

Suicide and Suicide Notes

Logic of Death in Youth

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INTRODUCTION

The authors have already reported on the phenomenon in which student suicides and student apathy occurred together frequently in the course the settling of major campus disputes^{1,2)}.

In the present paper, we shall attempt to reproduce the psychological condition at the time of the suicide on the basis of notes left by the young people. However, there is no evidence that these messages correctly indicate the psychology of the suicide.

If a suicide note is something that aims at communicating one's will to a specific person, this desire to communicate can be taken as indicating the existence of rationalization, beautification and extortion of one's act. That is because the motive could possibly be found in that which they disregarded as not worth telling and did not write.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used a total of 12 notes left by the 11 student suicides¹⁾ already reported on, and are senior high school girl student, aged 16, who attempted to kill herself by taking poison. At the time, she was receiving internal treatment for a fever of unknown origin.

Suicide notes do not always mention the patient's motive for committing suicide, but such notes could possibly be used as data for studying the logic of life and death in the youth of today in terms of sex (7 males, 5 females) and age (16-24).

The way in which the reason, explanation, motive and purpose of the suicidal act was mentioned in the suicide notes, were analyzed and then classified according to the model of Bjerg³⁾. This classification enables us to elucidate on various phenomenal motives.

RESULTS

1. The suicide notes, though varied in contents, all mentioned that his or her desire for a person or group had not been realized.

The notes of the girl students showed a tendency toward punishing others, as shown by remarks such as, "During the campus dispute, our comradeship developed into love. But you have moved to more radical activities, and I can no longer follow you", or "With the campus dispute ended, you have started devoting yourself to studies, as if making a 180 degree change. I love you so much, but you don't care a bit for me".

Of the suicide notes in which frustration related to their desire was expressed, eight exhibited a self-punishing attitude, placing the blame on themselves. Many reproached themselves for incompetence.

Besides the notes mentioned above, in which they sought the cause in others or in themselves, there were two notes in which the causes were loneliness or isolation, e.g., "I'm absolutely lonely", or "I have no friend".

2. Two notes reflected the inner mental conditions of no longer being able to tolerate the present situation out of frustration, stressing the continual present crisis.

Generally, they expressed their mental conditions with such remarks as, "I'm quite at a loss", "I'm in a condition in which I don't even get angry", or "I cannot maintain the present situation". From these lines we can keenly feel their mental confusion brought about by the rapid breakdown of solidarity during the campus dispute.

3. Their self-appraisals, were negative, though varying in degree, in all of the 12 notes. This appears to be a common phenomenon, in which they set a high goal peculiar to youth, find it impossible to attain easily, have a feeling of helplessness, and fall into self-hatred and further into despair.

In two cases, negative self-appraisal was considered to be of significance as a direct cause of suicide.

4. The disposition to suicide, or a wish to commit suicide, was observed in suicide notes of three cases.

They wrote, "At long last I found what I have been seeking after. Now, I'll be released from misfortune", and "Let's live together in another world". And they expressed their subjective, unavoidable impulses, and inevitability as, "I have no alternative but this", and "It cannot be helped".

Of them, there was one case in which suicide was interpreted as an inevitable thing, drew up a meticulous plan of action a month earlier,

and carried it out as scheduled.

5. There were two notes which described suicide as something that would satisfy, or meet the expectations of others.

There was also one note that said, "The university is responsible for my selecting death in this form". He was seeking the cause of death in others than himself.

6. There was one note expecting that the result of his suicide, after careful consideration, would bring benefit to somebody.

Expressions such as "Never commit same error as mine" or, "My death will be a warning to the activities of all other students" are indications of suppressed aggressiveness.

DISCUSSION

In cases where the content of a suicide note is varied, it is a very subjective work to interpret, take up, and classify the outstanding features contained in it. In some cases, one suicide note contradictory expressions.

Forcing various individual circumstances into a classification model is tantamount to an attempt at vague and artificial standardization of individual differences and nuances. This point has already been mentioned by Bjerg himself³⁾.

We have dared to make such an attempt. As a result, it was found that the youth consider their past as something disgusting that they did not like to experience if at all possible, or beautify more than necessary, and regard the present as one full of frustrations.

Their self-assessments were affirmative in regard to the past, but negative for the present. Many of them concluded that future was blocked by despair and emptiness.

The suicide victims were lacking in the ability to modify their past way of thinking, to change their present thinking, or to create a future image befitting themselves.

It is here that Bjerg tries to find a key to the prevention of suicide³⁾.

In two cases in which hebephrenic-type schizophrenia had been present and were in a stabilized period, expressions lacking in flexibility as to time—the past, present, and future—were characteristically observed.

Here we should mention the characteristics of suicide in the Japanese youth.

There is a strong propensity to dependency, and a strong conflict

arising from an aggressive and competitive desire for personal objectives.

In relation to this conflict, what cannot be disregarded is the influence of a society of high academic career pressure, peculiar to Japan, which restricts the individual in society, and at the same time, compels people to engage in aggressive competition (Ohara⁴⁾, Ishii⁵⁾).

Analysis of the suicide notes, shows that this strong propensity to dependency built up the sense of solidarity, under the special environment of the campus dispute, but that with the normalization of the dispute, the sense of solidarity was broken down. The effect on the individual was a desire to escape, and for selfpunishment which furthered a negative self-assessment.

When a youth cannot get satisfaction, as desired, out of the circumstances he finds himself in, frustration arises which develops easily into despair.

The enmity against the phenomenon which is the cause of this frustration and despair, is directed toward himself. The direction of energy changes, and he escapes into the future, or an unrealistic world. In cases where this aggressiveness is very strong, it tends to lead to self-destruction (Kitamura⁶⁾).

In classifying and standardizing suicide notes, we encountered difficulty in classifying the sense of value in each youth. Of course, reproducing the sense of value of the individual from a suicide note alone is extremely difficult.

The problem lies in suicide victims believing themselves to be the cause of frustration.

If this idea is correct, giving him a change to re-examine himself will be of help in preventing suicide.

Conflicts of love, negative self-assessment, a tendency to self-punishment, a wish to commit suicide, and expectations of the influence of the suicidal act on others were common to the suicide notes of the four coeds who committed suicide.

However, is the extreme violence a suicide by gas might inflict on others and society enough to interpret merely as a "wish to kill others" (Meninger⁷⁾)?

SUMMARY

An attempt was made to classify 12 suicide notes of a group of youths (16-24 years of age). The contents of the notes consisted largely of frustration negative self-assessment and propensity to self-punishment,

and characteristically, they took suicide as an escape from the present when they found themselves in a critical situation, or in the face of something unavoidable and inevitable.

Of the 12 suicides, 11 were a type of suicide that occurred frequently during the course of the settlement of the university campus dispute, and one was a coed who was receiving medical treatment for an internal disease.

In the former, the suicide was one that occurred under special circumstances. And for this reason, it could serve as a further clue in understanding the suicidal act in the youth of Japan.

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