. Thus you will have to make judgements about whether particular contents of a note are included in a given classification or not. Your task is to either conclude yes or no.

Thank you.

The experimenter presented antecedent protocol sentences in a random order (Edwards, 1950) and the suicide notes. Appendix B presents the research design in detail.

### Analysis of Data

The experimenter\* will determine inter-rater reliability; the statistical procedure calls for a coefficient of concordance (Siegel, 1956; & Kendall, 1970). After this, he will determine which of the three theories are overall verified by at least 70% of the notes. Utilizing an extremely liberal expectation, if a specific aspect of a theory is reflected in 70% of the notes, it will be considered to verify the theory in the note; i.e., at least 1 classification out of the possible 10 must be present in 70% of the notes for it to be considered reflective of the theory. The procedure will call for a count of the number of times that at least 2 out of 3 judges agree about 1 classification out of a possible 10 classifications of each theorist being present in the data. After this, the experimenter will determine which antecedent protocol statements are verified by at least half of the suicide notes; the procedure will call for a count of the number of times that at least 2 out of 3 judges agree about a classification's correspondence to a note, to determine the overall count of a classification in the data. The above procedure will be undertaken because it is assumed that, with a liberal estimate, if a specific aspect of a theory is valid it should be reflected in

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\*The author would like to thank Dr. F. Auld for his assistance and participation in the statistical procedures for the present study.



at least half of the data. After this, the experimenter will determine whether there are any significant differences between genuine and simulated notes. First, the experimenter will determine whether there are any overall differences between genuine and simulated notes for each of the three theorists; the statistical procedure calls for a Mann-Whitney U two-tailed test (Siegel, 1956). After this, the experimenter will determine whether there are any specific differences between genuine and simulated notes for each of the 30 classifications that were studied in the present project; the statistical procedure calls for a  $\chi^2$  for two-independent samples (Siegel, 1956) and it calls for the use of the Fisher and Yates' tables of significance for 2 x 2 contingency tables (Fisher & Yates, 1957).

### CHAPTER III

#### RESULTS

A coefficient of concordance was performed to assess the inter-judge reliability in the present study. An examination of the ratings by the three judges revealed a W of .696. This coefficient of concordance (W) was highly significant ( $X^2 = 60.552$ , d.f. = 29,  $p < .001$ ).

A count of the number of times that one classification out of a possible 10 classification for each theorists corresponded to a note was undertaken to assess whether a theory was valid. It was assumed that at least one classification out of a possible 10 should be reflected in at least 70% of the data; this is an extremely liberal expectation. The results with at least two out of three judges agreeing about one classification out of a possible 10 classifications correspondance to the data is as follows:

For Binswanger in the genuine notes, the result was 20 out of 33.

For Binswanger in the simulated notes, the result was 29 out of 33.

For Freud in the genuine notes, the result was 24 out of 33.

For Freud in the simulated notes, the result was 14 out of 33.

For Kelly in the genuine notes, the result was 20 out of 33.

For Kelly in the simulated note, the result was 18 out of 33.

As can be seen from the above results, Freud was the only theorist

who reached the pre-established expectation for the genuine suicide notes. Interestingly, Freud was also the theorist who reached the lowest value for the simulated notes. Also interestingly, Binswanger was the only theorist who reached the pre-established expectation for the simulated notes. The other results were not within the expected range for either genuine or simulated notes.

A count of the number of times that a classification corresponded to a note was undertaken to assess whether specific aspects of a theory were valid. It was assumed that a classification should be reflected in at least half of the data to be valid. The utilization of 50% is assumed to be a liberal expectation. The results with at least two out of three judges agreeing about a classifications correspondence to the data is shown in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, none of the classifications reached the expected significance for the genuine notes. Two of the classifications that were deduced from Binswanger's theory of suicide reached the expected significance in simulated notes. Specifically, Binswanger's ideas about that the person communicates that his suicide is an act undertaken to isolate his life, his problems and/or his dread from himself and that the person communicates that his suicide is an act of liberation and freedom from his life, his problems and/or his dread were validated in the simulated notes.

A Mann-Whitney U two-tailed test was performed to assess whether there were any overall differences between the genuine and simulated notes for each of the three theorists. The data that were presented

Table 1

Results of the Count of the Number of Times that, at Least,  
 2 out of 3 Judges Agreed About a Classifications  
 Correspondance to the Genuine and Simulated Notes

Classification	Genuine Notes	Simulated Notes
The antecedent protocol sentences for L. Binswanger are as follows:		
1) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is pre-occupied, absorbed and/or engrossed by his past.	4	2
2) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is cut off, detached and/or disinherited from his future.	1	6
3) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is living in a bare empty present that is meaningless and/or purposeless.	1	2
4) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is experiencing pronounced dread; i.e., he seems to be anticipating and/or experiencing great fear or anxiety.	5	2
5) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he sees his suicide as a meaningful event against the background of an otherwise meaningless, and/or purposeless life.	0	2
6) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is voluntarily choosing to kill himself.	7	14

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

Classification	Genuine Notes	Simulated Notes
7) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is basically a consciously planned action.	8	10
8) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act undertaken to isolate his life, his problems and/or his dread from himself.	9	19
9) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act of liberation and freedom from his life, his problems and/or his dread.	6	18
10) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he sees his demise as giving him some personal meaning or purpose.	2	5
The antecedent protocol sentences for S. Freud are as follows:		
1) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has experienced the loss or rejection of a significant person.	9	2
2) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is preoccupied with a person that he has lost or who has rejected him.	12	2
3) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is in some direct or indirect fashion identifying himself with a rejecting or lost person.	11	2
4) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is not angry at a rejecting or lost person; however, he appears indirectly to be angry at that person.	6	3

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

Classification	Genuine Notes	Simulated Notes
5) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is angry at himself.	2	0
6) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is overly critical of himself - he seems to be quite harsh on himself.	7	4
7) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he wants to punish himself.	2	0
8) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he wants to torment someone else by his demise.	7	1
9) In the suicide note, the person communicates directly and/or indirectly that he wants to kill someone else.	5	0
10) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicidal behaviour is a retreat to a less mature form of behaviour.	2	10

The antecedent protocol statements for G. Kelly are as follows:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an attempt to make sense out of whatever has happened to him.               | 2 | 1 |
| 2) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is killing himself because his worst expectations are coming true.                      | 1 | 4 |
| 3) In the suicide note, the person communicates that his expectations/anticipations about himself, others and/or the world are not coming true. | 9 | 6 |

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

Classification	Genuine Notes	Simulated Notes
4) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is expecting less and less from himself, others and/or the world.	8	10
5) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is helpless in understanding an unpredictable and senseless world.	1	2
6) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is aware of events that don't make adequate sense to him.	3	2
7) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he needs to change himself in order to handle forthcoming events in a way that seems to be impossible to himself.	0	1
8) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has been trying or is trying to make people or events fit with what he expects is the right thing.	1	1
9) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he does not seem to fit into or be able to do what other people expect of him.	1	1
10) In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is killing himself because he sees no alternative to this action and he sees the suicide as giving him some meaning in his life.	3	7

in Table 1 were used for the calculations. The results showed that Freud's classifications were able to distinguish genuine notes from simulated notes; such that, his theory seems more applicable to genuine notes than simulated notes ( $U(10,10) = 18.5, p < .05$ ). The results showed that Binswanger's classifications were not able to distinguish genuine notes from simulated notes ( $U(10,10) = 34, n.s.$ ). The results also showed that Kelly's classifications were not able to distinguish genuine notes from simulated notes ( $U(10,10) = 43, n.s.$ ).

A  $\chi^2$  for two-independent samples was performed to assess whether there were any specific differences between genuine and simulated notes for each of the classifications that were deduced from the theories of Binswanger, Freud and Kelly. The data that were presented in Table 1 were used for the calculations. The results showed the following significant findings for the genuine notes:

1. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has experienced the loss or rejection of a significant person ( $\chi^2 = 4.99, d.f. = 1, p < .05$ ).
2. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is preoccupied with a person that he has lost or who has rejected him ( $\chi^2 = 6.13, d.f. = 1, p < .05$ ).
3. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is in some direct or indirect fashion identifying himself with a rejecting or lost person ( $\chi^2 = 6.81, d.f. = 1, p < .01$ ).

All of the above bits of information were deduced from the theory of Freud.



The results showed the following significant findings for the simulated notes:

1. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act undertaken to isolate his life, his problem and/or his dread from himself ( $\chi^2 = 5.08$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .05$ ).
2. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act of liberation and freedom from his life, his problems and/or his dread of himself ( $\chi^2 = 7.69$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .01$ ).
3. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicidal behaviour is a retreat to a less mature form of behaviour ( $\chi^2 = 4.99$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .05$ ).

The first two bits of information were deduced from the theory of Binswanger; the latter bit of information was deduced from the theory of Freud.

The Fisher and Yates tables of significance for  $2 \times 2$  contingency tables were utilized for the  $\chi^2$  tests. An examination of the results showed consistent findings with the above results.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The results yielded clear evidence for an inter-judge reliability on the judges' correspondence of the classifications to the genuine and simulated notes. The coefficient of concordance was .696; this agreement between the judges was high and significant. Therefore, one can conclude that the procedure of Carnap (1932) in formulating specific classifications from a theory and checking their correspondence with some data was possible in the present study. The latent aspects of suicide as reflected in theoretical positions can be investigated in the manifest content of suicide notes via the agreement of the latent material to the manifest content by external examiners. Specifically, in the present study, the judges were able to correspond the classifications (that were deduced from the theories of Binswanger, Freud & Kelly) with the archival material of the suicide notes with significant concordance. The present author believes that people can, indeed, judge the agreement of a classification with a source of data if the classification is clear and reasonably specific. Interference with the clarity of the classification will probably result in a breakdown of the person's ability to verify a classification with the data.

The results showed that, with an extremely liberal criterion of at least one classification out of a possible 10 for each theorist

correspondence with at least 70% of the data, only Freud's theory reached the pre-established expectation for the genuine notes.

Freud was also the theorist who reached the lowest observed value for the simulated notes. Hence, only Freud's theory of suicide as reflected in genuine notes seems to be verified by this liberal expectation. Interestingly, Binswanger's theory reached the pre-established expectation for the simulated notes; hence, Binswanger's theory seems to be verified for the simulated notes.

The results showed that, with a liberal criterion for the correspondence of the specific classifications with at least 50% of the genuine suicide notes, none of the three theorists' classifications were determined to be reflected in the data. Interestingly, two classifications that were deduced from Binswanger's theory reached the pre-established expectation for the simulated notes. These classifications referred to the ideas that suicide is an act undertaken to isolate and liberate oneself from one's problems and life. Hence, a cautionary note seems in order because of the low occurrence of the specific classifications in the data.

The major procedure of analyzing suicide notes has historically been to compare genuine notes with simulated notes. This method, according to Shneidman and Farberow (1957), allows one to understand the genuine notes by comparing them to something similar to them. The investigator by this comparison can demonstrate the figural characteristics of what he is investigating by noting the differences

between genuine and simulated notes. This method of studying suicide notes, according to Shneidman and Farberow (1957), is a direct application of John Stuart Mill's Method of Difference - which is an essential aspect of scientific observation and experimentation.

The results yielded clear evidence for differences between the genuine and simulated notes. The results showed that the judges differentiated their ratings on various measures for genuine and simulated notes. Hence, in the present study, one can look at the figural characteristics of suicide notes by noting the differences between the genuine and simulated notes on the various measures that were deduced from the theories of Binswanger, Freud and Kelly. The results showed that the overall classifications that were deduced from Freud's theory were judged to be significantly more representative of the genuine notes than the simulated notes. The overall classifications that were deduced from Binswanger and Kelly's theories were not judged to be significantly more representative of either the genuine notes or the simulated notes. Therefore, the overall theory of Freud about suicide seems to be validated rather than the theories of Binswanger and Kelly in the present study. The previous conclusions seem even more warranted if one notes that Freud's theory was the only one which surpassed the pre-established expectation of the correspondence of at least one classification to 70% of the data. Furthermore, if one adds all of the data bearing on the correspondence of all the classifications of Freud to the suicide notes that were presented

in Table 1 than the number of confirmatory observations for Freud in the genuine notes was highest, and in the simulated notes was lowest. However, a cautionary note seems in order because of the archival nature of the present study; hence, the previous conclusions cannot be experimentally conclusive. However, these results are quite interesting and suggestive.

The specific characteristics of genuine notes that differ significantly from simulated notes in the present study, and hence, imply the figural aspects of the "frame" of the suicidal person who writes a note, are as follows:

In the genuine notes the person communicates that he has experienced, and is preoccupied with, a significant person that he has lost or who has rejected him. He also sees himself, in some direct or indirect fashion, identifying himself with the rejecting or lost person. These results seem to be related to the previous findings of earlier studies, that were synthesized previously in this project, that the person who writes a suicide note makes numerous references to important people that were related to his demise and that the person believes that his needs were not met by these significant people. From the present study, one can further conclude that the suicidal person sees these important people as either being lost to him or having rejected him. He is also quite preoccupied in his thought with his loss or rejection and hence, the loss or rejection seems to have a pronounced influence on the "frame" that the suicidal person takes about the way he experiences his situation. Furthermore, the suicidal person also

sees himself as identifying with the person or people who he has lost or have rejected him. The result of the suicidal person is identifying himself with the lost or rejecting object can be interpreted in the following manner:

The suicidal person via identification seems to adopt characteristics of the lost or rejecting object; i.e., the attitudes of the lost or rejecting object toward the suicidal person seem to be adopted by the suicidal person himself. The suicidal person may also see or think himself like the lost or rejecting object and therefore devalues himself. This interpretation is consistent with the finding of Shneidman and Farberow (1957) that the person who kills himself had problems of identification; i.e., the person who kills himself was confused about his concept of self. Shneidman and Farberow (1957) have reported that the suicidal person exhibits fallacious identification between the self as experienced as self and the self as experienced by others. From the present study, one can conclude that the suicidal person exhibits fallacious identification between the self as experienced as self and the self as experienced by the lost or rejecting object. The fallacious identification probably relates to a confusion in the suicidal person's thought process. The previous ideas plus the finding that the person is functionally fixed over his loss and/or rejection relates to the previous finding of earlier studies that the suicidal person's thought processes are unusual and, at times, faulty. The present author believes that the unusual thought processes allow the suicidal person to see suicide as a sol-

ution to his problem(s). Shneidman and Farberow (1957) have also hypothesized that the unusual thought process of the suicidal person aids in his leap into oblivion.

In review, Freud sees the events of object loss and/or object rejection as the important events that are usually experienced by a person who kills himself. For Freud, the rejection and/or loss of a significant object is experienced as a severe trauma by a person and depending on one's adjustment may be a prelude to suicidal behaviour.

Interestingly, all of the specific classifications that were judged to be figural of genuine notes were deduced from Freud's theory of suicide. None of Binswanger and Kelly's deduced classifications occurred as essential characteristics of the genuine notes. According to Carnap (1932), we can make an induction from the data to the specific aspects of Freud's theory of suicide for verificational means. However, it should be noted that there is a problem with an induction from the data to Freud's theory; namely that, seven out of the ten classifications that were derived from Freud's theory were not judged to be essential characteristics of genuine suicide notes when compared to simulated suicide notes. Furthermore, one of the classifications in regard to Freud's idea about suicide being a regression (i.e., suicidal behaviour being a retreat to a less mature form of behaviour) was judged to be more characteristic of people who write simulated notes. However, according to Carnap (1932), we can make generalizations from our results about our significant specific results. Furthermore,

we can make an overall generalization about Freud's theory from our result that the classifications that were deduced from Freud's theory were judged to be overall more significant for genuine notes than simulated notes. However, as noted previously, the present study is not an experiment, and hence, the induction from the data to the overall and specific aspects of Freud's theory is speculative and suggestive but not experimentally conclusive.

The specific characteristics of simulated notes that differ significantly from genuine notes in the present study, and hence, imply the figural aspects of the "frame" of the person who simulates a suicide note, are as follows:

In the simulated notes, the person communicates that his suicide is an act undertaken to isolate his life, his problems, and/or dread from himself. He also communicates that his suicide is an act of liberation and freedom from his life, his problems, and/or dread. And, he communicates that his suicidal behaviour is a retreat to an immature form of behaviour.

The classifications that were judged to be figural of simulated notes were deduced from the theories of Binswanger and Freud. Freud's theory of suicide is reflected in the notion that suicide is an immature form of behaviour. The other bits of information were deduced from Binswanger's theory of suicide. Interestingly, Binswanger's theory seems to be specifically more appropriate for simulated notes than genuine notes in regard to the two significant ideas. Furthermore, Binswanger was the only theorist who surpassed the pre-established



expectation of the correspondence of the classifications to the data; the expectation that at least one classification out of a possible 10 classifications of Binswanger would correspond with at least 70% of the simulated notes. And, if one adds all of the data about the observations of the correspondence of all of the classifications of Binswanger to the simulated suicide notes that were presented in Table 1, then the observations for Binswanger in the simulated notes were the highest. Therefore, it seems that Binswanger missed the 'Ding-an-sich', but found the simulated 'Ding' of the common sense perspective in his theory. Binswanger's phenomenological method, which he believes leads to the unjudgemental existential view of suicide, seems itself to have some pre-judgements about suicide. A probable reason for the present findings is that Binswanger's focus in his theory of suicide is on the existential crisis of suicide and, according to the present results, it compares to the "frame" that people take who write simulated notes. People who write simulated notes may see suicide as an existential crisis, adopting various elements of Binswanger's theory (e.g., suicide as an isolation from life and suicide as act of liberation and freedom) as well as Freud's idea that suicide is an immature adjustment. In regard to the point of suicide being an immature adjustment, people who write simulated notes see suicide as an immature form of behaviour but this is not true of people generally who write genuine notes. One can conclude that people who killed themselves and wrote a note saw their suicide as a solution to their situation but others see the suicide as a solution to problems,

but they also see that solution as an escape and an immature adjustment. One may speculate that the person who writes a simulated note is aware of more mature solutions which the suicidal person is not conscious of during his steps to suicide.

Kelly's theory of suicide seems to be disconfirmed as a whole as well as in detail in the present archival study. Interestingly, if one looks at all of the data bearing or confirmatory in Table 1, one finds that confirmatory observations for Kelly in the genuine notes were the lowest. A possible reason for the present findings is that Kelly in his theory of suicide fails to dilate his construals of different events. Rather, Kelly forces events to fit his constricted anticipations and, thereby, proves his theory about suicide right by his anticipations. According to the present study, Kelly's as well as Binswanger's anticipations of suicide may be incorrect; they appear to take the non-validated "frame" about suicide. However, given the archival nature of the present study, the above conclusions remain speculative. Finally, it is understood that the present study cannot be crucial in empirically establishing or rejecting the validity of any theory of suicide. However, although the results may not be experimentally conclusive, the present study does offer some important data regarding the theories of Binswanger, Freud and Kelly about suicide and, even more important, the present study offers some important data about suicide notes themselves.

The present paper has approached suicide by looking at the "frame"

that a person takes who kills himself, by using suicide notes as a key to understanding the suicidal person. Clearly, the present study has added some important information to an understanding of the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a suicidal person experiences his situation. Furthermore, the present study has shown that the simulated "frame" is similar but also significantly different from the genuine "frame". This finding is consistent with Goffman's (1974) idea that "as-if-frames" are similar but different than the real "frames". Therefore people who write a note and people who simulate a note, key into significantly different important aspects about suicide. The simulated notes are fabrications and in some ways are out-of-the-genuine-"frame"-activity (Goffman, 1974). Although these fabrications may be seen as a delusory tendency, the present author believes that the person playing at being suicidal has some ideas about suicide and may even see positive evidence for his ideas about suicide from his experience. He, then, projects these ideas into the simulated "frame" that he takes about suicide; in fact, he cannot but project his ideas because he is not experiencing the actual events. The person that simulates being suicidal fails to know some of the significant characteristics of the genuine "frame". This seems understandable, given that the person who writes a simulated note is playing at being suicidal but the person who writes a genuine note is, indeed, suicidal. The person who writes a simulated note cannot typically see all of the genuine "frame" of the suicidal person. Vice versa, the person who writes a genuine note cannot typically see all

of the "frame" that a non-suicidal person may take about suicide and about the suicidal person himself. In conclusion, the real suicidal "frame" seems to be difficult to understand objectively and completely by non-suicidal people since the suicidal person takes his "frame" and not our fabricated "frame". Hence, it is important for us to remember that it is the suicidal person who frames his situation and not us.

Previously, the author raised the question of generalizability - i.e., can the information that is obtained from people who write suicide notes be generalized to other people who do not write a note? Since only a small proportion of the individuals who commit suicide leave notes, it is probably inappropriate to generalize interpretations of the present study to the "frame" of suicidal individuals who do not leave notes. However, science does allow one to speculate and, within such speculation, the author believes that one can transfer the data from the suicidal people who write notes to other people who do not write notes. Certainly, one can speculate by asking questions from the data that were reported in the present study about suicidal people who do not write notes; and maybe about people who are thinking about suicide; and maybe about people who occasionally are suicidal; and so forth and so forth.

An important issue that the author wants to raise and others have raised is the fact that it is very difficult to obtain suicide notes for research purposes. The present author believes that some collaborative effort among researchers and various facilities that may obtain notes is needed; suicide notes without the identifying data should be

made available to researchers. Furthermore, an international data source should be established because such an archival source would be a rich potential for further research.

The present study raises some suggestions about possible future research. The method that was used in the present study will be appropriate for further investigation of the theories of Binswanger, Freud and Kelly about suicide as well as other theories (e.g., Jungian, Sullivanian, etc.). Furthermore, the method, that was derived from Carnap (1932), should be applicable to other archival data than suicide notes.

In conclusion, the present research project was undertaken to help in developing an understanding of manifest aspects of suicide notes. The author believes that the present study has, indeed, increased our understanding of suicide notes and the "frame" of the suicidal person. Although no one may know why someone commits suicide, the author believes that there are some ways that have allowed and will allow us to understand suicide more clearly.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
SUICIDE NOTES THAT  
WERE USED IN THIS STUDY

1. To the Police. No note--one was written before this. Los Angeles Police already have a record of one attempt. Notify-- Anne M. Jones, 100 Main St., Los Angeles, tel. BA 00000. I live at 100 Spring St., Los Angeles, I work at Ford, 100 Broadway. That is all.  
I can't find my place in life.

J. William Smith

2. Dear Mom, In the last week a number of occurrences have forced me into a position where I feel my life is not worth continuing. Friday I lost the job I have held for the past seven years. When I told my wife she packed her bags and left me. For six years she has been living with me, not for me but for my money. Mom please take care of Mary for me. I'm leaving and I don't want Betty to have her.  
I have nothing left to live for so I'm just checking out.

I love you Mom, Bill

3. I hope this is what you wanted.
4. Dear, please forgive me for leaving you with all the responsibilities that this is certain to bring on you. If there is anything of me that can be used in any medical or scientific way please don't refuse to let them as my last request. I am very proud of our son, and his high potential in his chosen field for which he has real talent. Bye for the last time, and never forget that you were the best thing that ever happened to me. Have my brother help you, I know he will want to very much.
5. Dearest Mary. This is to say goodbye. I have not told you because I did not want you to worry, but I have been feeling bad for 2 years, with my heart. I knew that if I went to a doctor I would lose my job. I think this is best for all concerned. I am in the car in the garage. Call the police but please don't come out there. I love you very much darling. Goodbye,

Bill

6. I am tired of living so I decided to end it all, hope this will not distress anybody.



7. Dear Mary. I regret that things have reached such a state that this is the only way out for me and my family. I apologize for the trouble I've caused.
8. This is the last note I shall ever wright. No one should feel bad about my going as I am not worth it. I don't want to go but there is nothing else to do.

My Love kept after me until I lost control and struck at the only one I ever loved. The only thing that meant anything to me. Then I got tight. When I struck at her something snapped inside my head. I could feel it. I didn't want to hurt her ever. She is Mary Jones of 100 Main St. Los Angeles. Her aunt's phone is BA 00000. She lives close by. Please get in tutch with them at once. She keped after me until this is all I can do. I must.

My last request is not to be put 6 ft. under but burned and my ashes scattered over the mountains.

Please don't let my brother know how or why I died. To her it must be an accident. Mary is the most wonderful person on earth. I just wasn't the right one for her. It is not her fault I fell so madly in Love with her.

I have never been much good. I have only hurt everyone.

Well at least I have loved. I loved her and her two girls more than words could ever tell. They were like my own girls to me.

Well, that's it.

John W. Smith

Get in touch with Mary Jones at once. Call BA 00000. Tell Mrs. Brown. She will see Mary. Thank you.

John William Smith

9. Dearest: Not being of sound mind I have decided to leave this world by electrocuting myself.

Bill

10. Honey I got you into this thing and it was no fault of yours-- so I am taking the only way out and I leave everything which has all been acquired since we were married to you my darling wife--Mary Smith--and God Bless You Darling. Forgive me-- goodbye dear. You trusted me and I thought I was doing everything for the best but I used poor judgement I thought I was

doing everything for the best but I used poor judgment and poor management on my part and bit off more than I could chew but didn't know it at the time I did it. Sell everything before winter sets in--I leave everything of value of any kind or nature including real estate--home--and all to my darling wife. Tell my mother--sister I said God bless them all and forgive me--Goodbye darling and God bless you all.

Your loving husband always,  
William J. Smith

11. Dear Mary, The reason for my despondency is that you'd prefer the company of almost anyone to mine. 2. You told me you had nothing to look forward to on week ends. You told me you preferred living alone. This led to more sedatives. I have lost the love of my two children. You blamed me for your vaginal bleeding. Your first husband was denied normal sexual intercourse because you said it hurt. I received the same accuse. You said it hurt even out of wedlock. This you cant help. But affection would have been harmless. I had little of that. But gaiety you saved for strangers, but even so I loved you. My salary wasn't enough for a large family, with the car upkeep. I was happy regardless. So were you between moods also. You are free now to frequent the places where they drink and indulge in loose talk. Please refrain from giving Betty sips of beer, after all she is only 12. Make her love you some other way. Soon she'll dominate you and one thing leads to another. You don't want another child where your boy is. Your love for me would have endured if it had been the real thing.

Dr. Jones did all he could for my internal trouble. When we quarrel over other and younger men it was silly but you would have been hurt too. It's O.K. to be friendly but not hilarious. Nembutal has a tendency to make you tolerant rather than jealous. It headed off many a quarrel because its quieting to the nerves. As you know I took them for sleep and spastic colon at nite; also migraine headache.

Well, I've loved you through 3 years of quarreling, adjusting the sex angle the way you said it pleased you. Your word for it was "ecstasy." Farewell and good fortune. I hope you find someone who doesn't "hurt" you as you said 3 of us did. All the love I have,

Bill

Notify my kin by mail. Call Georgia St. Hosp. Ambulance.

12. Dear Mary: I am sorry to cause you a lot of trouble and grife but I think this is best for all of us.

Dad

13. Dear Mary, I don't know why I am doing this unless my reasoning has gone all to pot. Something must have slipped.

Bill

14. My Dearest Wife: I cannot endure this situation any longer, I cannot believe I have been so bad a husband as to merit this. Something is certainly wrong. I honestly don't know what it is. Whatever you may be searching for I hope with all my heart you find. Please be good to little Betty, our daughter, I love her so.

I am talking over this Cyanide deal to myself. God knows what I'll do. I have it here. Possibly 20 grains--5 more than is necessary. I still love you. Be good to Betty Please.

15. Dear Mary. You have been the best wife a man could want and I still love you after fifteen years.

Don't think to badly of me for taking this way out but I can't take much more pain and sickness also I may get to much pain or so weak that I can't go this easy way. With all my love forever--

Bill

16. Goodbye dear wife. I cannot stand the suffering any longer. I am doing this by my own free will. You will be well taken care of.

Love and goodbye

17. My Darling: I'm sorry to leave you this way, but it looks life the only way out for me. Things have become so uncertain and unbearable, that I believe it will be better this way. Have the kids remember me, and don't be greivous because I took this way out. Never forget that I love you with all my heart and soul.

Bill

18. Dear Mother. I just cannot take it any more this is no way out but this has me down. I Joseph William Smith give ever thing to Henry Jones my car and what ever I have.

Joseph Smith

19. This is the end. Ive had enough. Cant take anymore.

20. Dear Mother and Mary, I am sorry to tell you this but Jo told you that I was drinking again. I won't lie about it. Because I quit for 5 week and never taken a drink. But Jo had come up home two nite a week after she got off from work and she would stay with me. But ever nite she came up she was drunk, and I would put her to bed. And on the nite of 12 of March she came drunk and when I went to work I left her in my bed and when she got up that was Wed. She went home she told me. But she didn't go home she went and got drunk, and I had been give her money to pay her room, and I give her money before I went that morning. But she go to the tavern and she got drunk and she got in a fight. I don't no who with, but it was on the street and she eather fell or got nook down and she got a black and blue place on her hip big as a teacup. I asked her how she got that but she said she done it on the ice box and she said it was like that and I no difference. The one that told me didn't no Jo was my wife. He seen it and told her she could do better then that. He said she was to drunk. I saw this and this made me mad and I did start drinking because she told me that she love me and I was so nice to give her money. I do love her and she love me. But I can't stand for her to drink like she does and do the way she do. Jo was up at my house Sun March 31, and she went home about 4 o'clock to go to work and I tryed to get to strating up. But she won't. If you can do anything with her I wish you would. Because I love her so much and she is killing herself. I wouldn't wrote you this if she hadn't told you I had started to drink again. I told her Sun. I would help her and I will if she will be half way write with me.

21. Dearest darling i want you to know that you are the only one in my life i love you so much i could not do without you please forgive me i drove myself sick honey please beleave me i love you again an the baby honey don't be mean with me please i have lived fifty years since i met you, I love you--I love you. Dearest darling i love you i love you i love you. Please don't discrāminat me darling

i know that i will die dont be mean with me please i love you more than you will ever know darling please an honey Tom i know don't tell Tom why his dady said good by honey. Can't stand it any more. Darling i love you. Darling i love you.

22. I am Sorry Mary But i just Can't Stand Life Any Longer.

William Smith

23. To Mary Jones. Please take care of my bills. Tell Tom I made enough money for him. He can take care of these small bills. Mary, I love Betty and I can't stand being without her. She's something I spoiled myself.

Love, Bill

Mary take this pen as Helen gave it to me when I went to the army.

24. Dear Mary. Although in the past you may have thought the idea of suicide had never entered my mind, I will tell you now that it has. I have given every other way my utmost but this seems to be the only solution--No doubt you remember times in the past when I have said, "I am worth a lot more dead than alive." Well, I wasn't jult kidding--My insurance will leave you well provided for and you now can have all those things I could never give you--you see, I know now that I can never hope to really make a success of life and I see no use to continue and drag you down with me, although the years we have been together have been the happiest of my life, I want it to stop here. I want you to marry again as soon as possible and the next time choose someone who can make it. I love you deeply.

Bill

25. Dear Mary. Im sorry for all the trouble Ive caused you. I guess I can't say any more. I love you forever ang give Tom my love. I guess I've disgraced myself and John I hope it doesn't reflect on you.

26. Darling: It's been great but I just can't go on for reasons you may know but I can't explain. There's enough insurance for all of you. Be happy and all my love always to you and our three.

Remember me as your adoring

Bill

27. Mary Darling. It's all my fault. I've thought this over a million times and this seems to be the only way I can settle all the trouble I have caused you and others. This is only a sample of how sorry I am. This should cancel all.

28. Dear Mary. I can go on no longer so will take the easy way out. I've taken care of everything. Sorry

Bill

29. I'm tired. There must be something fine for you. Love.

Bill

30. Darling: All of my life I have looked upon suicide as a weak and cowardly way out but after thinking it out carefully I honestly believe that this is the best way. I realize that this will be quite a shock to you but as you know, time heals all wounds, and as time goes on I hope you will realize that this was the best solution of our problems. Please try to explain to Tom and teach him to grow into a fine man, far better I hope than his Dad has been.

My insurance will take care of both of you at least until Tom is through school. God bless and keep you both. All of my love is for you and Tom Forever and ever.

Bill

31. To Tom, Betty, John--The stigma I bring upon you cannot be much more than has already been done. Be good to your mother and do all you can to help as she is a wonderful person. Tom--a rather gruesome thought--Remember when we worked in the yard and you asked to see a cadaver at the College? Little did we know that I would be the first deceased for you to encounter. I love you and know you will make a wonderful man. Betty--We have been very close to each other. Please don't think too harshly of my actions. Stabilization takes place in time, and I know you will grow up to be one of the best women in the

world. My love, dear. Johnny-- you came last in our offspring so couldn't know me as well as your brother and sister. Just follow your brother's example, love your sister and help Mother. Remember, I love you, Johnny. Mary-- There is no more or less to say than I have already told you-- Truth will triumph eventually.

Bill

32. Dear Mary: As we both might reasonable recognize this is not the right way to solve any situation. Lord how I wish it could be done in any other way. No use of thinking about that now, its like a dead end road in the middle of the night. Confusion, bewilderment, questions with no answers. What can a person say? How do you lift yourself up again and try to keep going? The will is gone, reason is gone, there is only one answer. You'll probably ask why--over and over again--I've been doing that and only creating more confusion. Continue with your will to live, fill any emptiness with your love for our children, find a new live for yourself and forgive me for whatever results to you from this. Love,

Bill

33. Dear Wife; I am sorry to cause you this embarrassment but I can't seem to stand life this way. This is the easy way for me. You will get over it in time too.
34. Dearest Mary--I just can't go on without Tom, John and you. I hope some day you can forgive me. I know you will find someone better for you and the boys. God bless you all.

Love, Bill

35. My dear wife: I never thought that I'd write a suicide note but life can throw some unexpected curves. This note has two purposes, first, to make certain that this is a suicide and not murder so that in no way can some unforeseen circumstantial evidence point suspicion at some innocent person. Secondly, to give you my reasons for this drastic action and to assure you that you are in no way responsible for my action.

As you will recall, I've always said that I'd rather be dead than be a hopeless and helpless burden upon you. Fate has decreed that I be just that. I have considered this action

carefully and prayerfully. I know that you, in your great unselfish love, would have voted against me in this.

My continued living, though you would be quick to deny this, would be a continuing depressant, because of my condition, upon you and the kids. Facts are facts and a "head in the sand" attitude is only kidding ourselves. After the first shock of my death has worn away, I'm sure that you will see the logic of my decision--even though you may not admit it--and life will be much easier and happier for you.

My undying love to you and the kids. Please tell them I'm doing this because I think it is best for all of us. With my love,

Bill

36. Dearest Mary: Well, dear--it's the end of the trail for me. It has been a fairly long and reasonably pleasant life, all in all--especially fine that part in which you played a part. You have been wonderful. No man could have asked for a better wife than you have been.

Please understand that if I didn't feel that this course would be the best for you and the girls I certainly would have waited for nature to take her course. It would not have been long, anyhow, for the clot I coughed up was from the lungs and I know there's activity there--of an ominous nature.

Be good to your mother girls. You have the finest mother in the world; even as I have had the most wonderful wife and two wonderful daughters. Bye-by Mary, Betty, and Helen. How I do love you all. And may God help and guide you from here on in.

"Daddy"

37. Dearest Wife. I am writing this to explain why I am going to end it all. I know that this is a cowardly way and I am sorry but I just haven't the will to do otherwise. Please forgive me if you can and believe that I loved you to the end.

Bill

38. Dear Mary. Since you are convinced that you are an invalid and no one can help you, I hope my \$3000 insurance will help you to see the truth about yourself and get rid of your mental sickness. You are now free to marry Joe. Remember you will never have any happiness with anyone until you learn to help



yourself. I have no regrets and hold no malice or unkind thoughts toward you. We would have had a happy life together if you had wanted to help yourself. I hope you eventually will find happiness. Love, Bill.

Tell my folks I'm sorry I couldn't see them before I went.

39. I'm tired of being sick and in pain and can see no use in prolonging it as they say there is no hope of recovery.
40. I specifically request that my body be disposed of by cremation. To my good friends, Joe Smith and Mary Jones I give my deep and undying affection. My dear parents, Henry W. and Betty C. Brown have done their best for me and it is my failure, rather than anything they have failed to offer that has brought this about. My sister, Helen White of 100 Main Street, New York, is closest and dearest to me and, with her consent, I ask that she take and raise my son. My phonograph records, now in storage with my parents, I give to my former wife, Wilma Brown, 200 Broadway, Los Angeles, Calif.

Explanations would be useless, suffice to say I have tried and failed. Given unto my hand this ninth day of June in the year of 1943, A.D., in the city of Los Angeles, California.

Jack Brown

41. Some where in this pile is your answers. I couldn't find it. Mom, you should have known what was about to happen after I told you my troubles now I will get my rest.

Dad, I am in this jam because I trusted people (namely you) and some people trusted me, because I am, in my present state a menace to me and my customers I think this is the best way out, and out of my insurance if you ever take a drink I hope you drown yourself with it.

42. Dear Mary. Things are piling up too high for me. I love you but I know our basic difficulties are not soluable. Please don't think too harshly of me if I take this way out. You have insurance and your health to help get started again. Tell the kids I had an accident so they wont be ashamed of their daddy.

Love, Bill

43. Dearest Wife: I'm sorry I had to do this but I know you will be happier as a result. I hope you will be married as soon as it is proper to be and I feel sure that you and Fred will have a full and happy life together. Love always,

Bill

44. My dearest family: I am terribly sick and it is all my fault. I blame no one but myself. I know it is going to go hard with Tommy and Sister. Please see that Tommy gets a Mickey Mouse Watch for his birthday. Helen I am counting on you to take care of Mother. Please do not follow in my footsteps.

Mary my darling I know you did everything possible to avoid this, but please forgive me, as I think it was the only way out. God forgive me and help take care of my family.

45. Dear Mary. Honey I hope you will forgive me for being the way I was this AM. I honestly love you with all my heart and I thought we would understand things together. I didn't know you felt the way you did about everything. I really thought we were the "happily married couple." Too bad you just keep everything inside you.

For the first time in my life I was really in love, and I thought you were too. I had hopes that you would forget your feelings and we would try to be happy together.

My bonus should take care of things so you contact Joe. Sorry to end things this way now to you--I wish you the best of everything.

I did and do think you the nicest person ever. Good by and thanks for everything.

Bill

46. Dearest One, This world is too cruel for me. I am in search of peace--eternal peace where I will not be a burden to you and all the world.

This world was not meant for me. I was never wanted or able to place myself in any good position. I am only a handicap to you and your life will be better without me. I love you, but my love has brought you nothing but sadness and despair.

Forgive, Dearest, but since I was very young, everyone considered me a failure and over the years it has proven to be so. I have done nothing to make life seem worthwhile. Mother meant good, but she drove me to my grave. Forgive me for not being what you expected. I do love you. Do not

think badly of me. I am better off dead, no one will miss me. Until later, when we can be happy.

Your Desperate Husband, Bill Smith

47. My Dearest Mary. For many months now the pain of my illness has been unberable and since none of the specialists could give me any hope whatsoever I have decided to end my suffering forever. I Love You,

Bill

48. To my wife Mary: As you know, like we've talked over before our situation, I'll always love you with all my heart and soul. It could have been so simple if you had have given me the help that you alone knew I needed.

This is not an easy thing I'm about to do, but when a person makes a few mistakes and later tried to say in his own small way with a small vocabulary that he is sorry for what has happened and promises to remember what has happened and will try to make the old Bill come home again, and do his best to start all over again, and make things at home much better for all concerned, you still refuse to have me when you as well as I know that I can't do it by myself, then there's only one thing to do.

I'm sorry honey, but please believe me this is the only way out for me as long as you feel as you do-- This will put you in good shape. Please always take care of Betty and tell her that her Daddy wasn't too bad a guy after all. With all the love that's in me. Bill

Yes, Mommie, now you have your car and a lot more too, even more than you had hoped for. At least you are better off financially than you were 6 years ago. The only pitiful thing about the whole situation is the baby and the nice car that I bought with blood money. I only hope I do a good job of it. Then your troubles will be over with. I know this is what you have been hoping for for a long time. I'm not crazy, I just love you too much!!!

I love you--Daddy--Goodbye forever.

49. To the Police. I can see no reason to battle the elements of life any longer with no progress being made.

50. Mary: The only thing you never called me was crazy. Now you can do that. I loved you so.

Bill

51. Dear Mary. Everything is kind of mixed up with me and what i am doing is the only way out I guess I can think of no other. I am very sorry I got you in the shape we are in but I did I love you very much. It is going to hurt my mother and Dad to and also you I think. I hope you all the luck in the world.

With all my love, Bill.  
Goodbye

52. Dear Mary. I have decided to end my life. Things are not going right and don't look as though they ever will. I'm doing this to help you, so that you may continue unhampered.

Love, Bill

53. To my kids-- This is a lousy way to leave you, but I can no longer help you in any way. It's better for us all that the burden of caring for me be lifted--you will have sufficient problems of your own. You must face these problems intelligently, squarely, courageously, rather than running away from them, as I am from this one insolvable problem of my disability. Remember me as I was--as we enjoyed life together--as we worked out your small problems--which seemed so large--and above all remember I would never under any circumstances run out on you if there remained any chance that I could be of help to you.

Daddy

54. Mary dear. Im sorry that I have been making you unhappy-- I'm all twisted up inside. You and Joe will be better off this way--start over.

Love, Bill

55. Darling wife, Mary Helen Smith I'm sorry for everything I did please don't be angry at me my sweet wife. You left me and did not say anything. So darling this is your divorce my darling wife Mary. I wish you get the rings back my dear wife. Goodby my dear wife Mary. I love you more than anything in the hold world my sweet wife.

William Smith

56. Dear wife. It seems that fate has destined me to be a failure.. All at once it appears that I can no longer face the problems and responsibility of trying to get ahead only to see us struggle along in poverty. So as usual I have taken the easy way out and left you to finish the job I have so poorly started. With money from our Life Insurance program you will be able to give the children and yourself the things you have always wanted for us all. Possibly we will all meet again sometime where we will be able to live in the peaceful way we all deserved so much here on earth.

Your ever loving husband

57. Mary--I know this is a terrible thing to do but believe me, dear, it is for the best. The events of the last few months have left me at my wit's end and I see no other way out. I am sorry I was such a trial to you and the children, please forgive me.

Bill

58. Dear Mary; I'm just to tired and to sick of trying to continue. Sorry it had to be this way. I'm sure everything will work out for the best. Keep everything quiet as possible. Say I had a heart attack.

As ever, Bill

God forgive me. God bless you and John.

59. Dear Wife. My health has broken and I no longer feel that I can be of help in the Support to leave in this manner but feel that it is best for all concerned--Love.

60. Honey. I am sorry this is the only way I know. I am all wrong. I love you very much.

Bill

61. Dear Mary. I am writeing you, as our Divorce is not final, and will not be till next month, so the way things stand now you are still my wife, which makes you entitled to the things which belong to me, and I want you to have them. Don't let anyone take them from you as they are yours. Please see a lawyer and get them as soon as you can. I am listing some of the things, they are: A Blue Davenport and chair, A Magic Chef Stove, a large mattress, an Electrolux cleaner, a 9 x 12 Rug redish flower design and pad. All the things listed above are all most nwe.. Then there is my 30-30 rifle, books, typewriter, tools and a hand contract for a house in Chicago, A Savings account in Boston, Mass.

Your husband, William H. Smith

62. Dearest Mary. As I sit here with this gun in my Hand, which in a few minutes I will take my life I am thinking of all the wonderful minutes, Days, years, I have spent with you. I know if I talked all this over again with you, you would talk me out of what I am about to do.

I know the mistakes I have made are not in the least bit your fault. But as you know in my small way I will always try to place part of the Blame on you. So I hope you will forgive me all or partly for what I am about to do.

Goodby dear I hope We will meet again in some pther place, where we can be as happy as I have been since I have been married to you. Goodby sweetheart. Yours as always,

/Bill

63. I'm tired of it all. I love you and God Bless you.
64. Good bye my Dear. I am very sorry but it is just too hard to breathe.

Love Bill

Dearest have someone at the Legion call the V.A. I think they will take care of me.

65. To the police. please tell family that I love them why say more.
66. Good by Kid. You couldn't help it. Tell that brother of yours, When he gets where I'm going. I hope I'm a foreman down there. I might be able to do something for him.

Bill

NOTE: The following is the "key" for the 33 pairs of genuine and simulated suicide notes. The numbers refer in each case to the genuine note:

1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31,  
34, 36, 38, 40, 41, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 54, 55, 58, 60, 61,  
64, 66.

APPENDIX B  
A PROCEDURAL PACKAGE THAT  
WAS USED BY THE JUDGES



Enclosed, you will find a collection of suicide notes. Your task will be to verify whether the statements provided below correspond or compare to the contents of the suicide notes. The statements provided below are a classification of the possible content of suicide notes. You are to determine whether the contents in the suicide notes are a particular or specific instance of that classification or not. Your comparison should be observable; however, the classifications may be more abstract than the specific instances. Thus you will have to make judgements about whether particular contents of a note are included in a given classification or not. Your task is to either conclude yes or no.

Thank you.

Below, please find the statements that you are to compare with the notes.


1. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an attempt to make sense out of whatever has happened to him.
2. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he sees his suicide as a meaningful event against the background of an otherwise meaningless, and/or purposeless life.
3. In the suicide note, the person communicates directly and/or indirectly that he wants to kill someone else.
4. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is in some direct or indirect fashion identifying himself with a rejecting or lost person.
5. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is cut off, detached and/or disinterested from his future.
6. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is expecting less and less from himself, others and/or the world.
7. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is killing himself because he sees no alternative to this action and he sees the suicide as giving him some meaning in his life.
8. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he wants to torment someone else by his demise.
9. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is preoccupied, absorbed and/or engrossed by his past.

10. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he needs to change himself in order to handle forthcoming events in a way that seems to be impossible to himself.
11. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is aware of events that don't make adequate sense to him.
12. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act undertaken to isolate his life, his problems and/or his dread from himself.
13. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his expectations/anticipations about himself, other and/or the world are not coming true..
14. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is voluntarily choosing to kill himself.
15. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he does not seem to fit into or be able to do what other people expect of him.
16. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is not angry at a rejecting or lost person; however, he appears indirectly to be angry at that person.
17. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is helpless in understanding, unpredictable and senseless world.
18. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is experiencing pronounced dread; i.e., he seems to be anticipating and/or experiencing great fear or anxiety.

19. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is preoccupied with a person that he has lost or who has rejected him.
20. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has experienced the loss or rejection of a significant person.
21. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicidal behaviour is a retreat to a less mature form of behaviour.
22. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is basically a consciously planned action.
23. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he has been trying or is trying to make people or events fit with what he expects is the right thing.
24. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he wants to punish himself.
25. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he sees his demise as giving him some personal meaning or purpose.
26. In the suicide note, the person communicates that his suicide is an act of liberation and freedom from his life, his problems and/or his dread.
27. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is overly critical of himself - he seems to be quite harsh on himself.
28. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is killing himself because his worst expectations are coming true.

29. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is living in a bare empty present that is meaningless and/or purposeless.
30. In the suicide note, the person communicates that he is angry at himself.

Below please find the suicide notes. Again your task is to verify whether the statements that are provided correspond with the notes. If the statement corresponds, please, indicate by writing out the number of the statement next to the note.



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