

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AND RESTRICTIONS IN THE ELIGIBILITY TO NEGOTIATE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Ned L. Kirsch

ABSTRACT

A conceptualization of suicide attempts is offered in which the interpersonal significance of the suicidal act is stressed. Suicide attempters are seen as finding themselves in relationships in which their eligibility to negotiate their personal characteristics has been significantly restricted. Given such relationships, the suicidal act has the significance of a negotiation move within the problematic relationship. This negotiation move represents the efforts of the attempters either to (a) prevent a degradation of their position within the relationship or (b) reinstate themselves to a position from which they have already been degraded. A study was designed to test the prediction that in situations that call for the negotiation of personal characteristics (i.e., situations of potential degradation), suicidal individuals will offer significantly fewer negotiation moves than nonsuicidal individuals. This pre-

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diction was supported. A number of issues related to the conceptualization and study are also discussed, including: (a) the relationship between depth of depression and the eligibility to negotiate personal characteristics; (b) the paradoxical nature of suicide attempts, and (c) the relationship of the present conceptualization to others which have recently been presented in the literature.

Based on the detailed examination of suicidal behaviors and the circumstances surrounding them, a number of hypotheses have been offered in the literature to account for differences between suicide attempters and committers. It has been suggested that individuals who engage unsuccessfully in suicidal behaviors may either (a) have no intention of terminating their lives, or (b) what intention they do have may be accompanied by competing intentions which, in effect, generate behaviors of distinct significance (Dorpat & Boswell, 1963; Farberow & Shneidman, 1961; Henderson, Hatigar, Davidson, Lance, Duncan-Jones, Kohler, Retchie, McAuley, Williams & Slazhius, 1977; Shneidman, 1969; Stengel, 1960a; Weiss, Nunez & Schaie, 1961).

This plausible hypothesis raises two important questions: (a) If suicidal attempters are not intending to terminate their lives, what are they doing by engaging in life-threatening behaviors? (b) If suicidal acts represent an unusual method by which a goal can be achieved, what can be said about the suicidal individual's world where such unusual acts are used?

A number of respectable efforts have been made in the literature to answer these questions which are, of course, not new. Of varying theoretical orientations, these answers have typically attributed the suicidal act to problematic changes within a person's world. The suicidal act itself is then viewed as representing an attempt to rectify these changes (see, as a recent example, Baechler, 1980). Theorists differ more on the details which they stress (e.g., the nature of problematic relationship or situational changes) than they do on these two basic propositions.

Stengel (1960a, 1960b, 1964, 1968; Stengel & Cook, 1958), for example, has emphasized the communication aspects of suicidal behaviors. He views suicidal individuals as in control of at least a limited range of behavioral options. For Stengel (1964) the suicide attempt represents a direct communication of a specific kind which has significance within a relationship and which may elicit specific changes within that relationship. Stengel (1964) indicates, in fact, that the relatively high "recidivism" rate for suicide attempters may be attributable to the failure of the attempt to initiate or accomplish sought-for changes. In such cases, second and third attempts may be viewed as efforts to rectify earlier failures.

From a somewhat different point of view, the interpersonal nature of suicidal acts has also been recognized in psychoanalytic theory. The

suicidal act has been variously described in this literature as: (a) the symptomatic expression of aggressive impulses directed toward hated aspects of a significant other (technically, an "object"), which the depressed individual has come to regard as expressions of his own character (i.e., aggression directed toward an ambivalently regarded introject) (Menninger, 1938); (b) a self-imposed penance to appease a loved one who has been wronged, or the reaffirmation through death of a capacity (e.g., to love or be nurturant) which had been questioned by either the attempter or the person to whom the attempt is directed (Hendin, 1964); or (c) the response to repeated loss by a person who has been rejected while seeking assistance (Meerloo, 1964). In all cases, however, the act itself is meaningful only insofar as it expresses how attempters view themselves vis-à-vis some significant other, regardless of the various symbolic motives which have been attributed to the act.

A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

The conceptualization that I will offer is not directly critical of any of these positions, insofar as they represent efforts to describe suicidal acts as expressions of problematic relationships. The historical details of these relationships will, of course, vary greatly, as will the details of those relationships upon which theorists focus. My effort will be, instead, to propose a conceptual framework which isolates a common element of these positions and provides for the systematic observation and description of suicidal behavior. Within such a framework, any number of different relationships can be problematic enough from the attempter's point of view. The observer, however, need not be restrictive about which relationship characteristics will count, so long as the problematic qualities of the relationship can be shown to be "problematic enough" from the actor's perspective.

Specifically this paper develops the following conceptualization:

1. Suicide attempters find themselves in a problematic relationship or set of relationships.
2. Within such problematic relationships, suicide attempters find, specifically, that the range of behaviors available to them has been significantly restricted in characteristic ways.
3. Most saliently, suicide attempters find that their eligibility to negotiate their personal characteristics has been significantly restricted.
4. When a situation within the problematic relationship calls compellingly for negotiation, suicide attempters will choose a negotiation move from among those still available to them. (The suicidal act is one such behavior, which has the significance of a negotiation move within the problematic relationship.)

5. This negotiation move represents the efforts of attempters either to prevent a degradation of their position within the relationship (i.e., prevent being treated as a person with some newly ascribed personal characteristic) or to reinstate themselves to a position from which they have already been degraded.

Since I am suggesting that the suicidal act serves as a negotiation move, I will first develop, at some length, the concept of negotiation introduced by Ossorio (1970/1981). After presenting this background material, I will discuss the negotiation of personal characteristics, developing the relationship between restrictions in the eligibility to negotiate personal characteristics and suicide attempts. Finally, an empirical investigation will be presented in which a method for studying the negotiation of personal characteristics will be introduced. This empirical investigation will examine one hypothesis generated by the conceptual model discussed in this paper.

The Concept of Negotiation

For most daily life circumstances, one can expect a certain degree of similarity in the ways different individuals behave with regard to some state of affairs. For any state of affairs and for any two observers, however, there is no *guarantee* that the way the world is observed, described, and treated will be the same; circumstances in which observers find themselves differing are far from uncommon.

This is not difficult to comprehend. Different observers of some state of affairs may, for example, have different histories and varying degrees and kinds of capacities or competence (i.e., they may not have acquired the competence to engage in the same social practices). Similarly, they may be members of different interpersonal worlds or have different purposes. All of these factors will find expression in what they are prepared to see and describe.

When two observers call one another's descriptions into question, however, the achievement of some sort of resolution requires an interpersonal "method" which will establish the respective descriptions of the state of affairs each observer is prepared to offer. Descriptions are members of a logical category of statements, and like the observations upon which they are based are ineligible for "proof" (Kirsch, 1979). Therefore, an alternative conceptualization is necessary to account for what does proceed between observers whose descriptions differ. Ossorio (1970/1981) has offered the social practice of negotiation as the "paradigm for the resolution of disagreement among critics of a given description." In practice, negotiation serves as the "method" by which individuals may establish (a) the kind of state of affairs a given state of affairs is

to be treated as, or (b) the significance of that state of affairs when descriptions of it have been called into question.

For every negotiation there will be some guarantee of resolution for each participant, though not necessarily the same resolution. Furthermore, each participant's resolution will meet one of two conditions: (a) It will provide for each person's understanding of his fellow negotiator's resolution as compatible with their relationship. If not, (b) the relationship will change, so that each person's understanding of the other person's resolution will be compatible with their relationship.

As negotiations proceed, each resolution "leaves no challenges to be raised or met by the participants" within the context of a particular description whose adequacy has been called into question, although each negotiation may raise "further questions to be pursued and disagreements thereon subject to negotiation" (Ossorio, 1970/1981, p. 7). Within any particular negotiation or series of negotiations, many options for the resolution of disagreement are available to the participants. A number of factors besides the adequacy of the descriptions may also influence the outcome of the negotiation. For no negotiation, however, is it necessary that the resolution achieved be one of consensus. Other options might include, for example, an agreement to disagree, in which each participant recognizes the legitimacy, if not the personal acceptability of differing descriptions, or a compromise, in which a new position having elements from each of the original two is agreed and acted upon.

It is also important to note briefly that negotiation, as it is being used in this discussion, is distinguishable from bargaining. In establishing how some state of affairs will be treated, negotiators come to a resolution about how the world is to be treated. In this sense, negotiators establish what will count for them as "reality" and, given a resolution of that sort, will proceed accordingly. Bargainers, however, address themselves to "what can be lived with" rather than to "what is." In bargaining, solutions are sought which do not change the face of things but simply establish the compromises and trade-offs that bargainers are willing to entertain.

An example may be helpful in clarifying the social practice of negotiation as it is used in this paper. Take the case of a man who is driving 55 miles per hour in a 25-mile per hour speed zone. He is stopped by a state policeman who proceeds to write him a ticket for speeding. The driver, who is barely willing to stop his car, frantically points to a bleeding child lying in the seat beside him. The officer, seeing the urgency of the situation, quickly escorts the driver to the hospital at breakneck speed where, after seeing to the child's safety, he proceeds to finish writing the ticket he had started earlier. As the relieved driver (who is once again beginning to attend to the world around him) sees this development,

he asks the officer what he's doing and suggests that the circumstances of his case warrant an exception.

The point at which the driver challenges the officer is the point at which he calls into question the officer's description (as yet implicit) of the state of affairs for which the officer would contend his actions are appropriate. "You were speeding," the officer says. "There're no excuses."

"The boy's life was in danger, couldn't you see that?" the driver replies. "Did you want me to let him die?"

"No," says the officer, a bit angered at this point, "my eyes are fine. But you should have called for help so others wouldn't be injured too."

"But I had no time," the driver counters, implying that he's only restating the obvious. "He was bleeding too much to take that chance."

One need not take this scenario to its conclusion to see the major points. Whatever we, as observers of this negotiation, might think of the persons or the decisions which they made, both the decisions and the circumstances upon which the decisions are based are all understandable to us. And yet, the descriptions which these two persons offer are significantly at variance. For the speeder, the life and death of a child was at stake, a commonly understood defense and a supervening issue which for him "converted" his act of exceeding the speed limit into an act of acceptable personal and societal responsibility. For the officer, saving the child's life required special action but not at the expense of social order. For him, speeding, whatever the reason offered, is still speeding and no reason will sway him from what he sees to be his duty and his devotion to the law.

Given these differences, a number of options are available to the negotiators, some of which have been mentioned above, and I would like to give additional examples of how some "moves" might appear within the context of the "speeder" example.

Initially, both officer and speeder might simply appeal to the facts to demonstrate the respective adequacy of their different descriptions. For example

Officer: You were going 55.

Driver: Yes, but the street was clear.

Officer: Clear or not, it's a 25 zone.

Driver: I know, but I was sounding my horn to warn people I was coming.

In this simple example, the negotiators struggle to resolve the importance of facts because the "weights" assigned to facts may alter the significance of the state of affairs being considered. Additionally, a negotiator may choose to ignore the facts (e.g., going 55 miles per hour), the description (e.g., speeding) and the significance of the state of affairs (e.g., com-

mitting a misdemeanor) and challenge instead the eligibility of the describer to (a) treat the state of affairs as being of a certain kind or (b) offer a certain kind of description. These challenges may include such examples as challenging the describer's status (e.g., "Who do you think you are anyway?"), noting a personal incapacity (e.g., "How could you see how fast I was going? You weren't even wearing your glasses."), or appealing to the relationship between the negotiators which renders one of them ineligible to offer the description being challenged (e.g., "You can put that ticket book away, rookie, I'm a sergeant myself.")

All of these examples are, of course, speculative for any given negotiation and may be used at the discretion of the negotiators in any order or combination which they see fit. As noted above, each negotiation may raise further issues for negotiation and within each successive negotiation, any of the same or different negotiation moves may be employed. For example, a negotiation about the relevant facts may be quickly settled and subsequently yield a negotiation about the significance of those facts. This process of successive negotiations will continue until such time as each party achieves some resolution for each negotiation, although, as previously stated, consensus is not required.

The Negotiation of Personal Characteristics

In the discussion above I have suggested that observers will negotiate the adequacy of descriptions, if for some reason a description of a state of affairs has been called into question. There is, however, one category of descriptions which is of special importance to the conceptualization of suicide attempts, namely, descriptions of persons, which can formally be treated in the same way as the descriptions of other objects or states of affairs. Most notably, ascriptions of personal characteristics (which are, in effect, descriptions of persons) are, like other descriptions, subject to criticism and can be negotiated when called into question.

The negotiation of personal characteristics, however, is not a trivial matter. Individuals frequently have good reasons for entering into negotiations of this kind, since the way they are seen by others will correspond to the way they are treated, which will in turn correspond to the range of behavioral options available to them within their social worlds. (For example, it would be difficult for me to work for a boss who refused to hire me because he saw me as undependable.) To the degree that the limitations or ineligibilities which accompany a particular way of being seen are of some importance, the individual whose behavioral options would be altered by the restricting description may call it into question.

For example, as changes occur in the description of a person (P) upon which an observer (O) is prepared to act, the behaviors in which P is

eligible to engage within the relationship with O will correspondingly change. (Another way of saying this is that their relationship changes.) If O's redescription has not been successfully challenged by P any subsequent effort by P to challenge O's description may be seen by O as the behavior of a person with the new set of personal characteristics, and therefore as "just the kind of thing a person like that would do." (This development will be recognized as a variation of Garfinkle's [1956] discussion of degradation ceremonies.)

Any time prior to O's successful redescription of P, however (and perhaps after as well, although with much more difficulty for P), P may enter into negotiation with O about O's and P's respective descriptions of P's personal characteristics. P himself has a number of reasons for entering into such a negotiation, any and all of which may be sufficient reasons for him. Most notably, P will enter into a negotiation with O about his own personal characteristics if a successful redescription of P's personal characteristics would significantly alter his standing within that relationship and correspondingly restrict his behavioral eligibilities. These restrictions may be significant for any of a number of reasons, including: (a) the relationship itself is important enough in its own right to be preserved as it stands; (b) the relationship is important because of other relationships which O has which are, in turn, important to P; and (c) the relationship is important to P because of other relationships which he has, to some significant degree as a function of his relationship with O.

The Ineligibility to Negotiate Ascribed Personal Characteristics

In daily life the negotiation of personal characteristics may range anywhere from relatively mundane instances (such as, for example, establishing that one is "not really undependable" by offering acceptable reasons for being late) to more complex examples (such as progressively renegotiating where one stands within an intimate relationship by repeatedly discussing, among other things, how one sees oneself, the other person, and oneself in regard to the other person). The ineligibility to negotiate a particular set of characteristics is not, however, an unusual circumstance and is certainly not always insidious. In fact, within *any* relationship a person will be eligible to negotiate certain personal characteristics and not eligible to negotiate others. This is the case because every relationship has a history that is, in part, a history of previous negotiations through which personal characteristics have been established. Since every relationship is, to some important degree, an expression of the history which its members share, the personal characteristics that these members take one another to have will not change unless the relationship (and possibly, the significance of the history they share)

changes as well. Until the relationship does change or is called into question, each member will be treated by other members as ineligible to claim any of a number of specific personal characteristics which are either pragmatically or logically incompatible with the personal characteristics that have already been established.

There is, of course, great significance to having successfully or unsuccessfully negotiated a particular personal characteristic, since the range of behaviors available to a person in a relationship will correspond to the sort of person he is taken to be. While some personal characteristics typically correspond to relatively minor behavioral restrictions (e.g., being tall), others may dramatically change a person's social world (e.g., being seen as fundamentally "unloving," "unreliable," or "dangerous"). For example, it may not be uncommon for individuals who have been successfully redescribed in this way to report corresponding changes in their self-esteem or general mood. At least in principle, however, no specific redescription of a person's characteristics will divest him of his broader status as a negotiator. While certain personal characteristics limit a person's specific eligibilities a negotiator may still question previously negotiated characteristics or challenge other new ascriptions. As Schwartz (1979) has noted, a primary goal of psychotherapy is to establish that clients who view themselves as degraded still retain the status of negotiators, whatever other personal characteristics they may ascribe to themselves.

Apart from these examples of ineligibilities, however, (i.e., ineligibilities for specific sets of personal characteristics) individuals may find themselves in relationships in which their eligibility to be a negotiator has been significantly restricted. A restriction in the eligibility to be a negotiator (and, correspondingly, to enter into negotiations about one's place in a relationship) is an insidiously disconfirming restriction. If it is sufficiently inclusive, it may even restrict the degraded person's eligibility to enter into negotiations about the eligibility to negotiate. A successful degradation of this sort will therefore have a significant impact on the place which a person takes himself to have in the world at large. A person who cannot (i.e., is ineligible to) negotiate personal characteristics may experience himself or herself as worthless. He or she will have difficulty entering into new relationships which, in turn, require new negotiations; will be susceptible to the successful ascription of competing personal characteristics across a range of relationships; and, taken to an extreme, may even be significantly restricted in the eligibility to assess and negotiate states of affairs in the world at large.

Ineligibilities and Suicide Attempts

At this point in the conceptual development, the relationship of suicide attempts to restrictions in the eligibility to negotiate personal character-

istics becomes clearer. In effect, as a person's eligibility to negotiate becomes increasingly restricted, the corresponding range of available behaviors that count as negotiations will also be restricted. In such circumstances, a person can be expected to engage in whatever behaviors are available which *will* count as negotiation moves. I am proposing that suicidal individuals find themselves in relationships in which suicide attempts represent the only negotiation moves they take to be still available to them which will either (a) prevent significant restrictions in the range of behaviors available to them, or (b) reinstate significant restrictions that have already been rescinded. In other words, suicidal individuals are faced with an actual or threatened degradation that constitutes an untenable position within a relationship. Suicide attempters will therefore exercise whatever behavioral options are available to them within that relationship which potentially retain sufficient "force" to establish or reestablish their status as negotiators.

In the remainder of this paper a study will be presented which was conducted as part of a larger investigation (Kirsch, 1979) designed to explore some of the ramifications of the conceptualization presented above. This study will assess the following hypothesis: that suicide attempters will be less likely than others to negotiate their personal characteristics when those characteristics are called into question within the context of some relationship. Specifically, the responses given by suicide attempters to accusations of wrongdoing will be compared to the responses given by nonsuicidal individuals to the same set of accusations. If the conceptualization presented above is a fair representation of suicidal acts, then one would expect suicidal individuals to offer fewer responses to these accusations that can be scored as negotiation moves.

It should be noted that the specific hypothesis explored in this paper represents only one element of the broader conceptual framework. Many other empirical questions could be asked about suicidal individuals and their relationships, based on the above model. The question being addressed in this paper is, however, central. If suicidal individuals are not less likely to offer negotiations when their personal characteristics are called into question, then no further empirical efforts to explicate the conceptual model need be attempted. If, however, that hypothesis is supported, a number of avenues for potentially significant research are opened. Variations upon the paradigm case example might, for example, investigate other questions such as: differences in the likelihood of negotiation as a function of the potential lethality of the suicidal act; differences in the range and types of problematic relationships reported by the attempters; the impact of seemingly nonrelational changes (e.g., medical illness) upon individuals, insofar as these changes are associated

with or generate problematic relationships; and special cases such as those in which the intent of the suicidal act appears to be a refusal to negotiate (e.g., "If that's the only game in town then I'd rather play no game at all!"). As previously stated, however, all of these would require that validity be established for the assertion that suicide attempters see themselves as restricted in a characteristic way. This study will therefore be limited to that demonstration.

METHOD

General Design

A sample of 60 patient participants was employed, consisting of four groups of 15 patients each (Note 1). These groups were: (a) high magnitude-of-intent suicide attempters; (b) low magnitude-of-intent suicide attempters; (c) suicidal ideators without a history of suicide attempts and (d) a comparison group of nonsuicidal psychiatric patients from the same hospital. All patients had no evidence of psychotic functioning in their histories. Data were collected from all patients within 24 hours of their admission to a large state psychiatric hospital in which approximately 300 beds are reserved for adult psychiatric admissions. At the time of data collection patients were informed of their rights and consent was obtained in accordance with HEW regulations. Data collected consisted of: (a) the Beck Depression Inventory; (b) the Beck Suicidal Intent Scale; (c) a Negotiation Inventory described below; and (d) a structured interview in which a clinical history and the subject's own report of the major reasons for the attempt were obtained. In all analyses, group membership served as the independent variable. Beck Depression Inventory and Negotiation Inventory scores served alternately as dependent variables or covariates in a series of analyses of variance or regression designs.

Patient Participants

The design of the present study called for four groups of 15 patients each: two groups of patients who had made a suicide attempt, one group of patients who only reported suicidal ideation, and a control group of patients who reported no current suicidal ideation or prior suicidal activity. Participants for each of these four cells were obtained in the following manner.

1. *Suicide Attempters (High and Low Magnitude-of-Intent Groups)*. Based on the histories and diagnostic impressions obtained during two phases of an admission procedure (a preadmission psychiatric screening and an extensive diagnostic interview conducted by members of a treatment

team) to a large state hospital over a nine-month period, every patient admitted between the ages of 18 and 65 with no evidence of past or present psychotic functioning who had made an overt suicide attempt was interviewed by the author within 24 hours of admission. This procedure was adopted to minimize the effects of a postattempt catharsis reaction. During this interview each patient was administered the Beck Depression Inventory, the Beck Suicidal Intent Scale, and a Negotiation Inventory developed for this study. Based on a set of criteria for inclusion in the study (e.g., ability to read and write English, consent to participate and the above mentioned criteria) a group of 38 suicide attempters was interviewed, of whom 30 satisfied all the criteria for inclusion and participated in the study. A median split was performed on the scores received by these 30 participants on the Suicide Intent Scale, and two groups of 15 participants each were identified: a high magnitude-of-intent group of 15 participants and a low magnitude-of-intent group of 15 participants.

2. *Suicidal Ideators and Nonsuicidal Controls.* A similar procedure was followed both for all nonpsychotic patients admitted to the hospital during the same time period who reported suicidal ideation to either the admitting physician or admission team and for all nonpsychotic patients without suicidal history or present suicidal ideation. A total of 22 patients with suicidal ideation were interviewed, of whom 15 met selection criteria and were utilized in the study. A total of 20 nonsuicidal patients were interviewed, of whom 15 met selection criteria and were utilized in this study.

Instruments

1. *Beck Suicidal Intent Scale.* Magnitude of suicidal intent was assessed with the Beck Suicidal Intent Scale (Beck, Schuyler & Herman, 1972). This instrument consists of 15 scorable items designed to assess the attempter's magnitude of intent by examining (a) the circumstances of the actual suicide attempt and (b) the attempter's own reported conceptions and expectations of the probable lethality of the attempt. Data on the reliability and validity of this scale can be obtained in Beck, et al. (1972).

2. *Beck Depression Inventory.* The depth of depression for each subject was assessed with the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961). This instrument consists of 22 items, each assessing a major behavioral or vegetative sign of depression commonly identified in the descriptive psychiatric literature (see, for example, Campbell, 1953; Friedman, Cowitz, Cohen & Granick, 1963;

Grinker, Miller, Sabshin, Nunn & Nunnally, 1961). The scale is self-administered. Subjects are requested to choose the one of four to six statements for each of the 22 symptoms which most accurately describes them (only one item of the scale directly queries the respondent about suicidal ideation). Each statement is assigned a weighted score; scale scores consist of the sum of weighted item scores. Data on the reliability and validity of this scale can be found in Beck (1967).

3. *Negotiation Inventory.* In order to assess the likelihood that a patient participant would offer negotiation responses when personal characteristics were called into question, a Negotiation Inventory was designed in which twenty brief scenarios were presented to each respondent. These scenarios are all characterized by an interaction in which a person is accused of either some act of wrongdoing or of having some negative personal characteristic. Respondents are requested to write what they would say in such situations for each of the twenty scenarios (see Forward, Cantor & Kirsch, 1976; Harre & Secord, 1973, and Mixon, 1972, for discussions of the modified role-enactment technique). The following are sample items from this scale:

1. You arrive two hours late for a dinner appointment and your friend accuses you of being irresponsible. What would you say?
2. You don't return a borrowed car at the time you promised and your friend accuses you of being untrustworthy. What would you say?
3. You don't get a job finished by the deadline and your boss accuses you of being lazy. What would you say?
4. You have been speeding coming home from a party. A state trooper stops you and arrests you for drunken driving. What would you say?

The method of scoring the responses of participants in this study was based upon a description of the social practice of making an accusation and offering a plea in response to accusation (i.e., the social practice of Accusations and Pleas). This social practice consists of four stages: (a) a violation (i.e., breaking a promise or failing to comply with a norm that is appealed to in identifying a behavior as an offense); (b) an accusation; (c) a plea; and (d) a negotiated resolution between the participants in the episode.

Within this social practice, an accusation (stage b) represents one possible move along a dimension of discipline strategies that a person can choose when confronted by some behavioral violation of a norm. These are: warning, accusation, and condemnation. Similarly, several options are available to the alleged perpetrator, including: (a) mere acceptance or rejection of the accusation (i.e., nonnegotiation); (b) apology;

(c) excuse or justification (i.e., an account; see Scott & Lyman, 1968); (d) challenges; and (e) contingency statements. Within the social practice, each accusation can be treated as an attempt to degrade the alleged perpetrator (Garfinkel, 1956) and each plea offered in response to accusation represents a different manner in which the perpetrator can attempt to forestall the degrading consequences of the accusation (Sykes & Matza, 1957). A discussion of the principal forms of pleas and the types of moves they represent follows below:

1. *Mere Acceptance or Mere Rejection of the Accusation: Nonnegotiation.* In merely accepting the accusation, the perpetrator assumes the degraded position and, in effect, informs the accuser that he is now prepared to be treated as a person of that sort. The mere acceptance in this way of an ascribed negative characteristic constitutes the successful degradation of the individual who is now prepared to act upon and be treated as eligible only for those behaviors that correspond to being a person of the "new kind."

This condition most closely resembles Garfinkel's (1956) description of a successful degradation ceremony, in which the social identity of those who overstep normative behavioral boundaries is modified and controlled. As described by Garfinkel (1956), communities establish the criteria for membership in good standing as a set of suprapersonal standards that are used to assess an individual's behavior. These standards are presented in a way which establishes membership in good standing as tautologically related to behaving in accordance with these social constraints and stipulations (i.e., engaging in some behavior *constitutes* being a member of the community in good standing).

When an individual behaves in a way which can be identified as a transgression, another individual who acts as a representative of the community fills the role of denouncer. If it is effective, the denunciation redefines the total identity of the transgressing individual in the eyes of witnesses who both represent the community's standards and serve to make the proceedings and the effect of the degradation public. The denouncer is faced with a number of tasks: (a) he must make a reasonable case for the perpetrator's having committed the transgression he is accused of; (b) he must present his denunciation to the witnesses in such a way as to preclude the possibility of their both disagreeing with the denunciation and remaining members of the community in good standing; (c) he must not concentrate on the perpetrator's specific behavior but on that behavior as one member of a class of behaviors that are morally repugnant; and (d) he must redescribe the perpetrator as being, and having always been, a member of the class of persons who commit such acts.

As Garfinkel notes, there are a number of strategies that the perpetrator

may use to counter this attempted degradation. In the present example (i.e., nonnegotiation), the perpetrator offers no resistance to the ascription implied in the accusation, does not negotiate his standing and, in effect, accedes to those characteristics which have been credited to him.

In offering a mere rejection of the accusation, the perpetrator does little better. Rather than offer reasons which support his being treated as a person of the "old kind" (i.e., one in good standing), the perpetrator merely insists, without demonstration, that he is a person of the "old kind." A denial of this sort is barely more of a negotiation than mere acceptance, since the accusation (which is based upon reasons for viewing the perpetrator as a person of the "new kind") requires that other reasons be offered which in some way call the accuser's reasons into question. A mere denial can, in effect, be treated as no reason at all, and the denier will be treated as a person of the "new kind" unless the accuser has other reasons for not following through on the accusation.

2. *Apology.* With an apology, the perpetrator attempts to recover status after having been accused of an act which both the accuser and the perpetrator recognize as a transgression. An apology suggests that there are no reasons the perpetrator can offer which will (a) absolve him of responsibility for the act, or (b) serve as an adequate redescription of appropriate action on the basis of some other set of standards. Unlike a mere acceptance or denial, however, an apology is a recognition that the described violation was committed and requests a status reinstatement (i.e., a pardon), even though no other account can be offered for the violation. The apologizer, in effect, assures the accuser that the offense will not occur again and, at worst, is assigned the status of a penitent. It might be expected that successive violations would be more difficult to forgive.

3. *Accounts: Justifications and Excuses.* With a justification the perpetrator reaffirms his status by claiming that the accuser's description of the behavior in question was incorrect. While it may have appeared that the perpetrator was committing a transgression within the context of the accuser's social practice description, the perpetrator claims that he was really acting on some other description which took precedence over the one presupposed by the accusation (note the example of the officer and speeder discussed above). A justification makes the claim that the transgression was not committed, by challenging the accuser's behavioral description.

A justification therefore presents the accuser with a behavioral redescription that challenges the applicability of the norm (or appeals to another of greater significance). A number of options of this sort are open to the perpetrator who wishes to make such a case: (a) claiming to not

be part of the relevant community to which that norm applies; (b) claiming that what the accuser took to be a norm is no longer or never was a norm of that sort; or (c) claiming that some other state of affairs such as personal obligation, responsibility, or relationship took precedence over that norm which would otherwise have been operative.

With an excuse, the perpetrator attempts to maintain status by demonstrating to the accuser that the violation was not deliberate, although it is clear to both that a "violation-like" behavior could not be denied. Unlike a justification, an excuse does not challenge the accuser's description of the behavior as a violation. Instead, the excuser challenges the accuser's ascription that the violation was performed deliberately. Rather than offer another description of the behavior which renders it appropriate, the excuser claims that the particular behavior was a function of extenuating circumstances (i.e., circumstances not under the perpetrator's control) and therefore the behavior is claimed not to have been a true expression of the behavior's character (Austin, 1961; Scott & Lyman, 1968).

4. *Challenges.* A perpetrator who offers a challenge addresses himself to the eligibility of the accuser to offer an accusation of that sort. The challenge can be addressed to the accuser (e.g., "Who are you to accuse me of that?") or to the relationship between them (e.g., "Some friend you turned out to be!"). In both of these cases the perpetrator does not directly address either the behavior which has been called into question or the accuser's description of that behavior, but offers a response which is addressed instead to the accuser's eligibility to give accusations of that sort. In some respects, a successful challenge leaves the description of the behavior and the personal characteristics associated with it as yet unnegotiated; repeated challenges by both members of a relationship may lead to a characteristic form of relationship stress (see, for example, Bergner, 1981).

5. *Contingency Statements.* Contingency statements are any variation upon pleas such as "why," "how come," or "I should consider that, let me give it some thought." Like challenges, contingency statements leave the violation and the perpetrator's personal characteristics unnegotiated; unlike challenges, they directly address the accusation by suggesting that the perpetrator is prepared to consider the accusation if a "reasonable" case can be made for its validity. In effect, the contingency statement preserves the perpetrator's standing in the relationship and precludes the degradation, regardless of the outcome of any subsequent negotiation. The successful contingency establishes the perpetrator as the member of the relationship whose endorsement is required for an accusation even to be considered. If some accusation successfully iden-

tifies a violation, the perpetrator can claim that this is so only because the accusation has been addressed to someone who is "reasonable enough to recognize my mistakes." All future accusations would therefore be subject to the same scrutiny, at which time the accuser might conceivably refuse to endorse the accusation, appealing instead to an established capacity for judicious self-examination as reason for the accusation's rejection. In many respects, contingency statements of this kind represent the most powerful negotiation moves in the face of accusation and are most likely to preserve or enhance the perpetrator's position in the relationship.

Based on these five response categories, a coding manual was developed to assist in the training of raters. This manual and the scaling procedures used in the development of the instrument can be found in Kirsch (1979). Prior to the use of the Negotiation Inventory in the present study, a small pilot study was conducted to investigate the power of the scale and coding scheme to differentiate suicidal and nonsuicidal persons. Ten suicidal patients were obtained in the same manner as described above and were administered the Negotiation Inventory. Responses to the Negotiation Inventory items were also obtained from an additional sample of 10 university students with no reported psychiatric or suicidal history. The protocols of these 20 individuals were randomized and blindly scored by the investigator. *t* tests were performed employing each of the five response categories as dependent variables. A significant difference was obtained between suicidal and nonsuicidal individuals for the nonnegotiation category, ($t [19] = 2.21, p < .05$). Differences between suicidal and nonsuicidal participants on all other coding categories were nonsignificant.

For the present study, all responses obtained from participants were scored by two trained independent raters. Raters were trained using the coding manual cited above, in which sample responses for each category and methods for coding some atypical responses were provided. In the present investigation, raters achieved an initial interrater agreement of 82% per participant protocol. All differences were subsequently resolved through negotiation and consensus was required for every item.

RESULTS

Relationship Between Suicidal/Nonsuicidal Group Membership and Nonnegotiation Scores

A one-way analysis of variance was performed using nonnegotiation scores as a dependent variable in order to assess differences in the degree to which suicidal and nonsuicidal participants offer nonnegotiation re-

sponses on the Negotiation Inventory. A summary of the analysis of variance is presented in Table 1. As predicted, suicidal participants offered significantly more nonnegotiation responses than their nonsuicidal counterparts ($F [3,56] = 3.23, p < .03$). A Tukey *B* test for homogeneous subgroups indicated that this significant *F* was attributable to differences between the means of the high magnitude-of-intent attempters and the nonsuicidal comparison group.

Relationship Between Suicidal/Nonsuicidal Group Membership and Negotiation Scores

In addition to a nonnegotiation score, each participant also received scores for the number of apologies, accounts, challenges, and contingency responses they offered on the Negotiation Inventory. These four scores conjointly represent the number and type of negotiation moves offered by each participant. Although no specific predictions were offered about differences among the four subject groups on each of these four negotiation subscores, a series of four one-way analyses of variance were conducted to assess any differences in the patterns of negotiations offered by suicidal and nonsuicidal participants.

Of the four analyses of variance conducted only the analysis using contingency-type responses as the dependent variable approached significance ($F [3,56] = 2.63, p < .059$), suggesting that participants in the nonsuicidal and ideator groups offer more contingency-type negotiations than their suicidal counterparts. The four analyses as a group, however, must be treated as indicating that while suicidal and nonsuicidal subjects

Table 1. "Nonnegotiation" Responses by Suicidal/Nonsuicidal Group Membership

<i>Suicidal/Nonsuicidal group membership</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Group 1 (HiMag)	7.47	3.29	15
Group 2 (LoMag)	6.60	3.09	15
Group 3 (Ideators)	7.33	3.83	15
Group 4 (Nonsuicidal)	4.20	2.76	15

ANOVA Summary				
<i>Source</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Between Groups	3	103.33	34.44	3.23*
Within Groups	56	597.07	10.66	
Total	59	700.40		

Note: * $p < .03$.

are distinguishable in the degree to which they employ nonnegotiation responses they are not distinguishable on the basis of the patterns of negotiations they employ.

Two possible interpretations can be offered for this finding. Conceptually, these findings may indicate that the four types of negotiation moves may be pragmatically equivalent as status-reaffirming moves for these subjects. The choice to employ any particular negotiation may be attributable to the nature of the violations and the content of the accusation in question, rather than to any programmatic effort or characteristic style to offer one type of negotiation rather than another. It is also possible, however, that no differences were found in these analyses because the five negotiation/nonnegotiation scores are linearly dependent. The significant differences between subgroups which were found for nonnegotiation scores may have restricted the potential variance between groups on the remaining four subscores and increased the likelihood of finding nonsignificant differences with these dependent variables.

Because nonsignificant differences were obtained on the four negotiation subscales, the following analysis is restricted to nonnegotiation scores.

Relationship Between Suicidal/Nonsuicidal Group Membership, Depression and Nonnegotiation Scores

The correlation between suicidality and depression was established by performing a simple regression analysis with depression scores as the dependent variable. The categorical variable of suicidal/nonsuicidal group membership was used as a predictor by converting it into three dummy-coded variables. The analysis reveals that suicidal/nonsuicidal group membership accounts for 34% of the variance in depression scores ($F [3,56] = 9.42, p < .001$) and, as expected, indicates a significant direct relationship between participants' depth of depression and their degree of suicidal intent.

Because of the relatively strong direct correlation between group membership and depression, a series of further regression analyses were conducted to clarify the relationship between suicidality and depth of depression with respect to nonnegotiation scores. Using nonnegotiation scores as the dependent variable, depression and suicidal/nonsuicidal group membership were alternately used as the first and second predictors in two forced regression designs. The results indicate that when group membership alone is used as a predictor, it accounts for 13.95% of the unadjusted variance in nonnegotiation scores ($F [3,56] = 3.03, p < .04$). Adding depression as a second predictor increases the variance

accounted for to 16.55% ($F [4,55] = 2.73, p < .04$) although the amount of increased variance attributable to the addition of depression is not significant.

Conversely, depression as the sole predictor accounts for only 10.99% of the unadjusted variance in nonnegotiation scores ($F [1,58] = 7.16, p < .02$) and the amount of increased variance attributable to the addition of suicidal/nonsuicidal group membership is not significant.

While no causal inferences can be made on the basis of these correlational analyses, they do indicate that the relationship between suicidality and depression is complex, that both contribute to the prediction of nonnegotiation scores and that both may correspond to changes in a person's behavioral eligibilities. These two variables do, however, share considerable covariance and the additional variance accounted for by adding one or the other to a regression equation may not be sufficient to warrant using both as predictors. If initial variance accounted for by one predictor (i.e., the raw correlation) is therefore used as a criterion for predictor selection, the results indicate that suicidal/nonsuicidal group membership offers the greater predictive power.

DISCUSSION

The central finding of the present study is that in response to accusations of wrongdoing, suicidal subjects are significantly less likely to negotiate their own personal characteristics than are nonsuicidal people. The present study does, of course, have a number of methodological limitations which must be considered when interpreting this finding. For example:

1. Subjects were recruited in a large state psychiatric hospital which serves a distinct segment of the general population. Patients are primarily from indigent families, without jobs or medical insurance, and often without permanent residence. At present, the relationship between histories of this kind and the eligibility to negotiate is unclear. It may be the case, for example, that psychiatric histories of the kind which are common in state hospitals are themselves sufficient to generate characteristic ineligibilities. This possibility is attenuated somewhat by the fact that comparison group subjects, who offered significantly more negotiation moves than their suicidal counterparts, are also members of the population served by the state hospital. Nevertheless, a systematic effect of "state hospital histories" must be considered in interpreting the present findings.

Similarly, it has been noted that admission to a state hospital itself, for whatever reason, is a powerful degradation (Goffman, 1967). The effects of this degradation on the present study are unclear, but must be considered as one possible source of systematic variance. For ex-

ample, while all subject groups used in this study shared the status of state hospital admission, the preadmission course of their difficulties may have varied systematically. Many of the nonattempters found themselves in the state hospital because, in effect, they were considered to be public nuisances. These patients, who often recognized the reasons for their admission, typically felt that they had been unjustly certified. Others viewed their hospitalization as an opportunity to divest themselves temporarily of financial problems; a few were merely awaiting transfer to another facility which was better suited to their needs. Suicide attempters, however, appeared to be a much more homogeneous group, all of whom reported recent periods of extreme personal distress and many of whom recognized the importance of hospitalization. Given these differences, suicide attempters may assume the degraded status of patient more readily than nonattempters. The finding that nonattempters offer more negotiations may correspondingly reflect a more acute desire to be discharged and to demonstrate that they are not in need of psychiatric care.

2. All suicidal subjects were interviewed within 24 hours of their admission to the hospital. This relatively short period of time between admission and interview was insisted upon to minimize the opportunity for subjects to (a) spontaneously recover from their suicidal ideation; (b) visit family or friends who might exacerbate or alleviate their continuing suicidal thoughts; or (c) receive psychiatric care. This precaution could not be totally efficient, since a suicidal act may sometimes have an immediate cathartic effect. A number of suicide attempters may, as well, be accompanied to the hospital by family members who are responsible for saving them. The reported differences between suicidal and nonsuicidal groups indicate that the technique of near-immediate data collection did prevent the attenuation of significant differences. Nevertheless, it is unclear in what ways and to what degree the data are confounded by any of a number of possible postattempt phenomena such as, for example, seeing the world from the eyes of a newly degraded (unsuccessful suicide attempter). Statements about the subjects of the study as suicide attempters must therefore be treated with the cautions that are reserved for any *post hoc* description.

Implications of the Present Study and Directions for Future Research

1. *Depression, Suicide, and Hopelessness.* Apart from the reservations expressed above, however, the findings of this study are broadly consistent with other observations of suicidal individuals. There is a good deal of evidence in the literature to suggest that suicide attempters do find themselves in situations which have been described as "untenable"

or "hopeless" (Bedrosian & Beck, 1979; Farber, 1968; Hattem, 1964; Kobler & Stotland, 1964; Kovacs, Beck & Weissman, 1975; Minkoff, Bergman, Beck & Beck, 1973; Rubenstein, Moses & Lidz, 1958). Kobler and Stotland (1964), for example, have presented a case history of a small psychiatric in-patient facility that experienced an epidemic of suicides within a brief crisis period. They suggest that the major determinant of suicidal behaviors is the observations of attempters that those around them believe that there is no way to prevent them from carrying through their lethal plan. Minkoff, et al. (1973), have similarly noted that many suicide attempters report having experienced feelings of hopelessness and describe a suicide attempter as one who "believes that nothing will turn out right for him, nothing he does will succeed . . . and his worst problem will never be solved" (p. 455).

Nevertheless, some important questions remain about what factors might distinguish a person who is merely depressed from one who is depressed and suicidal. Bedrosian and Beck (1979) have suggested that the concept of hopelessness which has been discussed above may be worth exploring in this regard. They have suggested that suicidal individuals not only face problematic changes in their world (which might be characteristic of any mood disorder) but, additionally, that they see no opportunity for implementing changes. Suicidal acts therefore become reasonable alternatives.

The conceptualization offered in the present paper is in many ways consistent with the formulation proposed by Bedrosian and Beck (1979). In fact, the data presented above suggest that the types of negotiations offered by suicidal individuals may, like scores on the Hopelessness Scale (Kovacs, et al., 1975), offer a methodological link between depression and the potential lethality of the suicidal act. This similarity is not surprising, since a suicidal individual who finds that he has been divested of his status as a negotiator may, in fact, be hopeless and may experience limitations in the behavioral options available to him. Typically, these restrictions will encompass behaviors which enable some persons to alter real-world states of affairs. Restrictions of the sort discussed in this conceptualization are "what hopelessness is all about."

The negotiation model, however, provides for the ascription of meaning to the suicidal act. It suggests that the suicidal individual is one who still retains some status and therefore "still has something to lose." Within this context, the suicidal act may be viewed as a self-affirmation and not simply an act of resignation to unmitigatable circumstances. While an immediate concern of a clinical or crisis intervention center may therefore be the alleviation of acute stress, a long-term therapeutic goal in working with suicidal individuals may be more profitably viewed

as the reinstatement of the attempter's status as a negotiator (Schwartz, 1979).

2. *The Negotiation Model and the Paradoxical Nature of Suicide Attempts.* Shneidman (1969), in discussing the notes of suicide committers, has stressed the paradoxical nature of the suicide note. He has noted that committers frequently leave instructions to be carried out after their death, express angry or loving feelings toward important people in their lives and discuss future events as if they will continue to have an impact on or be affected by them. Calling the expression of such thoughts "catalogic," Shneidman (1969) has remarked that suicide committers are unable to cognize their own deaths and treat the world as a place in which they will continue to have a part.

Paradoxes like these are not limited to suicide committers; a number of conceptual problems must be faced in discussing suicide attempters as well. For example, apart from duplicitous attempts in which the attempter is explicitly *not* intending to die, any attempt will be potentially lethal to some degree. Since a successful negotiation can benefit only individuals who are not successfully suicidal, it could be claimed that the value for the attempter of negotiating in this way is somewhat unclear. If the attempter dies, then any reaffirmation of status will be meaningless. Yet, it is also the case that many attempters do not deliberately insure the failure of their attempts; for them death is a genuine possibility.

Although a compelling solution to this paradox is not yet available, the present formulation does offer some indications of what a solution to the paradox might look like. Briefly, the description of suicide attempts as negotiation moves suggests that they represent efforts on the part of attempters to reaffirm their status within a network of relationships. To the degree that their status is successfully reaffirmed, attempters can also expect to preserve important behavioral eligibilities or, perhaps, broaden their opportunities in new ways. For many attempters, however, the benefits which correspond to reaffirmation may not be as important as the reaffirmation itself. For them a suicidal act, regardless of outcome, may be justified by its accrediting power alone.

3. *Suicide Attempters and Committers.* The initial impetus for the present conceptualization and study was the reported observation (Stengel, 1964) that suicide attempts are far more ambiguous in their significance than successful suicidal acts. The study reported in this paper did not directly address this issue. The conceptualization introduced above, however, does suggest that suicide attempters and committers may be more similar than their respective epidemiologies might indicate, since mem-

bers of both groups are struggling with significant disruptions of their interpersonal worlds. It may be valuable to treat suicide committers and attempters as differing from one another only in the degree to which their interpersonal world has been disrupted, with the additional expectation that the particular events which precipitate such disruptions may be different as well.

This redescription is in contrast to the observation that attempters and committers are epidemiologically distinct groups, a position which also suggests respective sets of conceptually independent reasons for the behaviors of these two groups. The negotiation model represents, instead, an insistence upon viewing suicidal acts as "cut from the same interpersonal cloth" such that differences between suicidal groups reflect variations in the type, range, and locus of their interpersonal difficulties. It is certainly the case that epidemiological differences between suicidal groups may help observers identify the likely areas of interpersonal disruption, but the present conceptualization raises the possibility that intervention techniques may be most successful if they are tailored to specific interpersonal disruptions and the attempter's degraded status.

In a recent major work, Baechler (1980) has suggested that suicidal individuals all face problematic situations and that suicidal acts can all be viewed as a problem-solving strategy. As Shneidman (1980) notes, Baechler dismisses "the three traditional approaches to the study of suicide: moral and philosophical analysis, the analysis of individual cases and the statistical" (1980, p. 175) in exchange for a position which emphasizes that "suicide denotes all behavior that seeks and finds the solution to an existential problem by making an attempt on the life of the subject" (Baechler, 1980, p. 74). In effect, the present conceptualization provides one method by which the impact of the problems faced by suicidal persons can be formulated. It is consistent with recommendations such as those of Baechler (1980) which stress the importance of a suicide attempt as, at the very least, an understandable response to a state of affairs which, for the attempter, is untenable. This conceptualization offers no suggestions about which states of affairs are most likely to be seen in this way or which persons are most likely to find some state of affairs untenable. It does, however, provide a basis for discussing such issues in a coherent way that is consistent with the attempter's own view of the world.

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NOTE

1. Data were collected as part of a larger study (Kirsch, 1979) in which additional hypotheses were tested. The partition of subjects reported in the present investigation reflects the requirements of the larger study.

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