

**The Infantilization and Stigmatization of Suicide:
A Multi-Modal Analysis of British Press Reporting of the Bridgend Suicides**

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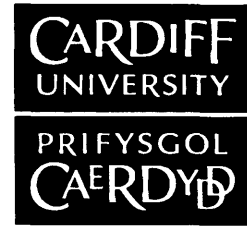
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Dedication

For Richard, who in life loved me endlessly, and in death inspired a new path for my life,
guided by his love and unfailing spirit.

AND

For Joey Davis who brought so much joy, love and happiness to others; you will be missed, but
loved, cherished and remembered forever.

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Abstract

Between January 2008 and June 2008, 20 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 took their own lives in the South Wales Borough of Bridgend. In this study, I examined a sample of both national and Welsh newspapers over this six-month period, employing both quantitative (content analysis) and qualitative (discourse analysis, interviews with journalists) methods to determine how the British Press reports suicide and also to determine how journalists balance their social responsibility to report suicide with their role of maintaining stability in society. Emile Durkheim's framework for suicide and Edwin Shneidman's theory of 'psychache' helped contextualize why suicide occurs, while Bob Franklin's, Stuart Allan's, and Barbara Zelizer's theories of news constructions, framing and production processes helped further my argument about the British press' responsibility to report responsibly while maintaining the status quo. My findings show that journalists created five key categories in which they could further stigmatize the issue of suicide: reaction to death by those left behind; reason for death; description of the deceased; infantilization; and suicide and Internet usage. These categories were summarily framed by questions around why suicide occurs and by ideologies of childhood. This study concludes that the most prevalent discourse around suicide is that it should never happen; people should die naturally, preferably in old age. To reinforce that discourse, journalists tend to deem all adult suicides to be childish acts and 'other' those that die into a category of the 'deviant non-child'. It appears, then, that an overarching assumption underpinning British newspaper reports of suicide is that it is a destabilizing force in liberal democratic society. As such, journalists play a significant role in maintaining balance and replicating acceptable discourses around the issue of suicide in this society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introducing Bridgend

In January 2008, the South Wales borough of Bridgend became the focus of local, national and international media attention due to a spate of suicides in the region. Suicide, once believed to be a social issue that should be kept under wraps because of the stigma associated with it, became much more openly discussed as the former mining town made national headlines over the first six months of 2008 for having had 20 suicides amongst people aged 15-29. Although government health officials in Wales had long been aware of the high suicide rates in the region, it was not until Welsh newspapers began closest sustained coverage of the story that those suicide rates came under the spotlight and health officials were taken to task. The story soon made national and international headlines after the Wales News Service sold a sensationalistic piece of copy to both tabloids and broadsheets¹ (Appendix I). The story, (accompanied by photographs²), focused predominantly on sensationalising the suicides, thus constructing the borough of Bridgend as 'Britain's suicide capital', and 'death town', describing the deaths that occurred there as part of a 'suicide craze', and attributing them to a 'suicide cult'.

Despite not providing a headline with the Wales News Service article, the story still made the front pages of the national newspapers on 23rd January, 2008. Headlines ranged from *The Mirror's*, 'Suicide Town: Parents' anguish as seven young friends all hang themselves in the space of one year' to *The Daily Mail's*, 'The Internet Suicide Cult: Chilling Links Between Seven Youngsters Found Hanged in the Same Town. They Lived and Died Online', to *The Guardian's*,

¹ According to the Wales News Service, the article was sold to red-topped newspapers, quality newspapers, and broadcasters throughout the UK. Due to confidentiality clauses in contracts, the agency declined to specify to which newspapers and broadcasters the article was sold.

² The Wales News Service declined to share the photo package for the purposes of this dissertation because of ownership rights.

'Police Suspect Internet Link to Suicides: Seven Young People Found Dead in Last 12 Months. Mother urges parents to monitor computer use' to *The Sun's*, 'Bebo mates in suicide chain'.

All newspapers in the sample³ I examined, picked up on the sensationalist references to the alleged link between the suicides and the internet, as well as making references in those stories to the alleged 'suicide cult'. It should be noted here that neither of these references were found to be the reasons behind the suicidal deaths by the South Wales Police. After the suicides from South Wales made national headlines on 23rd January, 2008, national and international newspapers and broadcasters began to descend on the area the very next day.

1.2 Research Questions and Argument

Guiding the research in this thesis were two questions:

1. How do British Newspapers report suicide?
2. How do journalists balance their social responsibility to report suicide so as to ensure an informed citizenry with their role of maintaining stability in society?

The first question, while quite broad, will provide a crucial point for future research relating to media reporting of suicide. Currently, the area of media reporting and suicide tends to rely on older pieces of research from the 1960s and 1970s, which focus heavily on seeking the cause and effect of suicide, rather than seeking to understand how newspapers report this rather critical social issue. The second question guiding this research was based on the fundamental understanding amongst media scholars that journalists have a social responsibility to report the news, and in this case— specifically in relation to young people — reporting adult suicide in a way that is different to the reporting of childhood suicide. Allan (2004) states '... we rely on news accounts to be faithful representations of reality. We are asked to believe, after all, that

³ The newspapers studied in this sample were: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, *South Wales Echo*, *The Western Mail*, *The Times on Sunday*, *The Observer*, *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Sunday Mirror* and *Wales on Sunday*.

truly professional journalists are able to set aside their individual preconceptions, values and opinions in order to depict reality as it actually is to us, their audience' (83). The second part of my research question asks whether journalists also have a role to play in maintaining stability in society. This thesis will argue that journalists must constantly negotiate between their social responsibility to report suicide⁴, and fulfilling their role of maintaining stability in society. It will become clear in this dissertation that it is still difficult to have an open discussion about suicide in the United Kingdom as the news reporting of the Bridgend suicides demonstrates. It is clear that journalists still find it difficult to explain the complexities of this social issue.

1.3 Patterns in Suicide

Suicide is a complicated issue; looking at the statistics for the UK does not help to make it any less so. In 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that, in England, about 5,000 people die by suicide annually. Approximately 19,000 suicide attempts are made by adolescents every year in Britain and, each month, more than 70 young people aged 15-24 die by suicide (Hill, 1995; Marris et al, 2000; Duffy and Ryan, 2004). In Wales, the rates of suicide are statistically higher than those of England and Northern Ireland. Between 1996 and 2006, about 300 people died by suicide in Wales, a rate that has remained relatively constant (NPHS, 2008: 9). Each year in Wales, on average, there are 21.5 deaths per 100,000, with rates differing between local health boards throughout the country. Of importance here, Bridgend has higher overall rates of suicides among males (25.2/100,000) than females. Female deaths in the borough are 4.6 per 100,000. The highest number of female suicides in Wales, however, can be found in Conwy, with 11.9 per 100,000 (NPHS, 2008: 16).

⁴ Journalists have a social responsibility to report suicide, not only because it is a complicated social issue, but also because it affects the health and economic stability of a society. It is not an issue that can be ignored.

In 1961, British law deemed suicide no longer a crime in England and Wales. Prior to this, those who attempted suicide and failed could be prosecuted and imprisoned, while the families of those who succeeded could also potentially be prosecuted (Suicide Act 1961 c.60). In part, this was due to religious and moral beliefs around intentionally taking one's own life, which some regarded as an act of self-murder. Following the change in law, McClure (2000) found that between 1963 and 1975 there was a marked decrease in recorded suicides amongst both males and females in England and Wales. He attributes this change primarily to the detoxification process that was being undertaken by the national gas companies. This meant the number of people killing themselves by placing their heads in gas ovens, as well as the number of people killing themselves by carbon monoxide poisoning in their cars in non-ventilated garages, was reduced. McClure argues, however, that this decrease was short lived, as, between 1975 and 1980, suicides began to rise again, in part due to the increased purchase of automobiles (2000: 64). It was Kelley and Bunting (1998) who noted 'a decrease in the suicide rate in England and Wales between 1991 and 1996, which was related to a decrease in the proportion of suicides attributed to poisoning with motor vehicle exhaust gas', though this research could be considered flawed (1998: 30). In attributing the causation of suicide to just one factor, Kelley and Bunting's research is an example of narrow thinking when it comes to causation of suicide. McClure (2000) notes it is not possible to link only one reason to the causation of a suicide. In fact, he argues, between 1975 and 1991, there were increases in male unemployment, violence, single-person households, divorce, warrants for repossession of homes, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, the HIV infection, and the changing role of women in British society (2000: 66), all of which could be linked to increased suicide rates throughout the UK.

In 2008, the Bridgend suicides became international news primarily because, in my view, of a narrow reporting on why the suicides occurred; most frequently, a link between suicide

and the Internet was forged, though never proven. As the Internet is a globalized method of communication, and is unregulated, the Bridgend suicides caught the attention of international media because of the potential for similar suicides to occur around the world. As McClure (2000) states, it is rarely possible to link only one reason to a suicidal death. This dissertation will show how British Newspapers constructed largely uninformed reasons for the suicides and how, as a result, they further reinforced stigmatized views of suicide, thus pushing any reasonable discussion the citizenry could have had on this social issue even further away than before. First, though, I would like to highlight how this study came about and some of the issues I have personally struggled with while conducting this research.

1.4 Why Suicide?

I worked as a print journalist in the United States between 1999 and 2006, covering both local and statewide news in Florida. I reported my first suicide story as a cub reporter in 2002 working a general assignment beat. I covered the story much like I would cover any other 'death' story, calling the Police Information Officer, the Medical Examiner's Office, a family member, a place of employment and, in this case, a suicide prevention office. The story was worked mostly from my desk, and from start to completion it took about two hours. I did not give much thought to the phrasing I used, nor the pictures that I ran, and I did not run an information box with contact details for those in need to seek help.

Between 2002 and 2005, I covered four suicide-related stories: a 'murder-suicide', a 'regular suicide', one story on suicide prevention, and one on bringing attention to a support group that helps those bereaved by suicide. These stories did not register much with me; I was the youngest journalist in the newsroom, the newest one to the field, thus I was given what were considered to be the 'throw-away' stories. In my newsroom, a 'throw-away' story was defined as a story that took precious time away from covering more in-depth analytical and

important pieces of journalism. In September 2005, however, my definition of suicide as a 'throw-away' story changed when my partner Richard, also a journalist, hanged himself at the local university where he was completing his journalism degree. Richard suffered from bi-polar disorder, and had attempted suicide once right before we met, and once during our three-year relationship. While I was aware of the possibility that he could kill himself, I never believed that he would. As he had died in a public place, our newsroom policy deemed that his suicide be covered. The story of his death, written by one of my colleagues, ran on the bottom of an inside page, with a mugshot of his face. His death received much coverage both in print and broadcast media, but I found myself conflicted when reading and watching the reports. They seemed insensitive, but I was not sure why. Two days after his death, I returned to work, where, unfortunately, my first story was that of the suicide of a local high school student. I found myself laboriously pouring over what words to use to describe his death, now having an understanding of how it felt to be bereaved. Where once I would have given little thought to the story, I found myself now arguing with my editor over the picture we were going to run, and the placement of the story on the page. While grieving, I was still reporting, but I found myself drawn more and more to the reporting of suicide. I pitched a series of articles for the editorial page on mental health, but all were shot down because the publisher deemed that they were not 'appealing' enough to the readership. After an argument at an editorial board meeting with my publisher about the newspaper not being proactive in its stance on mental illness and suicide prevention, he told me if I could angle the story towards children, it would run. Combing death records and filing numerous requests for public information, I was finally able to collate a series of five editorials, about 1,000 words each, on the prevention of childhood suicide and mental illness. The series ran over the course of three weekends in 2006, winning me numerous awards

and accolades, but that is where the story stopped. The newspaper was done covering suicide and mental illness, while I was just getting started.

Upon reflection of the series, the first thing that stood out was the fact that the only way it would be printed was if I angled it towards childhood. This led me to wonder what it was about childhood that had such a hold over newspapers, and why reporting issues that targeted children were deemed to be more important than those that targeted adults. Another issue that stood out was how I framed the articles. I framed them around fear, arguing for more mental health screening, more funding for suicide prevention and I supported an initiative to create a statewide office of suicide prevention for Florida. Additionally, the phrases I used, the language that was chosen, the pictures and graphics that ran with the series were all chosen with much more care than when I was merely writing a 'throw-away' story back in 2002.

Unfortunately, because I had daily deadlines to meet and needed to move on from the suicide story, these merely remained questions in the back of my mind until I decided to do a PhD. Richard's suicide had a profound impact on my life, and the passion I felt for writing about suicide and learning about it has only increased since his death. Researching suicide and merging it with my love of journalism seemed quite natural to me. I decided to loosely focus my dissertation on the questions that emerged from the series I wrote back in 2006. As with all dissertations, my research questions developed as I read the literature available and decided how I wanted to focus my research. The general purpose of this dissertation, then, is to unpack the complexities of how British Newspapers report suicide, the discourses employed by the press and the framing of suicide stories in an effort to gain a better understanding of how this complicated issue is portrayed to the British populous.

1.5 Challenges Faced

Completing this dissertation has proven to be quite a challenge. I was trained as a journalist in the United States and my training taught me that, in journalism, one must be objective, have a high code of ethics, work toward a higher ideal and never compromise work ethic. When studying the British Press, however, all that I held to be true about journalism was discarded as fallacy. British journalists place themselves in stories, and tend to be treated disdainfully and as untrustworthy by the populous. While journalists are not always seen as trustworthy in the US, they are widely seen as professionals. As will become apparent through an examination of Franklin's (1997) research later in this dissertation, newspaper reporters in the UK are mostly seen as working class, while in the US a university degree is needed to enter the field of journalism, so journalism is perceived as a more middle-class profession.

In this research project, it was difficult for me to negotiate between holding British journalists and the field of journalism to a high standard, and following along with how the literature and previous research explains the field in terms of social constructionism. Yet, I am a social constructionist, sometimes. Social constructionism is a term that refers 'broadly to any theories that regard reality as socially constructed or constituted by individuals in contexts of interaction, as an outcome of interpretive definitions of the situation' (Harrington, 2005: 328). This dissertation will argue that childhood is a socially constructed life stage, that the literature around journalism shows the field to be one that is socially constructed based on ideologies and specific production practices held as tenets of that field, that issues around social class are socially constructed; one is not born 'lower class', but rather into an economically-sanctioned label given by society as being lower class; and all three will be evidenced through the news reporting of the Bridgend suicides. When it comes to the issue of suicide, however, and

positioning myself amongst the literature, you will read how I sometimes align myself with psychological theory while discarding the sociological theories present.

I have not reconciled myself on these two issues, nor do I think I ever will. I believe that journalists should be held to a higher standard than they are now, as the power to persuade and inform the citizenry is a heavy responsibility, one that should be treated with respect, caution and careful attention. Yet, I fundamentally know that journalists do not report 'truth'. They are creating the stories in which they report said 'truth' – we get to read a journalist's perspective on a particular topic, something that has been created based on professional ideologies and newsroom practices. When it comes to the issue of suicide, however, I fundamentally believe that this issue is not just socially constructed, that it is a psychological and biological issue with answers rooted in those fields. Journalists should seek out the answers in these areas but, instead, they merely construct their own version of what they deem the answers to why suicide occurs.

It is important to raise these points here to show that this dissertation, while providing insight and new knowledge as to how British Newspapers report suicide, it was also used as a tool on my part to work through my own grief and questions about suicide, in addition to critically engaging with, and questioning my own firmly-held beliefs around the field of journalism and what it means to be a journalist.

1.6 Childhood and Bridgend

I started this dissertation in 2006, initially looking at how British Newspapers discursively constructed three child suicides through their reporting. As I have already indicated, this approach was influenced by the editorials I wrote as a reporter where I was instructed to focus on children. Laura Rhodes, thirteen, from Swansea, Wales, died September 4th, 2004. Rhodes and her friend Rebecca Ling met in an internet chat room and soon became friends. The two

then met outside of the chat room and spent time with each other and eventually holidayed for two weeks in Greece with Rhodes' family. Upon their return to Wales, however, the two girls ran away. Police found them after a day and returned them to their families, but, within hours, both had overdosed, with Ling surviving and Rhodes dying.

The focus of this story revolved around the Internet, and it was the first of its kind that I could find that suggested that it was the unregulated, unknown nature of the Internet that enabled the two young girls to form a suicide pact. That discourse dominated news reports for the months following the death, up until the inquest. At the inquest, the coroner announced the 13-year-old had been bullied at school for being overweight. With that, the suicide pact discourse and that of the Internet, faded into the background as a mere mention and bullying was the new reason for why Rhodes died—and indeed for why all childhood suicide occurs. Additionally, a third discourse emerged: the two girls were allegedly gay and did not wish to be parted, and so a discourse around suicide pacts and sexuality consequently became dominant.

Rhodes' death was something of an anomaly. Childhood suicide is rare, or that is what we are told (this will be covered in greater detail in Chapter Three), but Rhodes' death became the example used whenever any child suicides occurred in Wales. For example, two years later, in November 2006, and then again in 2008, the *South Wales Echo* continued to use Rhodes' suicide as an example of what happens when children are not kept safe. The 2008 *South Wales Echo* article mentioned the Bridgend suicides in passing, but focused mostly on rising suicide rates in Wales. I found this quite interesting as the discourses that emerged following Rhodes' suicide were quite prevalent at some point or another during the Bridgend suicides. Regardless of the similarities, real or otherwise created by the British Press, the last story in which Rhodes'

death was mentioned was 31st January, 2008, despite her death being, for a time, such a prominent focus of the main discourses that surround a childhood suicide.

I examined two other child suicides prior to turning my attention to the Bridgend suicides. Eleven-year-old Ben Vodden of West Sussex hanged himself December 12th, 2006. Vodden's suicide made national headlines as it was well documented that he was being physically bullied by classmates at his school, while also being verbally bullied by his school bus driver. At Vodden's inquest, the coroner found bullying was to blame for his death, but left the verdict as open, as he did not believe the boy intended to kill himself. As a result of Vodden's death, a documentary was created for Channel Four to highlight bullying. Around the same time, new laws came into effect to curb bullying on school buses and celebrities launched a BeatBullying campaign which featured Vodden's face on posters and t-shirts. Like Rhodes', his story continued to be reported until January 14th, 2008, when *The Daily Telegraph* asked: 'What drives children to suicide?'. After that, his story was eclipsed by the reporting of the Bridgend suicides.

The first story regarding the Bridgend suicides appeared in the *South Wales Echo* on 17th January, 2008. Prior to that, no suicide-related stories dealing with the Bridgend area or those that came to be represented in the overall story ran in either the Welsh or national newspapers in 2007. This is an extremely important piece of information to keep in mind, especially when I discuss the Werther Effect, or the 'suicide copycat theory' in Chapter Three. The first Bridgend suicide story had its roots back in September 2006 when Dale Crole, eighteen, of Porthcawl, Wales, went missing. His decomposed body was found hanged in early January 2007. His was the first suicide to be reported in 2008 as part of the Bridgend spate.

A death that was not reported in 2008 in the Bridgend spate was that of 15-year-old Jonathan Reynolds of Bridgend, whose death happened to be part of my original three

childhood case-studies. Reynolds killed himself by lying down on a railway track. Like Vodden and Rhodes, Reynolds' death was allegedly linked to bullying, both physical and verbal⁵, at his comprehensive school. Reynolds was also allegedly gay. Like the other childhood deaths I initially examined, Reynolds' story was reported in the press until mid-2007. The question that stood out to me when deciding to focus solely on the Bridgend deaths as a sample was why Reynolds' death was not more visible in the Bridgend reporting. While there were similar discourses to those of other suicides – fear of the Internet's influence, a possible suicide pact, bullying, being gay – the one key difference was the method of death. While all the suicides in Bridgend had hanged themselves, Reynolds had been killed by a train. If journalists who reported the Bridgend suicides truly wished to uncover the whole story and fulfill their social responsibility to report and prevent suicide, then Reynolds' suicide, like Crole's, should arguably have been reported as part of the Bridgend story. By reporting his death, journalists would have accurately portrayed the issue of suicide in this South Wales region, but additionally, a conversation could be had about various methods chosen to complete a suicide, as well as addressing the issue of childhood suicide, instead of just ignoring it completely.

This brief look at the way childhood suicide is constructed in the media leads me to believe that the key discourses around how and why suicides occur did not change when it came to Bridgend. Discourses around method, causation and technology were all present. The key difference or divergence of paths comes when talking about who died. In these childhood cases, the overarching discourse was that of protection, vulnerability and innocence, three

⁵ Most experts agree that there are two types of bullying: that which is direct, tending to be physical, and that which is indirect, which is more psychological. Physical bullying can include, (this is by no means an exhaustive list): hitting, tripping, taking belongings, beating, kicking, jostling, punching, pushing, pinching, maiming and can even lead to murder (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Rigby, 1996; Tattum, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith and Thompson, 1991). Psychological bullying can include the following, (again, this is not an exhaustive list): making faces, dirty gestures, telling nasty stories, intimidation, spreading malicious rumours, name calling, stalking behaviour, malicious telephone calls to the home and repeatedly hiding another's belongings (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Rigby, 1996; Tattum, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith and Thompson, 1991).

discourses that also apply to the Bridgend suicides. In the case of these three childhood deaths⁶, however, schools, parents and other adults were deemed as not doing enough to protect these children from being bullied, and the consequence was suicide. In the case of Bridgend, it was the Internet and in part, government that shouldered the blame for why the suicides happened.

1.7 Breaking News: Suicides in Bridgend

The first story of the Bridgend suicides ran in the *South Wales Echo* on 17th January 2008. Nearly a full week after the original newspaper report, the Bridgend story became national news on 23rd January, 2008. One might assume the national newspapers were slow to pick up on a potential suicide 'cluster'; in fact, a news release from the Wales News Service on January 22nd is what kicked off the coverage and deemed the suicides as part of something more sinister: 'A teenage suicide cult is sweeping through a town with seven young people killing themselves in copycat deaths', the lead of that release read (Appendix I). Consequently, between 23rd January and 28th January, the newspapers in my sample ran 57 stories between them⁷. Another key event, the publication of a press release (Appendix II) by the suicide prevention organization PAPYRUS, demanding journalists stop reporting the suicides, only fuelled the fire. As a direct result coverage that had been decreasing made another leap, with 25 news articles published between February 6th, 2008 and February 16th, 2008. It is important to note that PAPYRUS disseminated this release during the height of coverage in an attempt to calm the press down, but instead of achieving its goal, my sample showed a spike in coverage.

Additionally, during February 2008, two cousins, Nathaniel Pritchard, fifteen, and Kelly Stephenson, 20, died, which created the climax of the story. It was on the 20th and 21st of

⁶ Laura Rhodes, Ben Vodden and Jonathan Reynolds

⁷ The Newspapers studied in this sample were: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, *South Wales Echo*, *The Western Mail*, *The Times on Sunday*, *The Observer*, *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Sunday Mirror* and *Wales on Sunday*.

February, when 46 stories ran, that the story reached its peak. The press was already encouraged to focus on suicide in Bridgend by the deaths of the two cousins, as well as an additional suicide on the 19th February. On the 20th February, however, the South Wales Police, as well as Pritchard's parents, accused the media of causing the suicides, specifically pointing to the *South Wales Echo* as the primary culprit. This created outrage amongst journalists, especially as there was no evidence to support such a claim. After that, Bridgend continued to be an issue in the press, though not always in each newspaper. It was March 20th before another spike in coverage occurred, with 21 articles being published in my newspaper sample. The coroner for Bridgend had ruled on five of the suicides and deemed only two as actual suicides⁸. After this announcement, the stories dwindled until the death of Sean Rees, 19, a Sainsbury's grocery store worker who killed himself on April 20th, 2008. On the 21st and 22nd of April, a total of ten stories ran in the newspapers sampled in this study. Between April 24th, 2008, and June 30th, 2008, only a further 45 stories ran, thus bringing the coverage to a natural endpoint.

While the Bridgend story was ongoing, two other prominent suicides made national headlines in 2008. The first was the death of police chief constable Michael Todd of the Greater Manchester police force. Todd was found dead on a mountain in North Wales in early March 2008. His death dominated national headlines in both print and broadcast for an initial week and then in the days after his inquest and funeral in early April 2008. Print stories alluded to the fact that he had suffered depression in the past and had recently separated from his wife and children due to infidelity on his part. The second prominent death came only weeks after Todd's funeral. In mid-April 2008, children's television presenter Mark Speight was found hanged in a remote area of Paddington train station close to two weeks after he went missing.

⁸ For a death to be ruled a suicide in the UK, the coroner must have concrete evidence the person intended to kill themselves.

Speight's death came after extensive media coverage surrounding the death of his fiancée earlier in the year who had died after taking cocaine, sleeping pills and alcohol on a night out. He had been arrested on suspicion of murder, (he was later released without charge). He had to leave his presenting job in February 2008 and newspapers alleged that he could not bear to return to the flat where he had found his fiancée dead. I introduce these suicides here to illustrate how dominant a news story suicide was in the first half of 2008.

1.8 What this Research Entails

The dissertation focuses on a sample of print newspaper articles over a six-month period during the first half of 2008. Originally this study was going to examine the discourses constructed in childhood suicide stories. Since my initial engagement with the issue of press reporting of child suicides, the project has developed a focus on suicidal deaths in Bridgend. Not only will it provide some insight into how British Newspapers report suicide, but it will also further the context for understanding how society views the 'life stage' of childhood. Bridgend offers a clear example of some of the ways in which suicides of young people is embedded within discourses of childhood, which will be discussed in some detail in Chapters Three and Six.

In the early part of 2008, it seemed that suicide mania was sweeping the UK: suicide dominated both the national and local headlines. Not only were there near-weekly suicides happening in Wales, a prominent police chief had also taken his own life, as well as a popular children's television presenter. As will be seen in Chapter Three, there is currently a marked gap in research analyzing suicide and the media. What little research that exists has largely been undertaken outside of journalism studies and has tended to centre attention on blaming the media for causing or at the very least, contributing to, suicide. The research undertaken in this study will not attempt to refute psychological data that already exists, though I will place my study amongst it theoretically by showing the common assumptions in the current literature

around discourses of media and suicide that this body of research continues to propagate. My study, then, seeks to address and encourage the development of further journalism studies research in this area. While it is impossible for any dissertation to tackle all aspects of the reporting of suicide, I will nevertheless seek to cover a wide breadth of what I believe to be the most pressing issues for journalism studies.

The overarching question for this research is: How do British Newspapers report suicide? To address this question, I will closely examine the discourses that shape newspaper reporting of suicide, as well as how journalists report suicide in terms of format, placement, sourcing, framing, visuals and causation. As I have already indicated, this question is quite broad. My initial thoughts going into this project centred on two important issues. Firstly, that one of the key roles of the press in a liberal democracy is to report the news so that informed public discussion can occur and the right decisions made about how best to organise, regulate and fairly distribute resources in society. Secondly, journalists also have a responsibility to bring to public attention and scrutiny social issues that might endanger the stability of civil society. These points underpin my final research question: How do journalists balance their social responsibility to report suicide, so as to ensure an informed citizenry, with their role of maintaining stability in society?

I will argue in this dissertation that when reporting suicide, journalists must constantly negotiate between the two. One of the fundamental purposes of journalism is to tell us what we need to know as citizens. A journalist has a social responsibility to report suicides, not only to create awareness of the issues involved, but also to help prevent suicide. Journalists have important public platforms from which they are able to shed light on social issues, delve deeper into topics that are uncomfortable and, in this case, create public awareness of some of the early

warning signs to look for in a potential suicide case so that people might be better equipped to help loved ones.

As part of this social responsibility, journalists should report on these issues without creating panic. However, in the case of Bridgend, journalists did not live up to their social responsibility. I will argue that the story was blown out of proportion, sensationalized and, that ultimately, journalists created a moral panic around the topic of suicide, thus making it difficult for the citizenry to have a reasonable debate about the issue.

It will emerge in this dissertation that, at its root, suicide is a destabilizing influence on society. This idea is not something I will prove through my research findings, but I point it out as an illustration of how panic around such an issue can lead to distorted understanding and simplistic explanations. When suicide occurs, it adversely affects the wider society as well as those immediately bereaved. As will be seen in Chapter Three, research shows that the health of a democracy can be judged by the number of citizens who choose to kill themselves. In fact, those who die by suicide are themselves often labelled as 'unstable'. I will show in this dissertation how the discourses and conceptions around childhood are so closely aligned to the discourses and conceptions around suicide that it could be argued that the functionality of a society rests on these conceptions. Both suicide and childhood share features that are rooted in society's fears and concerns around innocence, vulnerability, helplessness and protection. For example, children are held to be vulnerable, helpless beings that must be protected by adults as they are going through childhood. Those who suffer mental illness are also considered to be vulnerable to persuasion, helpless to heal, and requiring protection from themselves. Strength, not weakness, is the foundation of a healthy democracy, yet the created life stage of childhood, and those who suffer mental illness and consequently go on to die by suicide, are considered weak, thus destabilizing society and creating disorder.

I will show in this dissertation that in order to maintain social stability, journalists tend to fall back on 'othering' those who have died, as well as describing them in terms of social class, with the working classes seen to be the most vulnerable due to economic and social disadvantage. Hall (1997) believes, as do I, that journalists create a constructed reality within which a society operates. Within those social constructions, Hall (1997) defines the term 'otherness': '... people who are in any way significantly different from the majority 'them' rather than 'us' – are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed polarized binary extremes' (226). Yet, as stated, journalists also reported suicide in terms of social class. For the purposes of this dissertation, Urry's (1989) definition of social class as the 'past, current and future economic power of a family' should be considered (85). Together, these two social constructions, 'othering' and 'social class' create categories through which journalists can maintain stability when reporting a destabilizing issue such as suicide. Journalists maintain this stability by reporting young adult suicide as a 'lower class' issue, as well as reducing those who chose to die to the constructed life stage of childhood. This will be explored in extensive detail in Chapter Six.

The issue of why a suicide happens is also important. From personal experience, suicide turns a bereaved person's world upside down; a person bereaved by suicide questions everything they know to be true and will often change or mould opinions in a different direction. To maintain stability, journalists must try and fill in those 'why?' gaps, providing some sort of context for why someone would kill themselves. Not doing so would leave people questioning their own lives, their own beliefs, their own conceptions and constructions in everyday life. A suicidal death, as will be explained further in Chapter Three, is different to that

of a 'normal' death. The accepted discourse around death is that it must be 'natural'⁹. Suicide, however, is a choice; a person chooses the time, date and place where he or she will die, and generally does not involve others in the process. Conceptions of suicide held in society are that it is a weak act, an immoral and cowardly act, as well as rooted in social and religious stigma. Those who are bereaved by suicide question those conceptions for it is quite difficult to think of someone who has died by suicide as weak or immoral or as a coward. Few would like to think ill of their loved ones in death. Questioning the conception of suicide as leading to the potential destabilization of society, goes against the current accepted discourses around suicide in society, thus this questioning ultimately puts our conception of democracy in peril.

1.9 Structure of this PhD

This PhD contains two literature review chapters, a methods chapter, two findings chapters and a conclusion. Chapter Two will articulate the workings of British Newspapers, explaining its social responsibility to report the news and illustrating it through theories around news values, reporting and moral panics, ideology, framing, and othering. Engaging with these features of news reporting will provide context and understanding about how British Newspapers operate. Having this understanding is necessary in order to draw out inherent discourses journalists use to further stigmatize suicide.

Chapter Three explores the theories of suicide put forward by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim and American suicidologist, Edwin Shneidman. Durkheim (1951) can be considered the 'father of sociology'. His work on suicide was the first of its kind, and his developed framework is still relevant today when discussing causation of suicide, both in the fields of sociology and suicidology. Shneidman's (1969) contemporary work in the field of suicidology spans nearly five decades and his work around 'psychache' – a mental pain which

⁹ For example, murder and euthanasia are not acceptable forms of death in British society.

causes suicide—is considered quite groundbreaking in the field. These theories will lay a foundation for my research and provide explanation as to why suicide occurs. They will also allow me to position my own work on media reporting of suicide amongst the literature. In that chapter, I also review the literature around the Werther Effect¹⁰, and present existing research about media reporting of suicide. My research will not attempt to refute or clarify the already established body of research presented here, but it will provide a new path that subsequent researchers might consider following. Additionally, Chapter Three will explore societal conceptions of childhood and childhood suicide and discuss the discourses that emerge in the media as a result of those conceptions. Lastly, Chapter Three will briefly discuss the concept of bullying. As previously stated, bullying is the common discourse and reason given for a child suicide. An explanation of what bullying is will be provided, as will a review of the current literature, not to help explain or provide context for the Bridgend suicides, but to illustrate why the media would choose bullying as a reason to explain away a childhood suicide. It should be clear, by the end of Chapter Three, the specific ways in which journalists are charged with an obligation to report suicide responsibly in order to help sustain and stabilize civil society.

Chapter Four, will set up the study methodologically. This dissertation uses two main methods of analysis; quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis. I chose these methods as I felt they would yield the best results both in breadth and depth. Conducting a content analysis allowed me to look at my sample as a whole, drawing general conclusions about the reporting in terms of sourcing, framing, causation and format, to name a few.

¹⁰ David Phillips (1974) found a 12% increase in the US national suicide rate following the death of actress Marilyn Monroe in 1962. Following his discovery, he coined the term the ‘Werther Effect’ so called because of the potential impact a celebrity death might have on others, and how it might lead them to end their own lives. This theory has now become widely accepted in the suicidology and psychology fields to mean that the more suicide is reported in the media, the more suicides occur.

Wanting to gain more depth from my study, however, I conducted a close-reading discourse analysis of some newspaper articles from my sample. These articles enabled investigation of issues around stigma, social class, othering and causation. Additionally, in-depth interviews were carried out as a means of testing some of the findings from the content analysis and the discourse analysis. The interviews should be seen as a complementary enhancement to the two main methods rather than a stand-alone qualitative method. The interviews were primarily conducted to gain a better understanding of the findings already produced in both the discourse analysis and content analysis. Chapter Four outlines the rationale for my research design and introduces each method.

The dissertation then presents the two findings chapters. Chapter Five, focuses mainly on the content analysis, exploring themes of production, labelling and framing. In terms of production, I will present findings regarding how the Bridgend sample was reported, while taking an in-depth look at news sources to determine which voices were heard the most and to look for the presence of patterns in reporting a suicide story. When looking at labelling in the content analysis, I will analyze the usage of labels such as 'commit suicide', the method and descriptive terms such as 'suicide cult' and 'suicide victim.' Lastly, I will take a close look at the dominant frames that emerged around reporting of the Bridgend suicides, especially around causation¹¹, method, the area of Bridgend itself, the Internet and why the suicides happened.

The findings in Chapter Five provide a foundation for the close-reading discourse analysis reported in Chapter Six, where I examine a sample of twelve articles. After describing each one, I take a close look at one article in particular, chosen because of its ideological richness

¹¹ It should be noted that for this dissertation, causation refers mostly to where the blame for the suicides is placed. For example, newspapers could blame the breakdown of a relationship or a social networking site. Looking at the frame of 'Why?' references how newspapers then unpacked the causation. For example, why would a relationship breakdown cause someone to take their own life?

in terms of gender, social class, race, the suicide act itself, and the visuals present in the reporting of the story. I also use an interview with the journalist who wrote the article to illustrate the key categories that emerged, and explain why I think that it is representative of the overall coverage of the Bridgend suicides. The categories I look at revolve around my argument that the press must negotiate its role around social responsibility and stability. Those categories are: reaction to death, reason for death, description of the deceased, infantilization and suicide and Internet usage. I finish the chapter by illustrating some of the ways in which discourses of childhood and those around suicide are articulated, and how such articulations are negotiated by journalists.

The final chapter reviews my findings and reflects on the implication for theory, method and practice. The final chapter of this dissertation will conclude that, overall, the Bridgend coverage did not report suicide responsibly—that is to say, in ways that would provide important information about suicide to citizens without creating sensation or panic. The reporting of Bridgend highlighted the fact that, while suicide is a legal act in the UK, it is largely misunderstood. The sensationalized reporting of the suicides hampered any sensible discussion that could take place, consequently limiting debate around suicide and hindering future suicide prevention.

First, however, a discussion around how British Newspapers operate is critical to the understanding of press production processes and to analyze discourses that might emerge from my research. Tony Harcup (2004), Jack Fuller (1996) and Stuart Allan's (2004) definitions of news and the role news values play in news reporting will be examined first. As journalists are influenced by discourses embedded in society as much as the next person, ideologies of news will also be examined, focusing on Samuel Becker's (1984) theory of ideology where he states: 'Ideology governs the way we perceive our world and ourselves; it controls what we see as

natural or obvious' (1984: 69). It will be important to see what role, if any, ideology plays in the reporting of suicide. I will also explore the theory of framing in news articles to see what role it plays in the reporting of suicide. The literature presented in Chapter Two will provide a context within which newspaper reporting can be understood, and it will also help situate my argument of journalism as playing an important role in maintaining stability in society by creating the key discourses around the reporting of suicide.

Chapter Two: Production Processes of the British Press

2.1 Introduction

The British Press plays a vital role in contextualizing and recontextualizing important discourses of the day to its readers. This dissertation looks at how those discourses are both constructed and articulated to the society at large through newspaper pages. This chapter will examine Allan (2004), Harcup (2004) and Zelizer's (2004) definitions of news construction and what role those constructions play in news production and will also explore Becker's (1984) definition of ideology and explain the role that ideology and social class play in the reporting of news. Stanley Cohen's work around moral panics and folk devils will also be discussed in relation to both childhood suicide and the Bridgend suicides, which are the focus of this dissertation. Theories around framing will also be explored in this chapter, setting a foundation to explore how British Newspapers use framing to construct particular discourses around the issue of suicide. In the reporting of Bridgend, as stated in Chapter One, press releases and news releases played an important role in thrusting that story onto the national stage. Because of this, the roles that public relations and news agencies play in today's reporting of news will also be briefly examined. The chapter will conclude with a summary of arguments and an introduction to the theoretical, multi-disciplinary foundation of conceptual frames that will be outlined and explored in Chapter Three.

2.2 Theories of News

In general terms, the news is everywhere around us and is happening all the time. Anything can be a story; the key is being able to take everyday happenings and turn them into a news story so that they can be packaged, framed and communicated to an audience. This concept of the news is outlined by Cohen (1992), who suggests that: '...the news and the newsworthy are created, not discovered, by the press through its act of publication – they are whatever the news people

say they are' (8). Halberstam (1992) concurs, contending that the news is not 'out there' waiting to be reported, rather that 'events are transformed into news only if they meet the specific demands and practices of the news-making process: events become news by the news perspective and not because of its objective characteristics' (15). Harcup (2004) comes at his definition of news from a different theoretical perspective. With his ideas firmly rooted in a Habermasian frame of the public sphere, he states that journalists 'inform society about itself and [make] public that which would otherwise be private' (2). Fuller (1996) is more general in his definition, maintaining that 'news is a report of what a news organization has recently learned about matters of some significance or interest to the specific community that news organization serves' (6). Further still, Allan (2004) and Chalaby (1998) who both come at the definition of news from a historical context, tracing its roots back to the 15th Century with the development of 'language in oral or preliterate communities' (Allan, 2004: 9).

What is evident from the literature is that there is no consensus amongst academics as to what news actually is. There are consistent elements amongst their definitions, but there is not one definitive definition. For the purposes of this dissertation, my definition of news will align most closely with Zelizer (2004), who argues that news is something which has been created to help maintain a social group's solidarity (5). The 'news' is reported, or framed, in a specific way to maintain that solidarity, but it also maintains stability, or the status quo, in a society as well. In a democratic society, such stability is highly valued since it helps maintain, it is thought, a democratic system of government—i.e. for a society to uphold its norms and values, each member of the society must generally believe in and follow those rules and regulations, so that order, not chaos, is maintained. The media's role is to integrate its audience (the members of the society) into certain agreed-upon norms, and to continue to reinforce and replicate them on a daily basis. According to liberal theory, the principle democratic role of the media is to act as a

watchdog, or the fourth estate – i.e. keep an eye on government (McNair, 2000: 9). Curran (2002) explains further, ‘... the media can also be viewed in a more expansive way, in liberal theory, as an agency of information and debate which facilitates the functioning of democracy’ (225). The media plays a significant role in maintaining a functioning democracy by reinforcing order and stability in the construction of news reporting. Journalists do this by creating frames for stories, discourses around particular issues and topics, and representing those stories in particular ways, both visually and linguistically, on news pages. In fact, they choose the voices we hear in the public sphere and use those voices to reinforce to audiences what they should be thinking about or worrying about when it comes to a particular issue. Fundamentally, newspapers do this through the use of news values and ideologies.

2.3 Constructing the News

Galtung and Ruge (1965) made an important early contribution to academic thinking about the news values debate when trying to determine how foreign news gets reported. They initially listed eighteen news values that they thought journalists used to determine the value of a story: frequency, consonance, negativity, continuity, unexpectedness, composition, unambiguity, competition, personalization, co-optation, meaningful/cultural proximity, prefabrication, reference to elite nations, predictability, reference to elite persons, time constraints, conflict and logistics (70). More specifically, Galtung and Ruge (1965) argued:

... the more events satisfy the criteria mentioned, the more likely that they will be registered as news (selection); Once a news item has been selected what makes it newsworthy according to the factors will be accentuated (selection); Both the process of selection and the process of distortion will take place at all steps in the chain from event to reader (1965: 71).

Most journalists, when asked how they ‘uncover’ news, reference their field as needing a ‘sixth sense – a news sense’ (Zelizer, 2004: 30). In fact, it is a common statement made within the journalism field and noted by academics (Allan, 2004; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991; Chalaby,

1998; Fuller, 1996; Harcup, 2004). Allan (2004), however, argues that a 'nose for news' or a 'gut feeling' is not at the root of how news stories are created. Rather, it is a set of commonly held, yet unwritten, inherently bought-into beliefs – news values. Allan claims that 'news values help the newsworker to justify the selection of certain types of events as newsworthy at the expense of alternative ones' (61). Allan (2004) lays out the twelve news values reporters use to gauge whether an event is newsworthy: conflict, relevance, timeliness, simplification, personalization, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, cultural specificity, and negativity (62-63). In their content analysis study, Harcup and O' Neill (2001) concluded after reviewing Galtung and Ruge's original study, that while a good starting point, the original news values from the 1960s needed to be changed to fit in with a more technologically diverse media field. They also concluded that, 'in contrast to some of the more mechanistic analyses of newspaper content, we should be constantly aware that identifying news factors or news values may tell us more about how stories are covered than why they were chosen in the first place' (Harcup and O' Neill, 2001: 277). They cautioned that Galtung and Ruge's news values should be regarded as 'open to question, rather than recited as if written on a tablet of stone' (2001: 277). They reduced Galtung and Ruge's list of 18 news values to a list of ten: The power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up and newspaper agenda (2001: 279). Further still, however, Shoemaker and Reese (1991) distilled their news values into six, which working journalists more commonly use: importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, timeliness and proximity (90). Allan (2004) is of the view that news values enhance a 'hierarchical series of normative rules by which social life is to be understood' (84). It is more the routine of gathering news, Shoemaker and Reese argue, that explains how news gets defined in the first place: 'Through

their [the journalist's] routines, they actively construct reality' (98). Hall et al (1978) agree, maintaining that:

... it is sufficient to say that news values provide the criteria in the routine practices of journalism which enable journalists, editors, and newsmen to decide routinely and regularly which stories are 'newsworthy' and which are not, which stories are major 'lead' stories and which are relatively insignificant, which stories to run, and which to drop (1978: 54).

Through these decisions, the media create a constructed reality for their audiences:

We exist as members of one society because it is assumed we share a common stock of cultural knowledge with our own fellow men: we have access to the same 'maps of meanings.' Not only are we all able to manipulate these maps of meanings to understand events, but we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, which these maps embody or reflect (Hall et al, 1978: 55).

An issue I have struggled with throughout this research, as stated in Chapter One, is reconciling what I was taught when becoming a journalist – that truth is absolute – with my views that all journalism is constructed – that truth is a fabrication in the news production process. The literature points to a debate of 'reporting truth'. As a journalist trained in the US, I would argue that my job is to find facts and report them, accurately fulfilling my liberal democratic role of watchdog, yet from a social constructionist perspective, the idea that journalists can publish the truth is far-fetched. When a journalist brings his or her own life experiences to a story, the idea of 'truth' becomes tainted in the reporting process. Allan (2004) echoes this notion, arguing that, '... we rely on news accounts to be faithful representations of reality. We are asked to believe, after all, that truly professional journalists are able to set aside their individual preconceptions, values and opinions in order to depict reality as it actually is to us, their audience' (83).

In a classic study of the social and political dynamics of the newsroom, Warren Breed (1955) looked at newsroom policy as it pertained to covering news stories. He interviewed some 120 journalists in the northeastern US, asking them how they learned newsroom policy – how they knew which stories to write and which ones to ignore. Most said it came from 'osmosis',

but Breed determined: 'basically, the learning of policy is a process by which the recruit discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of his status and its norms and values. He learns to anticipate what is expected of him so as to win rewards and avoid punishments (1955: 328). Consequently, Breed finds the idea of social control in the newsroom to be extremely important in maintaining newsroom solidarity: 'The obligation-esteem factor seems to be the active variable in determining not only policy conformity, but morale and good news performance as well' (1955: 334). Thus, it is not just a journalists own ideologies, or belief system at work, but rather a socially controlled newsroom with a strict hierarchy in place that determines what stories are covered and what are not. Breed concludes that while nothing was formally written down, a policy was still followed. Breed drew the conclusion that unwritten policies are stronger than formal ones:

The newsman's source of rewards is located not among the readers who are manifestly his clients, but among his colleagues and superiors. Instead of adhering to societal and professional ideals, he redefines his values to the more pragmatic level of the newsroom group. He thereby gains not only status rewards, but also acceptance in a solidary group engaged in interesting, varied and sometimes important work (Breed, 1955: 354).

Zelizer (2004) sums up this point, noting that, 'Through social control, the newspaper was thought to maintain its own smooth functioning, as well as that of existing power relationships in society' (54). The question then becomes whether or not news values reflect, or mirror, the values that society holds. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) define the two arguments, with one side believing that the media is a 'passive transmitter of events', and the other side viewing the media as 'taking a far more active role in manipulating reality'. As a social constructionist, I accept the latter approach; that the media play an active role in constructing discourses for society to follow. To extend this point, Halberstam argues that 'news is perpetually defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena' (1992, 16). He uses the

example of a 'deviant' event – 'man bites dog.' Such an event, from a journalistic perspective, is news; it is unusual and out of the ordinary, from a societal perspective, however, such an event could result in chaos, since it indicates a deviation from the norms held that dogs should be pets for humans, and not something to be eaten by them. With generally agreed-upon news values defining how to report a story, this 'deviant event' would be covered within a newspaper to reinforce the fact that such behaviour is not allowed in society – a rule has been broken. Hartley (1982) probably best explains this: 'Part of what determines the discourse of the news is the way the news-makers themselves act within the constraints, pressures, structures and norms that bring the larger world of social relations to bear on their work' (47-48). The role of reporters therefore is partly to tell members of society how they should act and behave on an everyday basis. When reporters jump on a story, reporting to the point of sensationalism, it is suggested that this should be a clue to readers that journalists, in their job of interpreting the social mood, convey public discomfort with the event and work to restore a sense of social 'normalcy'. Peter Cole and Tony Harcup (2010) explain further:

... neither governments nor media employers need to tell journalists what 'line' to take on important issues of the day because, broadly speaking and with exceptions which merely go to prove the rule, journalists have internalized the dominant societal values. Thus, it is regarded merely as common sense that falling house prices should be a cause for gloomy rather than celebratory coverage, even though cheaper housing might in reality be good news for many people, not least the low-paid journalists in the provincial press. Low air fares, on the other hand, tend to be reported as good news for consumers rather than bad news for the environment

Such examples of interpreting the social mood and setting the tone for how audiences should react to 'deviant' events can be seen in the childhood suicide cases presented in Chapter One. For those three child suicides, journalists created a discourse around bullying to try and restore 'normalcy'. As will be seen in Chapter Three, bullying is the key discourse provided when a child takes his or her own life. Suicide is a taboo issue, and even more so when a child dies by

suicide. By using the discourse of bullying, journalists are reinforcing a societally-accepted discourse around childhood that children must be protected. Allan (2004) puts it best:

Their news accounts shape in decisive ways our perceptions of the 'world out there' beyond our immediate experience. For many of us, our sense of what is happening in the society around us, what we should know and care about from one day to the next, is largely derived from the news stories they tell (83).

Zelizer (2004), however, will not be pigeonholed into one area of the discussion or another. In her research interviewing journalists, she discovered the journalism field can be seen in several different ways, only one of which is a mirror to society (30-32). She determined that journalism can be defined as a 'container'; it can be 'seen to contain the day's news, holding information for the public until it can appraise what has happened' (2004: 30). Journalism, she argues, may therefore be regarded as a service: 'referring to journalism as a service, positions journalism in the public interest and in conjunction with the needs of citizenship' (32). It could be argued here that the public is made to depend on the media to reinforce what cultural attributes we as a society have already agreed to agree upon. Zelizer's (2004) last argument is that journalism can be seen as a child. In her view, journalists are caretakers of the news, and journalism is a phenomenon in need of 'nurturing, attending, supervision and care. Journalists adopt a somewhat continuous parental position', she suggests (32). Zelizer thus positions the journalist in a parental role. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, it will be determined that adults hold power and control over children to keep them socially in line and to help them avoid breaking rules. The same argument could be made here in that the way the media chooses, covers and creates the news, maintaining and perpetuating the agreed-upon rules of society, is similar to the parental role Zelizer envisages. As Claire Wardle (2008) notes in her study on crime reporting in British newspapers, 'describing how a society responds to the threat of illegal behavior as a morality play has particular resonance as a way of understanding the role of

newspapers and their coverage of crime and punishment' (2008: 146). It is unwritten news values and the journalist's preconceived values, perceptions and ideologies that ultimately seek to reinforce an inherent set of rules and structure within society, and no moreso than when covering suicide.

2.4 Ideology and Social Class

In recent history, journalists have been perceived as crusaders, proponents of truth, exposers of corruption, oppression and exploitation (Franklin, 1997: 27). A field that has at least part of its origins in the working classes, trying to build a cohesive sense of class consciousness through articulating particular doctrines and ideologies, and showing trade workers that they did indeed share the same interests and political objectives, now finds itself as a firmly middle-class profession (Chalaby, 1998: 30-31). Despite still being considered a trade and not a profession by many, more than two-thirds of journalists have a university degree, making newsrooms, despite the poor pay, a middle-class stomping ground (Franklin, 1997: 50). Social class in the UK can be equated to the past, current and future economic power of a family, thus social class, much like childhood and the news itself, is a created structure. Urry (1989) states that, 'people experience or live social class through their experience as black or white, male or female' (85). If this is the case, as Halsey (1986), also argues, then 'a fully developed class system is both a structure of market inequality and also a hereditary system of recruitment' (50). It should come as no shock, then, that as the journalist's social class has changed, so too has the method in which news is reported. Ideologies now play a firm role in how news stories are written, produced and framed on a page. Becker's (1984) definition of ideology is helpful in this regard:

Ideology governs the way we perceive our world and ourselves; it controls what we see as natural or obvious. An ideology is an integrated set of frames of reference through which each of us sees the world and to which all of us adjust our actions (1984: 69).

With this definition in mind, then, it makes sense that journalists would bring to their coverage of news stories biases, firmly held religious morals, and beliefs on economic policy and social issues that tend to align with that of their respective social classes. What to think about social class trickles down through newspaper management from publisher to editor, editor to reporter, reporter to reader. Various ideologies come into play at different stages, thus creating a voice that newspapers circulate in society that encourages readers to believe particular things about the various levels of social class in the society. Fuller (1996) concurs with this view, claiming that: 'No one has ever achieved objective journalism, and no one ever could. The bias of the observer always enters the picture, if not colouring the details, then at least guiding the choice of them' (14). Morson (1992) agrees with this point, stating that ideological views creep into news stories when reporters are 'blind to all facts except those that accord with their own, long-held point of view' (27). Even if a reporter does his or her best, to refrain from including class ideals, the mere fact that reporters use news values to report the news is a major issue. Allan (2004) argues that news values help to 'rule in' certain types of events as newsworthy while also 'ruling out' alternative types (63):

At the heart of these processes of inclusion and exclusion are certain principles of organization or frames which work to impose order on the multiple happenings of the social world so as to render them into a series of meaningful events. Precisely how a particular news event is framed by the journalist claiming to be providing an objective or balanced account thus takes on a distinct ideological significance (Allan, 2004: 63).

Ideology, therefore, is not just an individual reporter's beliefs; it is a societal-level phenomenon in which ideals held by the society are put forth in the media. As Gramsci (1971) puts it, 'they organize human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position [and] struggle' (1971: 376). Ideologies, then, are about power and social control. The easiest way to maintain social control is to create social hierarchy. Griggs

(1989) argues that the social hierarchy structure was established with the intention of controlling the working class. When a reporter defines the news, 'often presenting information about events which occur outside the direct experience of the majority of the society', the media gain ideological power (Hall et al, 1978: 56). Shoemaker and Reese (1991) concur with this view, claiming that 'one of the key functions performed by the media is to maintain boundaries in a culture', or maintain social class divisions within society (186). Raymond Williams (1980) summarizes this best when discussing residual and emergent forms of culture:

By residual I mean that some experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation. There is a real case of this in certain religious values, by contrast with the very evident incorporation of most religious meanings and values into the dominant system. The same is true, in a culture like Britain, of certain notions derived from a rural past, which have a very significant popularity (Williams, 1980: 42).

Take, for example, the construction of social class. Many academics argue that social mobility—being able to elevate oneself from the working class to the middle class—is steeped in one's educational history (Goldthorpe et al, 1980; Abercrombie et al, 1994; Halsey, 1986; Morrison, 1997; Heath and Payne, 2000; Aries, 1960). Yet Entwistle (1978) states that social class is a much broader construction, encompassing, he argues, not only education, but also artistic taste, religion, speech, manners, dress, geographical location, size of residence, ownership of property and sources of income (1978: 35). The news media, then, as Allan (2004) argues, 'permit, indeed encourage, spirited debate, criticism and dissent, as long as there remain faithfully within the system of presupposition and principles that constitute an elite consensus' (57). Hall et al (1978) agree with this argument, claiming that: 'Hierarchical structures of command and review, informal socialisation into institutional roles, the sedimenting of dominant ideas into the 'professional ideology'—all help to ensure, within the media, their continued reproduction in

the dominant form' (60). It was Karl Marx and Frederick Engels who, in 1846, argued that ideologies have a firm grasp within the inner workings of the media. This grasp helps the media maintain ruling-class interests (1976: 59). Harcup (2004) explains that Marxists believe that the ruling class ideology is propagated throughout Western capitalist societies with the help of the media. Ideology may be slippery and contested, but it is argued that the principle remains essential:

...the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which as a means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped his ideas; hence the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance (Marx and Engels, 1976: 59).

Gramsci extends this point, noting that the most prominent and dynamic part of the ideology structure is the press: 'The press is the most dynamic part of the ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it...' (1985: 389).

It seems, then, that news organizations reproduce and reinforce certain societal norms and values. The news media tend to tell their readers what is important, what is acceptable, what is normal and moral and in their society, and thus, 'elites' are formed – including those that strictly follow society's rules. The media do not simply or straightforwardly serve the 'interests of the class which owns and controls the media' (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991: 190); instead it creates and 'defines the majority of the population [as to] what significant events are taking place, but also, they offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events' (Hall et al, 1978: 57). Media scholars try to understand the nuances of these events through the study of hegemony. Williams (1980) has indicated that in any society there is a 'central system

of practices, meanings and values which we can properly call dominant and effective' (36).

Thus, hegemony is defined as a voluntary yielding to authority, or power (Allan, 2004; Zelizer, 2004; Hartley, 1982; Hall et al, 1978; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991):

... the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values [are] not merely abstract but are organized and lived. That is why hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming (Williams, 1980: 36).

While Gramsci's (1971: 376) idea of 'media institutions serving a hegemonic function by continually producing a cohesive ideology, a set of commonsensical values and norms, that serves to reproduce and legitimate the social structure through which the subordinate classes participate in their own domination', seems a strong one, the idea that journalists secure agreement by consensus rather than forced compliance (Zelizer, 2004: 73) is debatable. To reinforce societal norms and values, the media demand forced compliance. It does this in the way it reports news stories, the way it frames stories, the wording and headlines that are used, the pictures that run on our news pages, and through the demonization of various societal groups. Examples of this will be provided in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation when the discourses that emerged from the reporting and framing of the Bridgend suicides are discussed.

2.5 Framing News

Every story in a newspaper is 'framed' in a particular way. Whitney et al (2004) explains the concept:

It [framing] refers to the process by which journalists select topics, define the underlying issue and interpret causes and effects. A frame is essentially a way of organizing otherwise fragmentary pieces of information in a thematic way that facilitates news gathering, news production, and, in principle at least, audience comprehension and learning (2004: 405).

This can be seen quite clearly in the reporting of suicide as will be evidenced in Chapters Five and Six. According to researchers, framing is another source of misrepresentation in the process of creating news (Allan, 2004; Whitney et al, 2004; Zelizer, 2004; Chalaby, 1998; Hall et al, 1978). Tuchman (1978) explains framing as 'the window through which newspeople viewed and composed their picture of the world' (1). That picture of the world is helped along by ideologies and news values – the way media power is projected onto society.

Framing can be broken down into several different distinctions. Hall et al (1978) discuss the 'mode of address', whereby language, or the way a topic is discussed, can be framed in a particular way (61). For example, using the informal 'Gordon', instead of 'Prime Minister Gordon Brown', gives two completely different images of Britain's Prime Minister in a story, and connotes a different meaning of hierarchical power within the story and the issue. Allan (2004) cautions that how a story can be framed in regard to headlines, pictures, pullouts, placement on a page, and language must be taken into consideration (90-92).

This dissertation examines how news stories are framed when it comes to suicide. News stories about suicide, especially in the case of Bridgend, are framed to inspire moral panic. The concept of moral panics stems from Stanley Cohen's work in the early 1970s around delinquency, youth cultures and subcultures, as well as football hooliganism. He explains his original thinking here:

... that the attribution of the moral panic label means that the 'things' extent and significance has been exaggerated (a) in itself (compared with other more reliable, valid and objective sources) and/or (b) compared with other, more serious problems. This labeling derives from a willful refusal by liberals, radicals and leftists to take public anxieties seriously. Instead, they are furthering a politically correct agenda: to downgrade traditional values and moral concerns (2002: viii).

For a moral panic to occur, Cohen (2002) describes three steps in his discursive formula. The first is that the issue is either new or old, 'lying dormant perhaps, but hard to recognize;

deceptively ordinary and routine, but invisibly creeping up the moral horizon' or that the issues are 'camouflaged versions of traditional and well know evils; (2002: viii). The second is that the issue is either damaging or a warning sign of the real danger, while lastly, the issue needs to be transparent or opaque, meaning either that anyone can see what is happening regarding the issue, or 'accredited experts must explain the perils hidden behind the superficially harmless' (2002: viii). While an issue can be labelled a moral panic, Nachman Ben-Yehuda (2009) explains its participants: 'Moral panics have to create focus on and sustain powerfully persuasive images of, folk devils that can serve at the heart of moral fears' (1). Ben-Yehuda goes on:

... moral panics are about representations, images and coercion: about which sector of a society has the power to represent and impose its images, world views and interests onto others as being both legitimate and valid (2009: 3).

Critcher (2009) argues that it is the middle class that helps to intensify fears surrounding an issue:

The anxiety of the middle class intensifies and finds expression in social movements whenever moral order seems to be collapsing in general or at particular sites where some specific social anxiety serves to mobilize an array of different issues and alliances of disparate social forces. Such anxieties are provoked by crises, real or imagined, in the political and social order (2009: 21).

Ben-Yehuda concludes: 'In other words, moral panics are about struggles for moral hegemony over interpretations of the legitimacy (or not) of prevailing social arrangements and material interests' (2009: 3).

It is important to have an understanding of moral panics and folk devils, because the reporting of the Bridgend suicides was arguably a moral panic. The story of Bridgend has many facets; primarily, the fear of the Internet, the fear of social networking sites and the fear of suicide, coupled with the fact that the demonization of those who took their own lives led to over exposure of a sensitive issue that dragged out unnecessarily on news pages across the

British Isles for more than six months, causing irreparable harm to those bereaved by suicide, those who worked in suicide prevention and those who suffer from mental health issues. Story framing played a large role in the creation of the Bridgend suicides story, as it did in the case of the industrial strikes in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, studied from the 1970s onwards by the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG), amongst others.

It is useful to examine the GUMG's influential work on reporting strikes as it provides a way to understand how the British Press has historically framed certain contentious issues. When GUMG researchers analyzed broadcast coverage of industrial life during the 1970s and 1980s, they found that there was little connection between its portrayal and its reality. Researchers concluded that there was no relationship between 'the severity of the stoppages and the amount of news coverage they get'. In fact, the strikes that were covered the most were those that were 'perceived as threatening for the middle classes' (retrieved June 9th, 2009 from www.glasgowmediagroup.org). Strikes are not widely considered to be 'legitimate' by middle-class managers, researchers suggested, so media coverage of an industrial strike under this theory must demonize the strike and frame it as negative and unacceptable in an orderly British society. Hall (1997) describes this demonization in terms of 'otherness', explaining:

... people who are in any way significantly different from the majority 'them' rather than 'us' – are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed polarized binary extremes (226).

The sociological argument, which this dissertation supports, states that 'culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system... social groups impose meaning on their world by ordering and organizing things into classificatory systems' (Hall, 1997: 237). By imposing meaning and stability onto events, a society is able to maintain its status quo and deter chaos. Othering comes into play in media

stories when the stability of norms and values are threatened. In short, the othering in news stories helps set the frame for the story. The frame then sets the stage for how the issue is to be interpreted.

2.6 News Production

Interpretation of issues on news pages can be influenced by many things. As stated earlier, journalists and editors bring their own backgrounds, sets of experiences and ideologies to the stories we read and the way that we read them on a page. Traditionally, newsrooms have been made up of journalists who perceive their job to be about seeking truth and who wish to hold those in power accountable and help foster democracy. As newsroom budgets decline, however, and more and more journalists are voluntarily leaving journalism or being laid off, what we are seeing as a result is a serious shift in newsgathering practices both at local and national levels. Franklin (2006) states that 'local newspapers are increasingly a business success but a journalistic failure' (4), meaning that as advertising revenues become more important at management levels, newsgathering and reporting practices are being impacted 'in ways that diminish the range and quality of editorial in the provincial press' (4). Consequently, journalists become reliant on press releases and copy available from news agencies (Franklin, 2006: 11). This is important to note with regard to this dissertation, as the Bridgend suicides story began with the creation of a news release disseminated by the Wales News Service, followed by a press release by the suicide charity, PAPYRUS. These two releases alone had the power to firstly dictate the coverage and secondly reinforce future reporting of the story.

Justin Lewis et al (2008) found in a study of 2,207 items in the UK National 'quality' (i.e. broadsheet) newspapers and 402 items broadcast on radio and television news reports that 'nearly half of all press stories appeared to come wholly or mainly from agency services' (5). This, Franklin argues, is critical for investigative journalism, for the local press which enjoyed

the title of 'local watchdog' is now gone (2006: 13). In the case of Bridgend, it was a release from a news agency that broke the story, not a local newspaper.

Local journalism traditionally has been about local people, their stories, their tribulations, their frustrations, their successes. Local news reported how the newest council vote on zoning would impact the local corner shop or how the new regulations on literacy would improve the economic impact for the town or region. As the makeup of the newsroom has changed, however, so too has the role of the local newspaper: 'The established local newspaper groups have little ambition to disrupt the local networks of economic and political power into which they are so closely integrated' (Franklin, 2006: 13). Consequently, this shift has left newsrooms wide open to the use of pre-prepared copy from news agencies and PR firms at whim. In their study, Lewis et al (2008) found the following:

60 percent of press stories rely wholly or mainly on pre-packaged information, a further 20 percent are reliant to varying degrees on PR and agency materials. Of the remaining 20 percent, only 12 percent are without any discernible pre-packaged content and in 8 percent of cases, the presence of PR content was unclear (14).

While these results seem alarming upon first glance, they are not surprising. Media outlets have relied on wire services for copy, be it the Associated Press, Reuters or United Press International, since the late 1800s (Hamer, 2006: 211). The wires provided international and national news for a fee, but as newsrooms became increasingly understaffed and with the emergence of new technologies, most notably the Internet, news agencies have found a new role in helping fledgling newspapers fill their news holes with pre-packaged local fluff (Hamer, 2006: 212). Consequently, local newspapers now consist mostly of public relations content and/or agency copy. This has potentially serious consequences in establishing who is actually setting a newspaper's agenda. Agencies themselves admit proudly that they do have an influence in setting the media's agenda (Hamer, 2006: 210). This might not seem important at

first, but when an agency or public relations firm with a particular ideology is able to get its copy reprinted freely on newspapers across both national and local media, without a word, headline, or picture changed, the future of democracy is called into question. Voices that we once heard in the press will dwindle; issues that were once deemed important but controversial will no longer be given even news brief status. In short, the press will become a mouthpiece for whatever news agency or PR firm can provide the most copy at the cheapest price. One must not be alarmist regarding this situation, but it is important to understand the consequences of this reliance on news agency copy. The impact of this was never clearer than in the case of the Bridgend suicides. The story came to light based on an overly sensationalized, poorly reported, weakly sourced news agency story that targeted both print and broadcast media, and that was delivered to all markets across the UK in January, 2008. It was this one piece of copy that triggered a media event around suicide, the likes of which the UK had never seen.

2.7 News Gathering Practices

While one can demonize news agencies for their flippant way of infiltrating news pages and putting forth poorly-reported copy, the fact of the matter is that the newspapers who buy their copy get away with it because the fundamental principles of journalism are followed. As stated earlier in this chapter, news is everywhere around us and is happening all the time. The key to a good story is being able to mould information into news, so that a news story can be packaged, framed and communicated to an audience. But how is a story constructed? Earlier in this chapter, news values and what role they play in the construction of news was discussed at length. To recap, news values are the categories journalists use to decide if something is worth reporting or not. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) distilled their news values into six, which working journalists most commonly use: importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, timeliness and proximity (90). If these are in place, reporting follows. In the section that follows,

the newsgathering process will be briefly examined. It is important to look at this as it proved critical in uncovering the discourses and frames that were exhibited in the reporting of the Bridgend suicides.

The newsgathering process is not something that is widely examined by scholars, though Verica Rupar (2006) makes a good case for further study in her study of newsgathering and transparency in the New Zealand press. One of Rupar's (2006) arguments is that when journalists are quoting information, they do not specifically say where they got that information. For example, she notes the difference between saying, 'the Prime Minister said yesterday at a press conference in the Beehive that...' versus, 'The Prime Minister thinks...'. She adds:

This categorization refers to the explicit description of the newsgathering process. The investigation of the clarity of newsgathering process does not go into details about frequency of the use of particular journalism techniques (interview, survey, press release, press conference, meeting...). Instead, it is focused on the more general question of presence or absence of any explanation of how the journalist obtained the information (2006: 130).

She argued that a full attribution of sources, and explanation of how the source was found and used, would only enhance the meaning of the news (2006: 134). Rupar's point, though valid, seems a little simplistic. At the root of the relationship between a news story and its sources is power. Rupar would like to see an explanation of the newsgathering method: 'The more authoritative the sources are, the less there is an explanation of the newsgathering method' (2006: 135). Yet, the way the current structure is set up, makes this impossible. News sourcing is a complicated issue. Ericson et al (1989) explain it perfectly:

What is at stake in news production is the meaning attributed to events, processes, or states of affairs. As much as the news itself is light reading, listening and viewing, the process of assigning meaning is not a light matter. It is crucial to the constitution of political culture (377).

In fact, the power play at hand is another example of what Zelizer (2004) argued as to why we even have this function in society called news: it is created to help maintain a social group's solidarity (5). That solidarity, as argued earlier, is a way for stability and the status quo to be maintained. Norms and values must be upheld so that chaos does not reign. What better way for journalists to aid in upholding these values than through their choice of sources? Journalists are certainly not passive dupes who accept all that is handed to them; rather, journalists play a critical role within the already created power structures in society, which is evident through story sourcing. A crime story will always have a quote from a police official, a story about budget woes will always contain a quote from an elected official, and a story about higher education will always contain a quote from a qualified academic. Ericson et al (1989) explain further:

There is considerable variation in who controls the process, depending on the context, the type of sources involved, the type of news organizations involved, and what is at issue. It is a matter of who wants to control whom via news accounts and how all the sources and news organizations involved see themselves fitting into the picture. The process operates within structural pressures and power imbalances (1989: 378).

While those who hold power—elected officials, CEOs, education authorities, politicians—might seem to use the media to further their bureaucratic propaganda, the media, too, have power in their own way. For instance, the media has the power to deny those sources access to their news pages, the power to sustain coverage of a particular issue for as long as they want, the power to articulate complicated messages into commonsense for readers, and the power to have the last word (Ericson et al, 1989: 378). These power struggles are continually at play, with the media mostly winning. If a source decides to participate in a public conversation, then he or she is exposing their organization to the discourse of 'deviance and control... that is [the source] must come to the fact that... to translate the local knowledge

into... common sense they [the media] focus on procedural propriety and offer moral assessments' (1989: 379). Additionally, sources also must accept 'that the news accounts themselves will be routinely experienced as bad, inaccurate, distorted, unfair, biased, and wrong' (379). These news gathering practices will become clearer when discussed in relation to the Bridgend suicides in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation.

2.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the groundwork for analysis into the Bridgend suicides, which is the focus of this dissertation, has been laid. Understanding how British Newspapers work, what ideologies are brought to a news page, how sources are chosen, how stories are framed and how stories can be interpreted is important because of the larger democratic implications and policies that can be formed based on what is put forward as part of a newspaper's news agenda.

The literature presented in this dissertation serves as a foundation for how British Newspapers operate and how journalists construct news stories. Having an understanding of such theories is important, as the research discussed in this chapter can and will be attributed to the findings chapters around the reporting of the Bridgend suicides.

Chapter Three will set out the theoretical, multi-disciplinary foundation for this dissertation, laying out the conceptual frames within which my arguments surrounding childhood and suicide are situated. That chapter, argues that British Newspapers routinely report suicide in a narrow way, perpetuating stigma and fear around the issue of suicide. It also argues that newspapers tend to draw on certain discourses of childhood that, in my view, are out of step with how childhood is actually experienced. Moreover, the discourse of bullying needs to be reconsidered, as British Newspapers tend to see it as the primary reason for childhood suicide.

Chapter Three: Foundation for a Suicidal Culture

3.1 Introduction

Academic research into suicide is ongoing in several different fields; namely, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, epidemiology, medicine and economics, amongst others (Aggleton et al, 2000; Alao et al, 2006; Barker et al, 1994; Berman and Jobes, 1991; Bird and Faulkner, 2000; Brent et al, 1993; Brown and Barraclough, 1997; Chew and McCleary, 1995; Coyle and MacWhannell, 2002; Fishman et al, 1997; Hawton et al, 1999; Heath et al, 2000; Kenny, 2001; Lester, 1971; Pirkis et al, 2007; Pirkis et al, 2006; Van Heeringen, 2001) In the journalism studies field, however, there has been little research to date. Existing studies have variously examined the media effects of reporting suicide on audiences, or have conducted interviews with journalists in order to establish how and why they report suicide in certain ways. However, few so far have engaged with these issues from a media or journalism studies perspective. The research currently available tends to situate itself firmly in one of the aforementioned fields of study, which can be problematic when reviewed by media scholars. That is to say, such studies frequently utilize strongly challenged, if not discredited, theories of direct or causal media effects. As such, these studies have tended to point to the media as the 'cause' of suicide, failing to take into consideration more recent, and critical, approaches to the reporting of suicide. Thus, important discussions that in my view need to occur around the media and its 'effect' on suicide and suicidal tendencies are at a dead end, and probably have been since the mid-1980s. No recent methodologies or theories have been introduced to the field of suicidology to study whether reporting suicide has an influence on suicide. The purpose of this media dissertation is to unpack, from a journalism studies perspective, the complexities of how British Newspapers report suicide, the discourses employed by them, and the framing of suicide stories.

I will explore the relationship the press has to the issue of suicide and how that taints, or enhances, the coverage of childhood suicide. Theories surrounding childhood need to be understood and explored because of the strong presence 'infantilization' had in the reporting of young adult suicide; as will be seen in the case of the Bridgend suicides, young adults who died by suicide were discursively constructed using societally-accepted discourses of childhood. The theories surrounding childhood are multi-faceted and never more so than when suicide is introduced into a world in which it is assumed that it is the responsibility of adults to protect children from harm. Childhood, as will be explained is conceptualized by adults as a time of innocence, weakness, naiveté, subordination, ignorance and incompetence. When a child does take his or her own life, that 'unnatural death' throws this dominant conception of childhood into question, with adults left behind to try and rationalize the death. These discourses also hold true for the issue of suicide, especially in the case of the Bridgend suicides when those who took their own lives were discursively constructed as vulnerable, innocent and dependent by British Newspapers. This will be discussed later in this chapter as well as in Chapters Five and Six, Traditionally, because such assumptions are made about childhood in western societies (see Aries, 1960), the academic literature shows that the main discourse that has emerged to 'explain' childhood suicide is that of bullying. Those who research suicide understand that it is a complex issue, with many contributing factors at work before the event takes place. When reporting a childhood suicide, however, British newspapers tended to list a single mitigating factor—bullying—a frame that has largely been accepted by those researching childhood. This reason for childhood suicide, however, does not hold true when discussing the suicide of an adult, as will be seen in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation. There is no one, dominant frame or discourse around adult suicides, yet bullying is rarely an option when contextualizing the death. Bullying, as a reason for suicide is only used when describing the suicide of a child.

This chapter first explores society's conceptions of childhood. I will discuss French sociologist Phillipe Aries' theory of childhood in which he questions whether children should be considered 'mini adults', as they were once perceived, or as 'naïve, weak and innocent' beings in need of protection, as they are seen today. I will also take an in-depth look at how the media report childhood to illustrate the commonly-held discourses around childhood that the media articulates to society at-large. Following this discussion on conceptions of childhood, I will examine the issue of suicide, providing background suicide statistics for the UK, so the Bridgend suicides can be taken in context when explained in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. Also discussed will be French sociologist Emile Durkheim's framework for suicide and American suicidologist, Edwin S. Shneidman's theory of 'psychache'. Both will help to put the issue of suicide in context, while also providing some hypotheses as to why suicide occurs. This dissertation will not attempt to answer why suicide occurs, but it will explore discourses put forth by British Newspapers that attempt to explain why it occurs. 'Why?' is an important question in suicide research. It is the first question asked by one bereaved by suicide, as well as the greater society. It can be hard to fathom that life can be so difficult that anyone would take his or her own life. When it does happen, society's underlying Judeo-Christian tradition prompts the question of 'why?' based on its 'sanctity of life' framework. Within the section on suicide, the Werther Effect, or copycat suicide theory will be introduced to illustrate commonly held beliefs about the role of the media in perpetuating suicide in society. In addition, examples of current studies around the reporting of suicide will be presented in order to illustrate how the literature is stuck in the 'effects' method of analyzing data. Lastly, this chapter will look at bullying in order to help place the issue of childhood suicide in context. Bullying was neither a dominant discourse nor frame in the Bridgend suicides, yet it was quite prevalent in the suicidal deaths of Laura Rhodes, Ben Vodden and Jonathan Reynolds, the three childhood suicides

mentioned in the introductory chapter. The issue of bullying must be discussed to show the contrast between how the press reports a child suicide to that of an adult suicide. In terms of Bridgend it should be noted that while bullying was not a dominant discourse, features of the bullying discourse, such as a 'child in need of protection' was present. The Bridgend suicides flagged the issue that despite being 'adults' by societal standards, these adults were most recently 'children' and therefore were still in need of protection. By the end of this dissertation, it should be clear that, while the frame changes around causation of death, the newspaper reporting of child suicide and adult suicide is really no different. The frame of bullying is used to reinforce the fact that children need to be protected, but, at the same time, 'others'¹² a child's death and places it outside the accepted discourse of why children can die.

3.2 Conceptions of Childhood in Society

Since at least the early 1960s, researchers have struggled to establish a theoretical basis upon which to understand modern cultural assumptions about childhood. Aries (1960) introduced the idea that, in historical terms, children in Western societies were not generally perceived to be fundamentally different from adults (1960: 36). Aries' work, critically acclaimed in the field of sociology, was widely regarded as a pioneering contribution to the field of childhood studies. Against academic opinion at the time, Aries demonstrated that childhood is not a separate stage of the life cycle, as many researchers once thought. In fact, his hypotheses challenged the field to define the contexts of childhood; was childhood a time for coddling, a place for the child to remain as 'the sweet little creature with whom people played affectionately but with liberty, if not indeed with license and without any thought of morality or education' or was childhood, as

¹² As stated in the previous chapter, I define 'othering' based on Hall's (1997) social constructionist approach: '... people who are in any way significantly different from the majority 'them' rather than 'us'—are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed polarized binary extremes' (226).

is more accepted today, a 'realization of the innocence and the weakness of childhood, and consequently of the duty of adults to safeguard the former and strengthen the latter' (Aries, 1960: 316). Aries' argument provided a foundation for sociological theorists to deem that childhood is socially constructed. Those theorists believe that the time period which we call childhood is not a naturally occurring label, but rather one which was created in response to social and economic hardships of the industrial revolution (Aries, 1960; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1982, 1996; Davin, 1999; Kennedy, 1998; Woodhead, 1997; Hillman, 1982).

Aries (1960) examined historical records related to childhood dating back to medieval times, when the idea or conception of childhood as something separate from adulthood did not really exist (1960:125). He argues that the notion of a long period of childhood is a social construct which began to take shape over the 16th and 17th centuries. In medieval society, Aries claims childhood was perceived to be a very short period in one's life. He argues that an awareness of the particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult, was missing in medieval society. That is why, in Aries' view, 'as soon as the child could live without constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society' (Aries, 1960: 125). This is a key point to keep in mind when considering the ways in which the news media represent children, with journalists largely seeing them as 'innocents' who therefore must be treated with utmost care because in cultural terms they tend to be regarded as naïve and vulnerable (Freeman, 1995: 79). This notion of 'innocence' will also clearly be seen when I discuss the Bridgend suicides in Chapters Five and Six. Despite the fact that it was young adults who took their own lives, the media continued to describe these adults in terms of childhood, reducing them to 'vulnerable children' who carried out a 'childish' act. Aries (1960) plainly states that descriptions such as these are a more modern-day phenomenon. Since Aries' intervention, research into childhood studies has established a wide range of

evidence about some of the ways in which childhood is being constructed, and several significant themes have emerged. Those themes—from the social perceptions of childhood, to the social constraints of childhood, and the oppression of children by adults—will be reviewed in order to provide a sound basis for understanding cultural discourses around childhood.

James and Prout (1997), two leading researchers into the sociology of childhood, define childhood through the creation of their emergent paradigm, which is broken down into three assertions. The first is that there is a need for an interpretative framework in order to understand the early years of human life. This assertion states that childhood is to be understood as socially constructed: 'In these terms, it is biological immaturity rather than childhood which is a universal and natural feature of human groups, for ways of understanding this period of human life' (James and Prout, 1997:3). Durkheim (1982), often referred to as one of the 'founding fathers of sociology', sees childhood as a period of growth: '... [it is] the period in which the individual, in both the physical and moral sense, does not yet exist, the period in which he [sic] is made, develops and is formed' (146-147). James and Prout's second assertion is that childhood can never be separated from other variables, such as class, gender or ethnicity, because of the inherent ideological and structural position of children in western societies (1997: 4; Adams, 1986). The third assertion made is that children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right and not just in relation to their social construction by adults (1997: 3-4). The authors further argue that children play a role in the construction of their own social lives, stating: They [children] can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinations (James and Prout, 1997: 4). Although James and Prout make a good argument, their assertion that children's social relationships and cultures could be studied outside the confines of an already defined structure of childhood seems naïve. While it is noble to want to study children outside the confines of an adult construction of childhood, unless we

can revert back to pre-industrialized ideations of childhood, it is a concern that children will never be fully understood (Franklin, 1986).

Jenks (1982, 1996) concurs with James and Prout, suggesting that the social construction of childhood is a 'social status delineated by boundaries incorporated within the social structure and manifested through certain typical forms of conduct, all of which are essentially related to a particular cultural setting' (1982: 12). Davin (1999) agrees with this point, maintaining that childhood is always defined by a cultural or economic context. Even Hillman (1982), who disagrees with James and Prout's third assertion, has developed his own theory of the social construction of childhood. For Hillman, '... childhood is not an actual state, but rather a mode of existence and perception and emotion which we still today insist belongs to actual children, so that we construct a world for them following our need to place this fantasy somewhere in actuality' (1982: 98-99).

If it is adults creating a conception of childhood then the perceptions we have of children are also similarly created. Perceptions are extremely important when it comes to childhood. How adults think children should act during this time of human development contributes to how we treat them, how we care for them and how we perceive the need to keep them 'safe' from emotional and physical harm (Franklin, 1995; Freeman, 1995; Holt, 1975). This was (most certainly) reinforced in the press reporting of the three childhood suicides mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. The constructions around those three childhood deaths focused mostly on the emotional and physical harm the children faced because of bullying, a discourse, as previously shown, that was constructed by the media to help society, or adults, deal with the concept of a child suicide. When it came to the Bridgend suicides, as will be seen in Chapters Five and Six, journalists used a similar method of construction to help society deal with the deaths, but instead of using the discourse of bullying, journalists

discursively constructed young adult suicide in terms of childhood, creating a category of 'deviant non-child' in which to place the action of suicide outside normal socially-accepted discourses around why a person can die.

3.3 'Adultist' Power

Childhood is maintained by adults, and children are compelled to live their lives within these boundaries where the source of power rests firmly with adults. The term 'adultist' has been coined for the purposes of this dissertation, and will be used to describe the restrictions and power adults hold over children and the state of childhood. The phrase will be used in conjunction with arguments surrounding the structure, perceptions and oppression of childhood, encompassing the arguments of James, Prout, Jenks, Davin and even Hillman before me—that childhood is socially constructed. An example of this power that adults hold over childhood can be found in the choice of words available to adults to describe the created life stage; it additionally leaves adults with a perception of what the 'perfect' child's manner should be. In fact, the lexical choices for describing childhood are so widespread that the media use these words, thus perpetuating and reinforcing the conception of childhood as one where the child is innocent, dependent, weak, naïve, unknowing; childhood is a time of subordination, fun, ignorance, incompetence, and children are vulnerable, in need of protection, in need of discipline, capable of only limited responsibility, small, carefree, safe and protected (Jenks, 1982, 1996; Davin, 1999; Holland, 2004; Prout, 2005; Goldson, 1997; Scraton, 1997; Fletcher & Hussey, 1999; Davis & Bourhill, 1997; Coppock, 1997; Wyness, 2006; Devine, 2002; Aries, 1960; Durkheim, 1982; Denzin, 1982; James & Prout, 1997; Woodhead, 1997; Qvortrup, 1997; Kitzinger, 1997). These words, however, are not created by the children themselves, who partake of childhood; it is adults who have fabricated a certain ideology and created a stage of life which we call childhood (Torstenson-Ed, 2007: 58).

This dissertation departs from commonly-held beliefs about what age childhood begins and ends. For example, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child state in Article One that 'The convention defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger' (www.unicef.org, retrieved October 22nd, 2010) For the purposes of this dissertation, however, a child will be considered, as it is considered by many academics, as any person under the age of fifteen (Haim, 1969; Qvortrup, 1997). As already defined by Haim (1969), adolescence encompasses, 'someone who is no longer a child, but not yet an adult, and at the same time, still a child and already an adult' (1969: 34). This concept is important when considering child suicide, but also something that should be highlighted and remembered when discussing the Bridgend suicides. Those that died in the Bridgend area were between the ages of fifteen and 29. While one of the suiciders can be considered a child, or even an adolescent, as Haim (1969) defined, there were nineteen that were not, and were in fact legally considered adults. This is important to note as this group of young adults were not children, but they were not discursively treated as adults, either. It highlights the need for this 'transitional' group to be treated in a slightly different manner, by both academics and also journalists.

Prout (2005) calls childhood a 'social phenomenon' (2005: 56). Maybin and Woodhead (2003) say there is nothing 'natural' about childhood, 'for children in Western societies [are] mainly centred around home, classroom and playground, as well as in cars, buses and other forms of transport, in shopping malls and disco's. These are human creations that regulate children's lives' (2003: in Prout (2005): 56). Moreover, these human creations tend to be found in the ideas of play and 'carefree, disorganized bliss,' according to Jenks (1982:189). With an adult-created childhood, adults have also created a system in which children are dependent upon

adults to meet their needs. Scraton believes it comes down to adults exerting their power over children:

... children's experiences are reconstructed by adults who easily portray power as responsibility, control as care, and regulation as protection. Typically adults direct and children obey with age and status (parents, guardians, professional) ensuring legitimacy (1997: 163).

The research literature on childhood is now remarkably analogous, concurring that childhood is a created life stage, one ruled and, in a more abstracted sense, executed, by adults. That is why, when children appear to step outside the 'normal' perceptions of childhood, chaos erupts within the structured confines of an adultist world. When certain events occur which seem to challenge preconceived notions around childhood innocence, the adultist world of childhood is thrown off kilter and thus questions arise – especially in the fields of sociology, psychology and Media Studies – as to whether or not childhood can actually exist. Kitzinger broke ground in the 1980s with her studies of childhood sexual abuse (1997: 166). Her research established the basis for understanding the ideological and concrete implications of constructing childhood as a time of innocence – that is to say, that where harm against children occurs, it is constructed as a 'violation of childhood' or the 'victimized childhood' (1997: 167-168). This idea of 'victimization' was used by journalists reporting the Bridgend suicides to discursively describe those that took their own lives. However, while Kitzinger (1997) uses it to illustrate an actual act of assault by another, in the case of the Bridgend suicides, it was used to further 'infantilize' those that died, instead of acknowledging the fact that one cannot be portrayed as a victim when it was the person's own choice to die. It is worth quoting Kitzinger at length because her research provides a context in which the adultist perception of childhood innocence can be perceived:

First, the notion of childhood innocence is itself a source of titillation for abusers. A glance at pornography leaves little doubt that innocence is a sexual commodity. Second, innocence is a double-edged sword in the fight against sexual abuse because it stigmatizes the 'knowing' child. The romanticization of

childhood innocence excludes those who do not conform to the ideal. Innocence is used to imply asexuality, 'pre-sexual personhood' or a limited and discrete childlike sensuality. This penalizes the child who sexually responds to the abuse or who appears flirtatious and sexually aware. If the violation of innocence is the criterion against which the act of sexual abuse is judged then violating a 'knowing' child becomes a lesser offence than violating an 'innocent child'. It is this notion which allows an abuser to defend himself on the grounds that his victim was 'no angel', citing as evidence, that the girl drinks, smokes and often fails to do her homework on time. Without her innocence the child has lost the magic cloak supposed to make her impervious to harm. (Kitzinger, 1997: 168-169).

Childhood victimization is seen as a corruption of childhood; the 'normal' view of childhood is diminished in such a child, and therefore he or she is negatively tainted. Jenks (1996) argues that cultural assumptions surrounding the presumed innocence of childhood lead to the conclusion that it is the experiences of society that sometimes corrupt children. Further, it is therefore assumed that: 'Left to its own devices, the child would, by nature, it was supposed, be guiltless. Children are thought to be innocent because of their lack of social experience' (1996: 124). It is the use of adult power over children, however, that leads to such 'corruption'. In the case of sexual abuse in children, Kitzinger (1997) suggests that discussing the idea of power with children is the only way that researchers will discover 'why some children passively comply with abusers and why some actively resist but are still abused' (1997: 182-183). Adult power is a core feature shaping contemporary conceptions of childhood. Adults use their power over children to control what they perceive to be the unruliness of childhood. As some research shows, children tend to understand the power dynamic between children and adults from an early age. Prout (2005), paraphrasing Darwin, has suggested that:

One of his [Darwin's] main arguments is that human children quickly acquire the capacity to understand their caretakers. This happens before they have the capacity to understand language. Children's capacity to derive meaning from what is being communicated by their caretakers seems to be accomplished by reading the expression on their faces and the intonation of their words (2005: 45).

Following this point, one might argue that it is reasonable to assume that children could take what they learn about adult power and use this in their own lives, even if it causes harm.

3.4 Reporting Childhood

In 1993, when 'little' Jamie Bulger (aged three), was murdered by two other 'little' children (aged ten), a more visible construction of the child emerged – that of the 'deviant' who had stepped outside the boundaries of 'normal' childhood. This notion of 'deviant' can also be seen in constructions of those who killed themselves as part of the Bridgend spate; they were categorized as the 'deviant non-child', as a way to further infantilize and stigmatize their deaths. This will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six.

The case of the two young boys who killed the three-year-old is now widely considered responsible for undermining the case made by certain children's rights campaigners for children to gain greater independence from adults. Devine (2002) maintains that, after this case, 'any hopes childhood activists might have had about a lessening of power by adults over children were dashed' (2002: 305). The Bulger murder was evidence for an adultist society, which was being increasingly challenged by children, that adult power was necessary in order to ensure that 'deviant' children who were out of step with the actual 'norm' of childhood would be controlled and punished. Because the concept of childhood assumes that childhood is a period of vulnerability and innocence, the Bulger murder created an image problem. Moreover, it is an anomaly with which the news media has been unable to come to terms. Jenks (1996) sums it up:

First, the traditional image of 'the child' has been shattered through the dramatic denial of childish innocence. Second, the unitary idea of the child, which such an ideology so long encouraged, has been revealed as illusory. No longer confined to the academy, the idea that childhood is contestable and culturally variable has entered a more public arena. No longer can different children be othered from the category of child. (Jenks, 1996: 124-125).

The Bulger murder, therefore, made an important contribution to rethinking childhood theories and research. For example, Davis and Bourhill (1997) note that the media reported the Bulger murder as evidence of a larger issue: a breakdown in moral order and a crisis in childhood. The 'folk devils', as the two young killers were reported in the press, were representative of a continuum of violence in childhood, yet it was acknowledged that the crime, the killing of a child by another child/children, was rare (1997: 46). As Davis and Bourhill rightly point out, however, the Bulger case outraged the adult community in the UK. There was a desire, Davis and Bourhill (1997) argue, to turn the two ten-year-old killers, Jon Thompson and Robert Venables, into figures who are very different from ordinary or 'normal boys. The problem, suggests Davis and Bourhill, is that the boys were not 'different' but very ordinary, thus calling into question many of the assumptions underpinning conventional discourses of childhood. Comprehending such a violent act was difficult for many adults and children alike and so, discursively, Thompson and Venables were defined as 'deviant' in an attempt to maintain the category of 'normal' childhood. To restore the image of the innocent childhood, those who committed acts of violence would be relegated to another category of childhood: the deviant, or a category of evil (Jenks, 1996: 129). This categorization was quite similar to what happened during the Bridgend suicides when journalists relegated those who killed themselves to the category of 'deviant non-child', which placed the adults who took their own lives outside the traditional 'adult' discourse, thus reducing their action to that of a childish one. This will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six.

To further restore the image of 'innocent' childhood, James Bulger was quickly turned into the more affable 'Jamie' by the UK press: 'James isn't just the formally correct Christian name, but what the child was called by those who knew him' (Morrison, 1997: 35). This is significant, as making the young child more affable, reinforced the innocence he held as a very young child.

The two young murderers were described in newspapers as: 'street urchins' (so called, Morrison argues, because they were of a lower social class); 'evil' (according to the lead policeman on the case) and 'freaks who just found each other' (according to a reporter who interviewed Thompson) (Morrison, 1997: 230-231). The two killers were also referred to by their last names, Thompson and Venables, the way people are referred to in the military or even prison. This made them sound much older, almost as if they were adults, which in the public mind made them more likely to be answerable for their actions. In fact, because of such emotive terminology being used in the media in the lead up to the trial, the trial almost did not happen:

Matters of opinion had been canvassed on page after page and, while the criminal investigation was proceeding, the nature of reporting went way beyond what was normally done by the media before defendants are charged and the trial begins. It was not a case where the publicity had been merely local. There had been widespread comment and articles containing alleged information about the case and the background of the defendants... editors had expressed opinion and comment and suggested innuendo that the defendants were guilty. Publicity had been misleading, prejudicial and, in a number of cases, highly sensational (Smith, 1994: 198).

Journalists in the UK press took a stand with the Bulger case, like with no case before, calling the two boys 'monsters' and 'bastards' in headlines across news pages day-in and day-out over the 30 days of the trial. Journalists told their audiences what they should think about this trial and why: it was a decay of British morals; it was the end of childhood innocence.

Strasburger and Wilson (2002) define two theories of thought surrounding children and the media. The first comes from the construction of the innocent, weak, vulnerable child, in need of adult protection. The media is often criticized for featuring 'material that children are simply not ready yet to confront' (2002: 9). Valkenburg (2004) agrees, stating this first theory views children from an effects perspective, with children as passive consumers of media – 'supporters of this paradigm believe that the effects of media are great and that children are influenced by media in large numbers' (2004: 8). The contrasting viewpoint is 'that children are

increasingly sophisticated, mature and media savvy' (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 9). Those who conform to this viewpoint think that children should be empowered to make their own media choices and become more independent consumers of media, able to spend their money how they choose (Buckingham, 2000; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002; Jenkins, 1998). Valkenburg (2004) firmly places supporters of this theory in commercial and marketing circles: 'They [children] easily see through any attempt to deceive or manipulate, and they are spoiled and difficult to please' (2004: 8). With two extremes like this, the only conclusions that can be drawn are that there is a middle grey area and that, no matter what, children will always be seen as different from adults (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002; Jenkins, 1998; Valkenburg, 2004).

Historically speaking, there are few who have sought to question the media effects research on and with children—how it began and how it has become the predominant paradigm. The first studies, according to Valkenburg (2004), began in the 1960s, looking at the effects of television on children. It is good to note here that television was still a relatively new media for many households. The 1970s saw Albert Bandura testing the effects that television had on behaviour—leading to the creation of the 'Social Learning' theory (Valkenburg, 2004: 9). Bandura's 'Bobo Doll' experiments were a way to test his hypothesis that children learn in two ways—through direct experience and through observation of others. Bandura found that if children were exposed to an adult punching a Bobo doll, then they would copy and punch the doll too. According to Bandura, 'these principles work in the same way when children observe the behaviour of people in the media' (Valkenburg, 2004: 9). This theory can be challenged, especially as it is the media theory most applied to suicide effects research by those outside the media field. Bandura's experiments do not take into account—nor does much of the media and suicide-orientated research—environmental factors, socio-economic factors, previous history of violence or abuse, or, probably the biggest factor omitted, —free choice.

Following Bandura's Social Learning theory method of research, the uses and gratification's model was conceived: '[This] tradition assumed media users, including children, actively and selectively look for information and entertainment to satisfy a certain need' (Valkenburg, 2004: 9). From the 1950s onwards, the field of Cultural Studies began to develop, reaching a high point of influence in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, researchers were more concerned with 'the question of whether various groups of children have the same level of access to culture', or whether all children have access to television, books, electronic games, movies and media software (Valkenburg, 2004: 10). With the empowered child at the centre of its conceptual framework, researchers in the field of Cultural Studies have been interested in understanding children's media preferences and how they influence their identity construction and subjectivities as consumers (Valkenburg, 2004; Buckingham, 2000; Jenkins, 1998).

Cultural Studies research focused on the operation of ideologies in culture: In its early days, 'cultural texts have preferred meanings that are difficult to resist by the public' (Valkenburg, 2004: 11). The American communications scholar Marsha Kinder (1999) points out that neither paradigm—supporters of the passive, vulnerable child, nor that of the active consumer—can ignore the issues the media raise when it comes to children: 'These include the escalation of violence among youngsters, the ever-increasing younger age at which children are regarded as consumers, the myriad of challenges and risks on the Internet, and the increased need for policy measures concerning children and media' (Kinder, 1999: 20).

All of this, of course, goes back to a central concern—that children tend to be used to embody adult fears about contemporary culture and media (Buckingham, 2000: 40). Similarly, journalists who reported the Bridgend suicides extended these concerns into young adulthood by infantilizing those who took their own lives, but also by linking their suicides to the Internet.

Journalists in the Bridgend case used childhood discourses on young adults in an attempt to further reinforce fears adults have about contemporary culture and media.

The media has come to play an increasingly significant role in everyday life in the West. In the 1960s, it was television that was the 'new technology' that was being blamed for a more outspoken, less respectful generation of children; in the noughties, the 'new technology' is the Internet. Strasburger and Wilson (2002) explain that the concern with the media today is due to the 'sheer proliferation of media outlets and technologies' (5). It can also be traced back to the fact that the current generation has more access to media technology than their grandparents, or even their parents, as Buckingham (2000) describes: '...young people's experience of new media technologies (and particularly of computers) as driving a wedge between their culture and that of their parent's generation' (Buckingham, 2000; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002).

Spigel (1998) defines the fear of new technology as a way for adults to maintain control over the created concept of childhood: '...childhood – as a moment of purity and innocence – exists only so long as the young are protected from certain types of knowledge. Given this, it is not surprising that mass media typically has been viewed with trepidation by the adult culture' (1998: 114). Buckingham (2000) said there is a struggle between adults and new technology:

On the one hand, these new forms are seen to have enormous positive potential, particularly in terms of learning while on the other, they are frequently seen to be harmful to those who are regarded as particularly vulnerable. In both cases, it is children – or perhaps more accurately, the idea of childhood – which is the vehicle for many of these aspirations and concerns (2000: 43).

Here, it would be useful to introduce social networking sites. This will become more important when discussing my own research in the coming chapters, so it is vital to have grounding in some of the literature already published. Similar to the fears evoked with the introduction of the Internet, as described by Buckingham above, the use of social networking sites (SNS) has evoked an even stronger response, as evidenced, too, by the reporting of the Bridgend suicides

where social networking sites were initially blamed for the deaths. Pfeil et al (2009) describe these sites as a way to connect with others:

...they encourage users to connect to other users on the site, establishing and/or maintaining a group of friends. These activities allow members of SNS to engage in social activities and build and maintain social capital in these online settings, by sustained contact between friends and family (2009: 643)

Yet the inherent fears surrounding children, teenagers and young adults using these social networking sites to engage in 'deviant' behaviour seems to be coming true. William and Merten's (2008) results indicate that 'online profiles contain a wealth of intimate, candid and publicly available information on a wide range of social issues...' (2008: 253). Some of those issues are: romantic relationships, friends, parents, substance use, sexuality, popular culture, eating disorders, trouble at school, depression, conflicts, self expression and self harm (255).

[They] have become a standard form of teenage communication comparable to cell phones, e-mail or instant messaging. The difference between blogging and other forms of communication is: 1.) they are accessible at any time, from any location, 2.) they leave a trail of observable dialogue that can be printed or stored, and 3.) they incorporate advanced multimedia components. Adolescents have the ability to construct a personal profile or online environment, depicting how they view themselves or how they want others to view them (2008: 255)

It is these profiles that many elected officials and police take issue with. For example, in the case of the Bridgend suicides, the deaths were initially linked to social networking sites. Several of those who died by suicide were friends on the likes of MySpace, Facebook and Bebo. Additionally, in the cases of two of the childhood suicides presented earlier, Laura Rhodes and Jonathan Reynolds, the press reported in both cases that the Internet and social networking sites played a role in their suicidal deaths. In the case of the Bridgend suicides, the survivors of the suicides tended to gravitate towards these networking sites to openly display their grief.

Williams and Merten (2009) explain:

As their thought processes are becoming more abstract, when dealing with loss, adolescents may feel comforted by their perception that they are communicating

with the deceased. Putting their thoughts into text helps adolescents make sense of the death not only by verbalizing, but also by visualizing their feelings and having the opportunity to reflect on their bereavement process (2009: 69).

They also found that when experiencing 'the sudden, unexpected death of a loved one', despite available resources such as family, friends and counselors, adolescents often feel unable to express their feelings (71). In fact, researchers found that 'posting commentary online allows multiple users to talk about their feelings and experiences and express grief in ways that might not feel comfortable in face-to-face interaction as they are simultaneously experiencing the grief process' (2009: 71). The most interesting finding from their study was that when adolescents posted online to a deceased peer's profile, 'the language they used indicates they were talking directly to the deceased':

While talking to the dead as if they were an attentive audience, adolescents reminisced about past shared experiences, provided updates on their current situations, discussed the death and their bereavement process, and posted a variety of emotional commentary which, based on theory, was assessed as indication of active coping (Williams and Merten, 2009: 85).

In fact, researchers would advocate this form of coping compared to what Brent et al (1993) found. In their study, Brent et al (1993) determined that those adolescents and youth exposed to suicide have a higher chance of developing their own mental health episode, which included suicidal ideation for much longer than originally thought one month after the suicide (509).

We did not anticipate as severe or long-lasting an impact on the exposed group as we apparently found. However, it may be possible that peers represent a more important source of support for these high-risk youth than for the average adolescent, and the loss of one peer may have a proportionally greater impact (516).

The purpose of looking at this in such depth here is to set up a foundation for when I discuss my own research later in this dissertation, as well as draw the conclusion, that while Internet and social networking sites have been deemed negative influences on children and young adults, they can also serve a positive function, as Buckingham (2000) argued earlier. The fact of

the matter is that media infiltrate every aspect of a child's life. 'Yet, in key respects, it is adult conceptions of childhood and adult provision for childhood, or lack thereof, which have made them so' (Livingstone, 2002: 78). But Livingstone contends that, as much as children and young people enjoy media, 'their first inclination is often towards activities with friends' (2002: 79). Strasburger and Wilson (2002) state that older children are being exposed to a more 'adult' (or older—eg: TV) market of media, while younger children are targeted for a new niche market (newer—eg: Internet). This means that boundaries are being blurred, the press likes to capitalize on this: '... in the press, stories about 'children at risk' make for the kind of sensational copy which sells newspapers—a phenomenon that has become much more prominent as the boundaries between the 'popular' and the 'quality' press have become steadily more blurred' (2002: 104). This is an important piece of research to note, as by reducing suicide to a childish act and infantilizing those who took their own lives, (as will be discussed in Chapter Six), journalists were able to create a sensation around the Bridgend suicides that also focused on 'children at risk', despite the fact that nineteen of the 20 suicides that were examined in this six-month sample were legally considered adults. Before exploring the literature on media reporting of suicide, it is important to first examine theories around the issue of suicide itself for a greater understanding of the complexities involved.

3.5 Defining Suicide

A World Health Organization (WHO) report released in 2004 stated that more than one million people die by suicide each year, and an additional ten to twenty times more attempt to take their own lives. In England, about 5,000 people die by suicide annually. Approximately 19,000 suicide attempts are made by adolescents every year in Britain. Each month in Britain, more than 70 young people aged 15-24 die by suicide. Yearly, approximately 12,000 children aged 5-14 are admitted to psychiatric hospitals for suicidal behaviour (Hill, 1995; Marris et al, 2000;

Duffy and Ryan, 2004). A review of suicide literature shows that it is important to understand what suicide is, its 'causes', its history, common perceptions and how these ideas make up the larger stigmas and associations that society, including the press, have about suicide before delving into its application towards theories of childhood. Further, in this section, discourses around childhood suicide will be discussed. Before turning to this issue, however, the questions as to what suicide is must be addressed; this will be examined by introducing the broader sociological perspectives on suicide compared to what is presented in the media.

Simply stated, suicide is the taking of one's own life. French sociologist Emile Durkheim's (1897) work on suicide established the sociological framework and theory that is still used today by many suicidologists. He argued that suicide is the result of society's strength or weakness of control over an individual (Berman and Jobes, 1991: 37). Within his theory, Durkheim identified four categories that each completed suicide would fit into based on the individual's relationship to society: egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic. According to Durkheim, egoistic suicides are not connected with, or dependent on, their community. In contrast, the person who is overly integrated into a group, and feels that no sacrifice is too great for the good of the larger group, would be considered an altruistic suicide. Anomic suicides occur when the victim is not capable of dealing with a crisis rationally, or when their relationship with society is suddenly changed. Suicide is the solution to a problem in this form. The last category, fatalistic suicide, is thought to be caused by excessive societal regulation that restricts the victim's freedom; this person sees no viable future for themselves. Additionally, in his germinal book on the subject, Durkheim found that the existence of a strong community, where a person is integrated and has support from family, neighbourhood and a religious group is one way to prevent suicide, while he also found that the rate of suicide increases when society's

control of its members is diminished (Sainsbury et al, 1979: 43). Durkheim's work helped to bring the discussion around suicide into public discourse¹³.

While his categories still have an impact on the study of suicide today, it is Edwin S. Shneidman's work in the field of psychology that has further described what suicide is, what causes it, why it happens, who it happens to, how it happens, and what can be done to prevent it. Shneidman (1996) states:

In almost every case, suicide is caused by pain, a certain kind of pain—psychological pain, which I call psychache. Furthermore, this psychache stems from thwarted or distorted psychological needs. In other words, suicide is chiefly a drama of the mind. Even though I know that each suicidal death is a multi-faceted event—that biological, biochemical, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, intrapsychic, logical, philosophical, conscious and unconscious elements are always present—I retain the belief that, in the proper distillation of the event, its essential nature is psychological. That is, each suicide drama occurs in the mind of a unique individual (4-5).

Shneidman believes that in order to prevent and address the issue of suicide, it is best to ask about a person's emotions, rather than engage in the study of the structure of the brain, social statistics or mental diseases. The two questions he argues need to be asked are: 'Where do you hurt?' and 'How can I help you?' (1996: 6). The essential fact to keep in mind when dealing with suicide is that it never happens because someone is happy or joyous. Instead, it is the result of negative emotions and anguish.

3.6 Questioning Suicide

The why of suicide can never be completely explained, yet it is a question that survivors of suicide (those left behind when a loved one dies), the press and researchers still attempt to answer or determine, with often futile results. Unfortunately, the person who has the answer is now deceased. However, research shows there can be precipitating factors that can help address

¹³ While Durkheim's work created a general framework in which the reasons for suicide can be explored, he did not delve into the specifics or differences between male and female suicides, nor differences between age groups.

the 'why?' question. Sidney M. Jourard (1969: 132) states that 'a person lives as long as he experiences his life as having meaning and value and as long as he has something to live for'. Jack D. Douglas (1969: 111) explains his theory in a six-step plan, which includes the willing of self-destruction, the loss of will and the motivation to be dead or die which causes a person to make sure it actually happens.

Shneidman (1985) indicates that suicidologists agree that precipitating events can be the cause or trigger for a suicide. He refers to them as: suffering ill health, being jilted, losing one's fortune and being humiliated or shamed (1985: 123). For Shneidman (1996), most suicides fall into one of five clusters of psychological needs. It is when those needs are not met that psychological pain ensues, and suicide can happen. The first is thwarted love, acceptance and belonging; a person experiencing this kind of emotional pain is frustrated and only wants to be taken care of and loved by another. The second is fractured control, and a loss of predictability and arrangement; this person is frustrated in the quest for achievement, autonomy, order and understanding. The third is assaulted self-image and the avoidance of shame, defeat, humiliation and disgrace; the person feels a frustrated need for affiliation, defendance and shame-avoidance. The fourth category is ruptured key relationships. Again, a person in this category is frustrated in their needs for affiliation and nurturing. The last category is excessive anger, rage and hostility. This person has frustrated needs relating to dominance, aggression and counteraction (Shneidman, 1996: 25). Shneidman's five clusters are similar to Durkheim's four labels of suicide, but, in my view, have better explanatory power for understanding suicide today.

Shneidman's (1996) definition of suicide, psychache plays a large role in understanding why a suicide might occur. Psychache is the hurt, anguish and pain that takes over the mind. Psychologically, a suicidal person is feeling shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, loneliness, angst and

dread. It is when these emotions become unbearable that suicide seems like the only solution (Shneidman, 1996: 13). Additionally, as Ad J.F.M. Kerkhof and Ella Arensman (2001) argue, quality of life factors such as living conditions, personal relationships, ambitions, fulfilments and values can also play a role. Other factors they found include physical, sexual and mental maltreatment by parents in childhood. In addition, psychiatric and psychological characteristics also play a major role: substance abuse, depression, hopelessness, powerlessness, personality disorders, unstable living conditions or living alone, criminal records, previous psychiatric treatments and a history of stressful traumatic life events including broken homes and family violence (2001: 32).

However, one of the key factors— and the single reliable indicator of a potential suicide—is depression. A person suffering from depression tends to suffer from feelings of low mood. The feelings a person suffers with depression are ongoing, meaning they last for days, weeks, months, even years. The feelings are intense and tend to exhibit both psychological and physical signs: persistent sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, sleeplessness, loss of energy, loss of self-confidence, loss of self-esteem, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, avoidance and isolation (DepressionAlliance.org, retrieved June 13th, 2007). In a 1992 survey of public attitudes surrounding depression, a prevailing stigma attached to mental health problems and psychiatric disorders was found. In the public sphere, mental illness implies weakness, abnormality and instability, all terms, which consequently are used to describe the created life stage of childhood. Because of this stigma, those who suffered from depression were found to avoid getting help. It should be noted here that depression is one of the leading causes for childhood suicide (Hill, 1995: 102).

The issue with suicide is that it seems to spurn all efforts to categorise or define it. It can happen at any age. It can happen in any geographic location. It happens to both sexes, though

men are more likely to kill themselves, while women attempt suicide more often. Lisa Bird and Alison Faulkner (2000) have studied suicide and self-harm in England and Wales. In their research they found there were seasonal differences in the levels of suicide, with spring and early summer showing high levels. In addition, suicides peaked in January. Barker et al (1994) contend that those increases can be partly accounted for by the weather. They state: '...the spring and early summer peak in suicidal behaviour is because of the seasonal change in the occurrence of episodes of affective disorder and/or the discrepancy noticed by depressed persons viewing the external world bursting into life when their internal world is lifeless' (1994: 375). Bird and Faulkner's (2000) research was inconclusive, however, and previous research would deem a January increase an anomaly (Lester, 1971; Barker et al, 1994; Chew and McCleary, 1995; Hakko et al, 1998).

3.7 Societal Views of Suicide

Every year in England and Wales, more than three times as many men as women kill themselves. The most common methods used in suicides were: poisoning (including car exhaust fumes), hanging and suffocation, drowning, firearms, jumping, cutting and piercing, and overdoses (Bird and Faulkner, 2000: 1-8). This holds true for most countries, except the United States where firearms are the leading method of suicide death, followed by hanging and suffocation. Bird and Faulkner (2000) consider the influence of social deprivation and social class in their study, but their conclusions are largely based on research conducted between 1975 and 1990. At that time, suicide was associated with poverty, poor social conditions, and unemployment and violence, particularly amongst young men. Reasons given at the time were the rise in people living alone, the number of divorced men, the increase in unemployment and homelessness, the increase in illegal drug use, alcohol consumption and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which might have influenced gay men to kill themselves (Bird and Faulkner, 2000: 8).

Further study is needed regarding this issue today since it has been twenty years since such research was initiated.

Suicide is a social issue, one that many researchers around the world are trying to address. Engaging with the problem means discussing it, and in the discussion lies the inherent problem. Suicide is a difficult issue to discuss; it is distressing, and can bring up emotions and passions most people would rather keep buried. Most people have a belief or stance on suicide, but it is where these beliefs and stances come from that create the discourses that circulate in the public sphere. For instance, many believe suicide is a mortal sin; this belief largely originates from religious teachings, while others believe that since suicide used to be illegal, it is still a crime against society. Furthermore, those who hold the tenets of psychology as truth would tend to believe that suicide is inherently caused by mental illness. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to discover which, if any, of the above is correct, but rather to look at these discourses and see how they contribute to newspaper coverage of suicide.

In many societies, suicide was historically regarded as a proper way to end one's life nobly as a way of pacifying the Gods when one had acted inappropriately (Hume, 2005: 6-13); it was during the Middle Ages, in Western Europe that suicide became widely regarded as a mortal sin, as Catholicism increasingly became the moral compass for society. According to Bille-Brahe (2001), for most of the last century, suicide was perceived as a psychotic act, while today, in some circles, it is considered a rational act, or even a human right, especially in the context of terminal illness (2001:183). Historical views on suicide over the centuries have helped to shape public attitudes over time in specific ways. Tolerance, acceptance, condemnation, scorn and contempt can all be traced around this issue throughout the ages. The most decisive condemnation came from the Catholic Church, however, when it deemed suicide a mortal sin. Achille Vander Heeren (1912), a scholar of Catechism, explains:

Suicide perpetrated without God's consent always constitutes a grave injustice towards Him. To destroy a thing is to dispose of it as an absolute master and to act as one having dull and independent dominion over it; but man does not possess this full and independent dominion over his life, since to be an owner, one must be superior to his property (retrieved October 3rd, 2008 from www.newadvent.org).

The idea that a person would feel he or she had more power than 'God' to make such decisions was a deeply offensive one to the Catholic Church: 'The Christian Middle Ages were unacquainted with this [suicide] morbid tendency, but it had reappeared at a more recent period, has developed constantly since the Renaissance, and at present has reached such an intensity among all civilized nations that it may be considered one of the special evils of our time' (Vander Heeren, 1912, retrieved October 3rd, 2008 from www.newadvent.org). The church saw suicide as 'de-Christianizing' a country and thusly deemed it a mortal sin, bringing with it a stigma and dissolution of tolerant attitudes (Bille-Brahe, 2001: 183). It was only when Durkheim (in 1897) and Austrian-born psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (in 1910) began studying and discussing suicide that it was determined that the suicidal act needed to be seen in relation to the individual and societal circumstances, rather than as an act against humanity. However, a stigma around suicide persists to this day. Graham Thornicroft (2006) breaks stigma down into two separate words that provides a more coherent understanding of the word. The first is *prejudice*. According to Thornicroft, prejudice is 'the unwarranted negative attitudes people hold towards us based on their own beliefs and preconceptions, rather than on our specific, individual attributes' (2006: xii). The second is *discrimination*. The definition is the 'societal codification of such attitudes, as expressed in laws and customs that result in us having a lower social status and fewer rights than non-labelled people do' (2006: xii). Readers should work from these two definitions of stigma when reading this dissertation.

One of the problems with discussing suicide is that most people do not pay it any attention unless it has affected them or their family in some way (Smith, 2004: 100). Myths still surround suicide. For example, many people believe that talking about suicide to a person who may be suicidal will cause more harm, possibly triggering that person to carry out self-harm (Haim: 1969: xi). Another myth is that suicide happens out of the blue. In fact, most people with suicidal tendencies leave clues, sometimes months before they carry out the act (Shneidman: 1985: 238). Debunking this myth helps to create a stronger argument for why the media cannot be blamed entirely for the repetition of suicides in a given community. Yet, the research that looks directly at how the media report suicide focuses on the effects that media reporting can have on the continuation of suicide rather than critically analysing reporting and providing context for how that reporting affects societal discourses around the issue of suicide.

3.8 Reporting Suicide

Academics in the fields of sociology, psychology, psychiatry and medicine cite the media as the predominant cause for 'copycat', or imitative suicides (Coyle and MacWhannell, 2002; Gould et al, 2003; Hawton et al, 1999; Jamison et al, 2003; Martin, 1998; Martin and Koo, 1997; Pfeffer, 1986; Phillips, 1974; Pirelli and Jeglic, 2009; Smith, 1994; Tam et al, 2007; Traskman-Bendz and Westrin, 2001; Van Heeringen, 2001; Weiss and Stephens, 1992). While exception can be taken with this research on several points, debunking the research is not the purpose of this dissertation. The research is explained here, in order to illustrate the current thinking regarding how the media report suicide. The current research often uses what has been referred to as the 'Werther Effect', based on Goethe's, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774. Several suicides occurred following the publication of the book, with the deceased dressing in a similar fashion to Young Werther and adopting his method of killing himself; some who died, were found with the book. The Werther Effect theory did not come to light, however, until the 1970s,

when David Phillips (1974) researched imitative suicidal behaviours occurring in response to the portrayal of suicide in the news or entertainment media. Phillips' (1974) study was among the first to look at the effect that newspaper reporting of celebrity suicides had on national suicide rates in the months following Marilyn Monroe's suicide in 1962. He found a twelve per cent increase in the US national suicide rate. Following this discovery, he coined the term, 'Werther Effect,' to describe the potential impact of a celebrity suicide on inspiring others to end their lives. Phillips' theory, however, goes against anything previously held to be true by Durkheim as Phillips (1974) acknowledges:

Durkheim believes that imitation might influence a few persons in the immediate vicinity of a well-known suicide, but he asserted that imitation does not affect the national level of suicides. He conceded that a few suicides might be precipitated by suggestion, but he felt that those would probably have occurred eventually, even in the absence of suggestion (340).

Phillips believed that he could turn Durkheim's assertions on their head.

The Werther Effect theory has become widely influential, despite various flaws in statistical analysis. First, in the choosing of newspapers, a representative sample, (i.e., one that would be available and readable to all social classes), was not chosen for Phillips' study. Second, the sample was based on a postwar period, but did not acknowledge research around higher increases of suicide during and immediately after war time (Kushner and Sterk, 2005: 1141-1142). Lastly, while the study tried to draw national comparisons of suicide, Phillips did not take into account the regionality of 'national' newspapers in the US. For example, while the *New York Times* is considered a national newspaper, it mostly covers the New York and Northeastern regions of the US. The Werther Effect has since been a hotly contested piece of research within the field of suicidology and since the coining of the phrase, researchers have been frustrated when trying to replicate Phillips' study as his results cannot always be discerned.

According to the WHO's media guidelines on reporting suicide, more than 50 other investigations into imitative suicides have been conducted: 'Collectively, these studies have strengthened the body of evidence in a number of ways' (WHO, 2008: 8). What those academics who fall in line behind the Werther Effect fail to consistently mention is that not all of the 50 studies can adequately replicate the Werther Effect, or a copycat syndrome in those studies. For instance, Hittner (2005) re-examined the Werther Effect and found only partial support for its existence, stating:

Although a number of studies have reported positive associations between mass media portrayals of suicide and actual suicide rates, these studies have been criticized on both methodological and statistical grounds. Perhaps the most central statistical concern is that these studies did not control for the positive correlation (i.e., dependency) between the expected and observed suicide rates before examining the impact of media publicity on the observed number of suicides (2005: 193)

Mick Temple (2008) in his analysis of power and the British Press summed up the issues with relying too heavily on effects-research:

The relationship between cause and effect does not flow one way... readers can influence their newspapers. There are many other influences (home, work, education) impacting on our political beliefs and the huge number of media outlets makes it difficult to ascribe impact to, for example, newspapers, or even any one newspaper. It is also the case that different people use the same media in different ways and for different purposes, making it likely that a newspaper will have different effects on different people. People have a well-developed capacity to suppress, forget, distort or misinterpret messages to fit their view of the world' (2008: 121).

If suicidologists agree, as stated earlier in this chapter, that precipitating factors must be involved before a person takes his or her own life, then it only reasons that newspaper reporting cannot cause a suicide, if it is merely reacting to the event that has happened.

In a study of college-aged students, Pirelli et al (2009) found that 'exposure to suicide and non-suicidal death were not related to current suicidal ideation; however, students who had made a suicide attempt were more likely to have been exposed to a death by suicide or

acute death' (136). As Brent et al (1993) argue, those that are exposed to a suicide personally, meaning they had a relationship with the person, be it friendship or familial, have an increased likelihood of taking their own life, whether they are exposed to news reports or not (Brent et al, 1993; Pirelli et al, 2009). This research will become quite prominent when discussing the Bridgend suicides and will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation.

Yet, despite these more recent findings, the Werther Effect theory is consistently called upon as explanation for suicide when deaths are reported by the media. The WHO report states: 'systematic reviews of these studies have consistently drawn the same conclusion: media reporting of suicide can lead to imitative suicidal behaviours' (WHO, 2008: 8). The word 'can' is important to note as it is the only acknowledgement that the Werther Effect can let down its researchers. The Werther Effect is, for all intents and purposes, a good example of what critics of certain effects research have referred to as a 'hypodermic needle approach' to media research— i.e., that all media audiences passively accept media messages. As such, media audiences will be encouraged to see suicide as an option to be used to solve their problems based purely on the fact that a suicide is reported in the media. I do contend that the media play a role in this social issue, as it does in any social issue. The media must report responsibly, have some consideration for families of the deceased, but, probably most importantly, the media has a role to play in educating citizens about suicide, the effect it has on those left behind, the warnings and signs of suicide prevention.

Shneidman (1996) stands by his notion of psychache and psychological pain needing to be already present before a suicide takes place (1996: 4). He believes that most of the psychache people experience is rooted in childhood experiences (1996: 163). Dying by suicide is a sudden event to those left behind. Death is the one event everyone knows must happen... one day. Suicide names the day, time, place and method: 'Suicide is the only kind of death in which the

individual supplies most of the details for the death certificate' (Shneidman, 1996: 160). How those details are articulated in the media, then, can explain whether suicide is reported responsibly or not.

Jamieson et al (2003) studied whether the reporting of suicide in print was responsible journalism. The undercurrent of the article was to prevent journalists from causing copycat suicides. Despite that fact, the authors found some interesting points: 'Content analysis of the *New York Times* for 1990, 1995 and 1999 indicates that although the suicide rate did not increase during this period, the prominence of suicide reporting did. In addition, articles did not focus on treatable pre-existing conditions (eg. depression) that play a role in up to 90% of self-inflicted deaths' (2003: 1,643). Jamieson et al also found that 60% of the suicide stories suggested a cause: 'However, these causes tended to focus on immediate precursors, such as negative life events, rather than long-standing and treatable conditions such as depression' (1,646). In fact, the authors found that depression, a potential contributor to suicide, was mentioned in only 8% of the stories. The authors concluded that 'readers are unlikely to learn much about the likely causes of this form of death and hence are unlikely to understand the importance of seeking treatment for mental disorders that increase the risk of suicide' (Jamieson et al, 2003: 1,646). Similar findings were established by researchers examining the Hong Kong news media. Au et al (2004) determined that newspaper reporting on suicide cases in Hong Kong 'is selective in its coverage and incomplete in reporting the risk factors' (165). Additionally, the authors found that student suicides were over-reported, whereas elderly suicides were under-reported. This could be attributed to conceptions of childhood and young adulthood held by the rest of society that 'children' have their lives in front of them and therefore would have no need, or want, to die. This concept will be explored further in Chapter Six when a similar finding emerged in the

reporting of the Bridgend suicides. Selective coverage of suicide, however, is irresponsible, and can also be detrimental to the citizenry:

Biased or incomplete information may generate incorrect impressions and foster myths among the general public, which may negatively alter their attitudes toward suicide. In the long run, the public may be misled by the press and misunderstand the extent and implications of suicide, or may try to deal with the problem based on incomplete and biased perceptions formed by newspaper reporting (2004: 166).

Jamieson et al's (2003) study also concluded that the 57 reporters they interviewed were unaware that 'their reporting could produce suicide imitation' (2003: 1,643). Yet imitative suicide, caused by the media as previously mentioned, cannot always be proven. One such case was Martin and Koo's (1997) study into the effects of Kurt Cobain's suicide on young people in Australia. Their study looked at broadcast media for the 30-day period following the announcement of Cobain's suicide in 1994. Martin and Koo (1997) concluded that male suicide rates in 1994 were lower than those of 1992 and 1993, and that female deaths showed a steady decline over five years: 'There was no evidence of any increase in deaths from gunshot, the method used by Cobain. The conclusion appears to be that this celebrity suicide had little impact on suicide in young persons in Australia' (1997: 187).

Yet, Martin (1998) insists that the media is responsible for most suicides that occur:

We must now accept that reports that are 'front page', repeated and/or multi-channel, have suicide prominent in the report or in the title, glorify suicide in some way, are accompanied by photographs, discuss in detail the method of suicide and, in particular, concern celebrities, will influence others to suicide (1998: 59).

Martin calls quite strongly for near censorship and most definitely punishment for suicide stories that do not adhere to his ideals of how the media should report suicide. He states: 'If this does not occur then the media collectively must accept some responsibility for the ongoing number of unnecessary suicides across the world (1998: 59-60). Martin is unclear as to whether the media should also be monitored and punished in regards to the world's murder and hunger

rates too. He quite easily dismisses Durkheim's (1951) postulation that: 'imitation is not involved in the act of suicide, and instead that suicide is an individual response separate from social group or subgroup manifestation' (as quoted in Martin, 1998: 59). In fact, Martin (1998) goes as far as to insult every memory of a person who died by suicide and offend the loved ones they left behind when he states that the media need to 'develop, wherever possible, an attitude toward suicide as wasteful, destructive to those who remain, an act with no inherent value' (Martin, 1998: 61). In his work, he ultimately demonizes those who choose to take their own lives and reduces the complexities of suicide to the single attitude of 'waste'. His work ultimately reinforces the stigmas found to be already reported by journalists in regards to suicide.

While Hawton et al (1999) found studies of televised UK news reports of suicides that 'have suggested associations with a short-term increased incidence of suicide, especially if the reports are repeated and the deaths are highly publicized', the authors at least noted that other studies 'have not shown such an effect' (973). Hawton and his co-authors also did not call for a bullish attitude towards those with suicide ideations.

Pirkis et al (2006) and Pirkis et al (2007) seem to be the most responsible in articulating their arguments around the reporting of suicide. Both sets of research advocate the 'need for media professionals and suicide experts to work together to balance newsworthiness against the risk of copycat behaviour' (2007: 278). While Pirkis and her collaborators do believe that imitation is a potential factor in suicide with regard to news reporting, the researchers do concede that other factors can contribute to a person taking his or her own life.

While most researchers study the relationship between the suicide rates and the news stories covered, Fishman and Weimann (1997) direct their media and suicide research in a different direction, looking at types of suicide reporting that appear on news pages in Israel.

The authors found the three motives for suicide most frequently cited in the press to be: economic hardship, romantic disappointment and mental problems (201), arguing that, 'These three motives were also found to have the largest discrepancies between the official statistics and the press reports' (1997: 201). The authors also found the following results: misrepresentation of the real frequency of the very young and the very old; slightly exaggerated percentages of male suicides; Arabs represented as more frequent suicide victims; the proportion of married to unmarried victims reported was almost identical with that recorded by the official statistics; motive—economic hardships, romantic disappointment and mental problems—were severely over-reported, with romantic disappointment being attributed 16.1% of the motives in the press compared to the actual 1.2% allocated by official statistics (1997: 203-205). Overall, the authors concluded that motives for suicide are 'socially reconstructed by the press' (1997: 199).

Peelo et al (2004) discuss social construction in the press, but as it pertains to homicide. Many of their findings can, however, be attributed to suicide. Despite the fact that suicide is not an act of crime, many in society, including the newspapers, insist on using the term 'commit suicide, which can imply a criminal act in the phrasing. Peelo et al (2004) explains further: 'Newspapers have a unique place in contributing to the framing of criminological problems, regularly reaching large readerships in a highly accessible form. The process of framing criminological problems may occur in response to outstanding alarming or shocking crimes, and move from being framed as a public problem to being a more pressing matter of panic'(2004: 257).

The Bridgend suicides, those at the heart of this dissertation, are an example of such a panic. The coverage in both regional and national newspapers jumped to the conclusion that 24

suicides, over the course of 2008, were a result of a suicide pact. Brown and Barraclough (1997) discuss further:

The people who take part in suicide pacts tend to be older, more likely to be married, without children, and are generally of a higher social class than those who commit solitary suicide. In solitary suicides, males outnumber females by about three to one, but in suicide pacts, the ratio of male to female is about equal. Suicide pacts comprise less than 1 percent of all suicides in England and Wales, amounting to 124 people in 62 pacts between January 1, 1988 and December 31, 1992 (1997: 286).

There is no evidence of a suicide pact link in the Bridgend suicides. Those who killed themselves ranged in age from 15-29, and were mostly unmarried, as Brown and Barraclough (1997) mentioned in their explanation. One explanation for the suicides could be discovered in Brent et al's (1993), Pirelli et al's (2009) and Gould et al's (2003) findings that those who had been personally affected by a suicide were more likely to take their own life. Gould and her researchers found in 'a nationally representative stratified random sample of US high school students that students who had attempted suicide were about three times more likely to attempt suicide than teens who did not know someone who had attempted suicide' (2003: 1,272).

3.9 Reporting Childhood Suicide

Suicides, like all unnatural deaths, warrant a legal investigation by coroners to rule out foul play. The inquiry sets out to establish a reason for death. These coroner investigations – where witnesses are present, post-mortem reports and suicide notes are read and the press feverishly take notes – can often turn into chaotic media events, causing grief and anguish for family and friends left behind. In England and Wales, there is the additional stigma of the criminality of a suicide. Suicide and attempted suicide were crimes in both England and Wales until 1961, and the suicide verdict at inquires still reflects an innocent-until-proven-guilty criminal heritage (Hill, 1995: 15). The coroner's definition of suicide is strict. The law requires that the intention of

a suicide victim—to die—must be known without any doubt. The same weight of evidence must be present, as in a murder case (Shneidman, 1969; Hill, 1995; Kenny, 2001). This raises major issues, as Hill (1995) points out, especially when it comes to childhood suicide. As stated previously, society's underlying Judeo-Christian tradition prompts the framework for the 'sanctity of life'—that life should be preserved, and especially should be preserved for children—but in the case of a childhood suicide, that preservation of life is discarded. Thus, legally, in the UK, a coroner must know without a doubt that a child intended to die. By hiding verdicts, or leaving them 'open', a coroner can save a family shame and embarrassment that their child went against societal conventions and made the decision to end their own life because of the pain they were feeling.

Unlike what was shown in the previous section about the media reporting of suicide in adults, when it comes to childhood suicide, journalists rely quite heavily on coroners to share their verdicts (Hill, 1995: 17). As with an adult suicide, clear intent on wanting to die needs to be proven, without doubt, before a suicide verdict may be recorded in England and Wales. Hill's research found the following: Between 1980 and 1990, 33% of 10-14 year olds; 75% of 15-19 year olds and 89% of 20-24 year olds who died by hanging themselves were given a suicide verdict at an inquest. When it came to overdoses, 14% of 10-14 year olds, 34% of 15-19 year olds and 39% of 20-24 year olds were given suicide verdicts (Hill, 1995: 16):

The burden of legal proof within the English system makes the under-reporting of suicide common practice. The youth suicide rate is also eroded by tactful coroners. The inquest highlights how a system for gathering suicide data can become choked by stigma and private grief. (1995: 16).

The willingness to ignore and deny childhood suicide casts the problem aside and renders it unworthy of attention. Many childhood suicide deaths within the English criminal system are left as 'open verdicts,' or 'undetermined deaths,' thus preventing true numbers of

childhood suicide being known. These deaths, however, as Hill (1995) discovered, have all the hallmarks of being suicides. Verdicts were left open, she said, to spare family members the grief and chaos associated with the stigma of such a death. Nevertheless, when added to 1980 numbers, she was able to estimate that the number of suicides in the 10-14 year old age category jumps 240% (1995: 19). The media play a role in burying these suicide statistics, instead choosing to create the discourse of bullying as a way to explain away childhood suicide.

One of the issues regarding childhood suicide is that the term 'adolescent suicide' is frequently used, encompassing a fairly large group from 10 year olds up to 19 year olds. However, that said, some researchers claim that adolescence, 11-13 year olds, is the only time in which adolescent suicide can be discussed: 'there is virtual unanimity that adolescence begins with the onset of puberty' (Haim, 1969: 30). He claims that for Western cultures puberty is between the ages of 10-12 for girls and 12-14 for boys. The problem with this statement is that puberty is not the same for every child. That is to say, does that mean that 10-year-old boys remain children while 10-year-old girls become adolescents because something biological has changed in their body? A larger issue still is the fact that 'adolescence' is another creation to try and distinguish and to separate older from younger children as 'others.' Using the term adolescence, especially with regard to suicide, is another way to restructure childhood: 'That adolescence is neither a mere continuation of childhood, nor a beginning without a past; it is, at the same time, an integration of new factors and a reshaping of the structures of childhood (Haim, 1969: 38). Haim's point is one that should be noted, especially when discussing the Bridgend suicides. While the deaths of nineteen young adults in Bridgend cannot be considered a restructuring of childhood one could argue that by infantilizing those adults, theories of childhood are being extended to a stage of life that is considered more transitional than anything else.

French sociologist Phillipe Aries (1960) stated that for many centuries, from the Middle Ages up until the end of the 15th Century in Western Europe, people believed children to be miniature adults (1960: 125). Naming a particular age group who die by suicide 'adolescents,' is another way to 'other' deviant children. Instead, that term, as Haim said (1969), classifies adolescents as, 'someone who is no longer a child but not yet an adult, and at the same time, still a child and already an adult (1969: 34). To follow in the footsteps of Haim (1969), in this dissertation, all people under the age of fifteen will be called children.

There are many facets to childhood suicide. One fact is clear: more boys kill themselves than girls. Getting a family to discuss or even admit that their child died by suicide is next to impossible (Pfeffer, 1986). The secrecy comes from a parent's guilt over their role in the child's behaviour, or because of the fear of social stigma associated with suicidal behaviour (1986: 15). The stigma is much worse when a child is involved in a suicide. In 1980, a study was carried out in the US by Lawrence Calhoun, James Selby and Michael E. Faulstick to determine perceptions about a family who had lost a child to suicide. The 119 participants were given two newspaper articles from a large city daily newspaper. The first story described a 10-year-old child who had died by suicide. The second story described a 10-year-old child who had died from natural causes. The participants were asked numerous questions about their beliefs regarding the child's psychological state and the role of the deceased child's parents. The results confirmed the stigma surrounding suicide (Calhoun et al, 1980: 535). The participants viewed the child who had died by suicide to be more psychologically disturbed than a child who died from natural causes. The parents of the suicidal child were blamed for contributing to the child's emotional turmoil. The study determined that people outside a family touched by suicide firmly believe that parental factors strongly influence a child's propensity toward suicidal behaviour (Calhoun et al, 1980; Pfeffer, 1986).

A contributing factor to suicide is thought to be social class, but, as yet, the research to back up that claim has not been carried out. For example, the most comprehensive study of child suicide in England and Wales was conducted by David Shafer between 1962 and 1968. Thirty children were documented during that time period to have killed themselves. In that sample, 21 were boys and nine were girls. The researcher was unable to track whether social class was a contributing factor in those deaths as there was no information listed on the coroner's records about social class specifically (Pfeffer, 1986: 27). The best Shaffer (1974) could do was to describe an image of the suicided children in his study; they '... tended to lead a solitary, isolated existence, were of superior intelligence, were at grammar school, seemed culturally distant from their parents who were less well educated' (288). Additionally, he found that their mothers were mentally ill, suicide notes hinted at internal conflict and they seemed to be depressed or withdrawn right before their deaths (288).

In Britain, because of the frequent mislabelling of the suicide deaths as 'open verdicts' or 'undetermined death', and because of the few details required on death certificates (for example: no details of racial or cultural identity), researchers have yet to determine whether social class plays a pivotal role in completed suicides and suicide attempts. Hill (1995) said that if such research existed, she would hypothesize that 'class differences in suicide are likely, in some cases, to reflect the stresses of poor finances, housing and employment conditions. Poverty, in general, is known to heighten depression and anxiety' (Hill, 1995; Strand and Kunst, 2006). It is no secret that depression is rampant amongst children. Berman and Jobses (1991) maintain that:

Adolescence is so commonly portrayed as a difficult, if not a dark and angry developmental stage, that to consider it otherwise may seem absurd to some. At first glance, one might wonder why adolescents even bother to go on—depression and suicidal behaviours would be natural sequelae to the developmental issues inherent in adolescence (1991: 52).

Yet the fact remains that children do suffer from depression, the same depression the Depression Alliance defined earlier. While adults and children tend to suffer from the same types of feelings and emotions when they are depressed, how these feelings and emotions come about are completely different. Haim (1969) said that the events in a child's life that will bring on a depressive state are: the loss of a loved one; failure in an important relationship, such as breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend; an event that damages the social standing of the child or the failure to fit in at school (1969: 243). A failure to fit in at school can sometimes be attributed to bullying.

Bullying¹⁴ is deemed the frame and discourse of choice by journalists when reporting a child suicide. This was evidenced in my original cases of the deaths of children Laura Rhodes, Ben Vodden and Jonathan Reynolds. All three, before they took their own lives, had been bullied; Rhodes for being overweight and possibly gay, Vodden for being meek, and Reynolds for being gay. Yet this frame and discourse around bullying was not evident when looking at the young adult suicides that occurred in Bridgend in 2008. As mentioned earlier, my hypothesis is that blaming 'bullying' for a child's suicide is an acceptable discourse in society by which the act of suicide can further be 'othered'.

The most severe consequence of bullying is suicide, but all bullying does not inevitably end with the death of its 'victim'. Earlier in this chapter, the stigma surrounding suicide was

¹⁴ Most authors agree that there are two types of bullying: that which is direct tending to be physical, and that which is indirect, which is more psychological. Physical bullying can include, (but this is by no means an exhaustive list): hitting, tripping, taking belongings, beating, kicking, jostling, punching, pushing, pinching, maiming and even murder (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Rigby, 1996; Tattum, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith and Thompson, 1991). Psychological bullying can include the following, (again, this is not an exhaustive list): making faces, dirty gestures, telling nasty stories, intimidation, spreading malicious rumours, name calling, stalking behaviour, malicious telephone calls to a student's home and repeatedly hiding another's belongings (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Rigby, 1996; Tattum, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith and Thompson, 1991). LaFontaine's (1991) research has found that over three-quarters of bullying reported to ChildLine happened in school. Additionally, she observes that some of the most violent bullying occurs on the way to and from school (1991: 16). Once at school, however, the playground becomes the bully's kingdom. It is where he or she rules, and where most of the damage is done.

examined. Based on societal conceptions of childhood, stigma is even more pronounced when it is a child who has chosen to die – children should be innocent, naïve beings, not beings who wish to die. Media reporting of child suicide is embedded within a set of social beliefs around these conceptions of childhood. So, too, is the media reporting of young adult suicide, as will be seen in Chapters Five and Six when I examine the Bridgend suicides in more detail. It is important to examine and understand the childhood literature presented in this chapter because as will be seen later in this dissertation, young adult suicides are infantilized and placed in a category of the 'deviant non-child', which highlights the fact that an adult suicide is discursively described in terms of childhood. Such an action by journalists does not just further stigmatize the issue of suicide, but it further reinforces the discourses, or blame that emerges when a child suicide actually does occur.

While it is important to remember that most media reports portray childhood suicide as coming to fruition because of bullying, a recent analysis of childhood bullying, conducted at the Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center by Young-Shin Kim shows that, 'there is no definitive evidence that bullying makes kids more likely to kill themselves' (2008: 133). Instead, 'there's a likely association [between bullying and suicide]. Thus the research confirms what most scholars have held to be common sense: bullying can be a trigger for suicide, but is not always the cause of suicide' (2008: 153). In a study in Britain that included 7,000 interviews with children and adolescents, Katz et al (2001) determined that when you compare severely bullied girls and boys with those who are not bullied, there are much higher levels of distress among the bullied victims (2001: 28):

Depression, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and an almost pervasive sense of hopelessness particularly for the boys, permeate their replies. A sad finding was that although one in five of the severely bullied boys had attempted suicide, nearly one in three of the less severely bullied had also attempted suicide (2001: 28).

Rigby (1996) conducted a study in Adelaide, Australia, in 1993 to see if the general health of children who are victimized by their peers at school can be seriously affected. He sampled 377 boys, of which 23% who called themselves bullying victims said they wished they were dead, while 12 percent who said they were not victims also said they wanted to die. His sample of 400 girls was equally alarming. Forty percent of girls who said they were victims of bullying wished to be dead, while 21% who considered themselves not to be victims also wished to die (1996: 54-55).

Researchers who study bullying all agree that power is the starting point of the bully-victim relationship (Rigby, 1996; LaFontaine, 1991; Katz et al, 2001; Besag, 1989; Tattum, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Smith and Thompson, 1991; Aggleton et al, 2000; Thompson, 2000; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Scraton (1997) maintains that adults regularly reconstruct children's experiences with power to minimize disorder. In fact, Prout (2005) has argued that children learn and perceive relations of power from an early age. It is no wonder, then, that bullying appears to be an enduring feature in UK schools. Smith and Sharp (1994) describe the everyday power struggle taking place in schools:

Bullying can be described as the systematic abuse of power. There will always be power relationships in social groups by virtue of strength, of size or ability, force of personality, sheer numbers or recognized hierarchy. Power can be abused; the exact definition of what constitutes abuse will depend on the social behaviour. If the above is systematic—repeated and deliberate—bullying seems a good name to describe it. (1994: 2)

Besides exerting power, bullying also creates vulnerability, isolation and loneliness in its victim, thus inherent in its make-up is the possibility that a child could choose to end his or her own life. The frame of bullying, therefore, further reinforces society's conception that children are in need of protection. Bullying, as Thompson and Smith (1991) have suggested, 'basically consists of the over-use of violence to establish social dominance in ordinary inter-personal

situations' (1991: 140). A way that bullies gain their power is through a created leadership position, either given by peers or taken and then begrudgingly accepted by peers. The core foundation of bullying, then, comes from the 'fairly basic aspects of the way children learn to be social' (Thompson and Smith, 1991: 140).

Research into bullying did not begin in earnest until the 1970s. It initially began in Scandinavia after a series of childhood suicides there. It was only in 1989 that the field of bullying research began in the UK, following the suicide of a young schoolgirl, who was thought to have killed herself because she was bullied at school. There are three commonly used definitions of bullying by researchers. The first, initially defined by Olweus in 1978 is, 'A student is being bullied or victimized¹⁵ when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students' (1993: 9). Likewise, in 1989, Roland suggested that, 'Bullying is longstanding violence, physical or psychological, conducted by an individual or a group and directed against an individual who is not able to defend himself in the actual situation' (1993: 16). It is Besag's (1989) definition, however, that incorporates all aspects of the literature and should be considered the definition this dissertation works from:

Bullying is a behaviour which can be defined as the repeated attack—physical, psychological, social or verbal—by those in a position of power, which is formally or situationally defined, on those who are powerless to resist, with the intention of causing distress for their own gain or gratification (1989: 4).

The conceptions held around the bully-victim relationship are reinforced in the press reporting of a child suicide. A description of the child who has taken his or her own life is steeped in society's conceptions of childhood; the child was weak and not protected from a bully,

¹⁵ A stereotype persists that victims of bullying are physically smaller and less aggressive than bullies, according to Aggleton et al (2000: 204). Victims are also seen to be socially isolated, from 'average' children due to the fact that they are tall, short, fat or thin. Foster and Thompson (1991) add that victims of bullying tend to lack self-confidence and have low self-esteem. On the other hand, bullies, Tattum (1993) suggests, are often physically strong, active and assertive: 'one could add that they are easily provoked, see insult when none is intended and actually enjoy aggression' (1993: 13).

therefore he or she chose to die. The suicide then sets the stage for being able to classify those in the bully-victim relationship as outside the acceptable discourse of what childhood is.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the key sociological and psychological perspectives around suicide and childhood and the reporting of both in the media. This needed to be done to show the current frame within which newspaper journalists describe both children and the issue of childhood. This also needed to be established early on in this dissertation for a greater understanding of why the childhood literature is so important both in reference to the original three childhood suicides I looked at, as well as the Bridgend case study. Journalists use society's conceptions of childhood to help demonize the issue of suicide. This was touched upon briefly throughout this chapter, but will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six. What I established in this chapter is that suicide is a complex issue, involving several precipitating factors that consequently will lead to the decision to take one's life. In popular discourse, bullying, as portrayed by the media is, it seems, the only reason a childhood suicide could occur. This discourse, largely established by the media, seems to also be bought into and perpetuated by many academics researching childhood.

Each section of this chapter is interconnected. Understanding the complexities of suicide can help understand why society might further take issue with a child suicide. Yet to understand a child suicide, one must also understand the societal conceptions of childhood because they also apply to young adult suicide, as will be seen in my examination of the Bridgend suicides. It was also important to look at the current research regarding media reporting of both suicide and childhood. Understanding the media, especially for the purposes of this dissertation, was key to see how British Newspapers explained the complexities of both suicide and childhood and consequently the discourses employed and the framing of stories.

The first three chapters of this dissertation set a strong theoretical foundation, based on the literature already available around suicide, childhood, and media reporting practices. Based on this, it should be clear that the research in this dissertation has been approached from a social constructionist perspective, believing that the news, childhood and discourses in the press are all socially constructed and accepted by the citizenry within society. It should also be clear that the issue of suicide is approached mostly from a sociological and psychological perspective, and that this dissertation does not share the view of other academics who research suicide; that the media is to blame for the continuation of suicides when they are reported. That said, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to uncover whether the media has an effect on increasing suicide statistics, but rather to uncover the discourses presented by the media through their reporting of suicide. Examining the current childhood literature was imperative to help unpack some of those frames and discourses, especially when analyzing the reporting of the Bridgend suicides.

A variety of methodologies will be used to uncover these discourses, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. Chapter Four will explore the methodologies of content analysis, discourse analysis and interviews to explain why these methods were best for conducting this particular research around the reporting of the Bridgend suicides.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the discourses which shape how British Newspapers report suicide. Such discourses tend to frame newspaper reporting of suicide in ways, that one could argue, encourage audiences to understand suicide in particular ways. In the case of the Bridgend suicides, as will be seen in the analysis chapters, newspapers encouraged the public to be fearful of the Internet and social networking sites and to live in a state of utter disbelief and shock, continuously asking why the suicides occurred. It is these frames that discursively determined what the country should feel about the issue of suicide. The most important thing to remember about the research undertaken in this dissertation is that it fills a gap in the media reporting of suicide. Not much has been written on media reporting of suicide, and that which has been written is lacking actual media-based theory and understanding, as they have been written in fields outside of media and journalism. It is my hope that the research in this dissertation will set the stage for further studies in this area by media academics.

While the Bridgend suicides are the central focus of this dissertation, three other recent childhood suicide cases have also been examined in order to determine how newspaper reporting of these suicides differs or is comparable to that of the Bridgend cases. To draw out discourses around childhood suicide, it is important to have a selection of actual cases at hand to help in the analysis. That said, the examples of childhood suicide are not the focal point of this research; the Bridgend cases are. The suicides in Bridgend provide a snapshot of how British Newspapers responded to the issue of suicide, taking into consideration, for example, stigmas of suicide, the issue of social class and conceptions of childhood. Journalists discursively constructed the young adults that killed themselves as children, demonized them

as 'deviants' and reduced them to a lower social class, which consequently further stigmatized not only the issue of suicide, but also that of childhood suicide. This will be explored in greater depth in Chapters Five and Six.

Before delving into the analysis, however, it is important to understand the methods employed and how the study could be replicated. This research employed both the quantitative content analysis and the qualitative method, discourse analysis. Additionally, qualitative interviews were used for illustrative purposes to provide perspective and explanation of the findings that emerged from the two methods used.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first, the quantitative content analysis will be described and the strengths and weaknesses of using such a method reviewed; also why it was important to use that method in this research. Secondly, the use of discourse analysis, mostly from Wetherell's (1987) social psychological perspective, but also drawing on relevant elements from Foucault, Wodak and Fairclough when necessary will be described. Also in this chapter will be described how discourse analysis helped in discovering critical discourses about suicide and how it also helped in the understanding of how stories are framed. In the third section of this chapter, the process of conducting interviews will be explained, as will why that qualitative method was useful as an accompaniment to discourse analysis. Lastly, the research at hand will be discussed, as will how and why the sample was chosen and the key research questions for the sample.

4.2 Choosing the Methods

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies both have refined methods with which to conduct research. The simplest of explanations comes from Asa Berger (2000); he states that qualitative research 'evaluates, uses concepts to explicate, focuses on aesthetics in texts, is theoretical, interprets, leads to an evaluation where the interpretation can be attacked,' while quantitative

methods, on the other hand, 'counts and measures, processes data collected, focuses on incidences of X in texts, is statistical, describes, explains and predicts, leads to a hypothesis or theory where the methodology can be attacked' (2000: 14). Qualitative research attempts to answer questions, getting more at the 'why' questions than a quantitative study ever could.

Stewart (2002) explains qualitative methods as varied and flexible:

... the qualitative researcher often uses a blend of methods to acquire the degree of detail required. It is also not uncommon for a qualitative researcher to begin with one data-collection technique, for example naturalistic observation, and later add or switch to another, such as interviewing, and even later add a third, perhaps the collection of artefacts. (2002: 132).

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) concede that 'qualitative techniques can increase a researcher's depth of understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, but the methods are not without weakness' (2003: 47). Sample sizes can sometimes be too small, hindering the researcher from generalizing on a larger scale. The differences between quantitative and qualitative research is that the goal of quantitative research 'is to isolate and define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken' and then once it is complete, to 'determine again with great precision the relationship between them,' while the goal of qualitative research is to 'isolate and define categories during the process of research', but also to expect 'the nature and definition of the analytic categories to change over the course of the project' (McCracken, 1988: 16). Qualitative research generally looks for patterns of interrelationships, rather than the 'delineated relationship between a limited set of them' (McCracken, 1988: 16). Yet quantitative research is not infallible either. A quantitative study will only yield numbers that provide context for one specific question a researcher asks. McCracken (1988) explains further:

The quantitative project requires investigators to construct a 'sample' of the necessary size and type to generalize to the larger population. In the qualitative case, however, the issue is not one of generalizability... it is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture constructs the world (17).

The difference, then, between the two methodologies, besides the fact that they look at different aspects of the same reality, is that one (quantitative) looks at something that is chosen to represent the larger society whereas one (qualitative) looks at the 'complicated character, organization and logic of culture' (McCracken, 1988: 17).

4.3 Counting the Content

Content analysis¹⁶ was chosen as a method for this dissertation because of the broad representations of suicide its findings could provide. Deacon et al (1999) explains: 'The purpose of content analysis is to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts, and the statistics are used to make broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation' (1999: 116). A full-blown content analysis can be quite rich in statistical findings. For the purpose of this study, a sample of newspaper articles from January 2008 until June 2008 was examined. While the content analysis yielded some important and interesting results (examined in the next chapter), it did not provide descriptive answers to the research questions. Neuendorf (2002) says that a 'content analysis can be as easy or as difficult as a researcher determines it to be but it 'needs substantial planning and understanding' (2002: 8). The content analysis undertaken in this dissertation looked at frequencies of phrases and words to determine how often the issue of suicide was represented in a positive or negative light, and cross tabulations were also conducted for a more in depth look at the articles in the study. Despite not being an in-depth statistical analysis, it is still important to have a conceptual framework of how the method works in the event that the project were to be expanded upon in greater depth in the future. Hansen et al (1998) discuss the overarching purpose of using the content analysis method, stating:

¹⁶ See Appendix III for Content Analysis Coding Sheet

The purpose of the method is to identify and count the occurrence of specified characteristics or dimensions of texts, and through this, to be able to say something about the messages, images, representations of such texts and their wider social significance (1998: 95).

Asa Berger (2000) and Stewart (2002) are both advocates of the method, stating that the advantages in conducting a content analysis range from being inexpensive, to dealing with current events, and topics of present-day interest, and using information that is easy to obtain and work with. Hansen et al (1998) argue that it is best used in conjunction with qualitative methods:

...content analysis is and should be enriched by the theoretical framework offered by other more qualitative approaches, while bringing to these a methodological rigour, prescriptions of use, and systematically rarely found in many of the more qualitative approaches (1998: 91).

Asa Berger (2000) notes the difficulties of using a content analysis: finding a representative sample, determining measurable units, obtaining reliability in coding and defining terms operationally (2000: 182). But Hansen et al (1998) have a much larger concern on a more societal level:

The problem, however, is how far quantification is taken in content analysis and to what degree the quantitative indicators that this technique offers are read or interpreted in relation to questions about the intensity of meaning in texts, the social impact of texts, or the relationship between media texts and the realities which they reflect (1998: 95).

The concern, therefore, is that content analysis puts too much emphasis on numbers, and not enough on digging beyond the statistics and looking for a more qualitative meaning. Hansen et al (1998) state, 'content analysis can help provide some indication of relative prominences and absence of key characteristics in media texts, but the inferences that can be drawn from such indications depend entirely on the context and framework of interpretation by which the texts analyzed are circumscribed' (Hansen et al, 1998: 95). It is here that Asa Berger (2000) explains that a researcher using the content analysis method needs to frame her research

within either a historical approach or a comparative approach. The historical approach is to put numbers into context, to give some perspective (2000: 176). For example, when looking at suicide in the Bridgend area between 1996 and 2006, one would be able to conclude that, while the suicides in the area were significantly above the all-Wales rates for suicide, the peak in the area was actually in 2002 (NPHS, 2008: 11). Using that data, one could then take the information compiled in this study and determine in a historical context whether or not the suicides in 2008 were actually statistically significant. Asa Berger (2000) also discussed the comparative approach. This is the approach that will be used in this dissertation.

The comparative approach is simple: compare the number of suicide stories in one newspaper against the number of suicide stories in another (2000: 177). In a full-blown content analysis, terms would need to be defined operationally. For example, in a study of suicide where binge drinking is identified as the main cause for the suicides, it would be imperative that the term 'binge drinking' be operationally defined. Questions such as the following would need to be answered in order to define the operational term for the study: What constitutes binge drinking? Does binge drinking have to occur all in one sitting? If a person goes out one night a month and gets drunk, is this binge drinking? If a person goes out four nights a week and gets drunk, is that binge drinking? What age does binge drinking start? Can an adult binge drink? (2000: 177). Additionally, each category in the study must be mutually exclusive: 'you must not define your concept in a way that it can be applied to more than one kind of behaviour' (2000: 177). For example, in the case of violence, some researchers do not think smacking or beating up a character in a children's cartoon is considered violence. Others disagree (Asa Berger, 2000: 177).

Reliability is a big issue when dealing with any quantitative method. Neuendorf (2002) mentions four important terms for content analysis: reliability, validity, accuracy and precision (112-113):

Reliability is the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials. The notion relevant to content analysis is that a measure is not valuable if it can be conducted only once or only by one particular person (2002: 112).

Additionally, inter-coder reliability is important in a full blown content analysis study. According to Messenger Davies and Mosdell (2006), inter-coder reliability is when you have 'another person code a text in the same way that you have. This will avoid accusations of subjectivity, but will also help you construct the final version so that categories are clear and mutually exclusive' (2006: 106). As the only person coding my research, I did not need to check for inter-coder reliability. If the study were to be expanded in the future, with several coders working on the project, inter-coder reliability would then be important.

Additionally, other key concepts to understand when doing a content analysis are validity and accuracy. Neuendorf (2002) defines validity as: 'the extent to which a measuring procedure represents the intended, and only the intended, concept' (2002: 112). Accuracy is the extent to which a measuring procedure is free from bias (non-random error) while precision is the fineness of distinction made between categories or levels of a measure, such as measuring a person's age in years versus decades (Neuendorf, 2002: 113). Two things to keep in mind, however, when completing a content analysis and analyzing the data are firstly that a measure cannot be valid if it is not reliable, accurate and relatively precise; and secondly that a measure might be reliable, accurate and precise and still not be valid (Neuendorf, 2002: 113). Hansen et al (1998) sum the method up quite nicely:

Content analyses count occurrences of specified dimensions and they analyze the relationships between these dimensions. Although content analysis initially

fragments texts down into constituent parts which can be counted, it re-assembles these constituent parts at the analysis and interpretation stage to examine which ones co-occur in which contexts, for what purposes, and with what implications. Moreover, and in contrast to many 'qualitative/interpretative' approaches, content analysis, because it follows clearly articulated rules and procedures, lays open to scrutiny the means by which textual meaning is dissected and examined (1998: 98).

To further the findings of a content analysis and to provide more depth to those findings, discourse analysis was conducted to help put qualitative findings into perspective.

4.4 Explaining Discourse Analysis

The study of discourse is the study of language in use, or the study of human meaning-making (Wetherell et al, 2004: 3). The most common definition of discourse analysis comes from

Wetherell et al (2004):

Discourse analysis is concerned with the meanings that events and experiences hold for social actors. It offers new methods and techniques for the social researcher interested in meaning-making. More than this, however, discourse analysis is also a theory of language and communication, a perspective on social interaction and an approach to knowledge construction across history, societies and cultures (2004: 1).

Deacon et al (1999) describe discourse as a way to conjoin language use as both a text and a practice: 'What we identify as 'discourse' and what we identify as 'social' are deeply intertwined. The discursive and the social mutually inform and mutually act upon each other, so that it is not as if discourse resides here, in our words, or in the newspapers and magazines you read, while the social is out there, in some quite separate realm of living and thinking' (1999: 147). Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) suggest that that discourse contributes to the construction of 'social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and meaning' (2002: 67). These three constructed vehicles of communication are linked together through language. Taylor (2001) argues that discourse analysts look at language in use, mostly in order to find patterns (2001: 6). It is these patterns that help construct ideologies for society, which are then perpetuated by the press. Taylor (2001) and Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) argue that language is

a vehicle for meaning, conveying meaning from one person to another, as long as elements of the language are understood:

... language is a machine that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world. This also extends to the constitution of social identities and social relations. It means that changes in discourse are a means by which the social world is changed. Struggles at the discursive level take part in changing, as well as in reproducing, the social reality (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002: 9)

To explain discourse analysis in the simplest terms, language is the vehicle by which texts are created. Those texts communicate about events and processes in the world and then they 'establish and reproduce social relations, or construct links with the situations in which they are used' (Deacon et al, 1999: 149). For the purpose of this dissertation, discourse analysis was conducted predominantly with Potter and Wetherell's (1987) model of social psychology in mind, but also with elements drawn from Foucault, Fairclough and Wodak's perspectives on critical discourse analysis. Potter and Wetherell's (1987) model is mainly focused on here, as it helps me focus my data collection on how the issue of suicide is constructed. They explain it best here:

'We are not linguists attempting to add social awareness to linguistics through the addition of the study of pragmatics. We are social psychologists expecting to gain a better understanding of social life and social interaction from our study of social texts' (1987: 7).

This dissertation, therefore, will not focus linguistically on the texts constructed by newspapers, but will look instead at the organization of newspaper articles to determine the ways in which discourses are socially constructed. Before explaining how Wetherell's model of discourse analysis was used in this dissertation, the elements of critical discourse analysis that were adhered to in this study must be explained.

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) define critical discourse analysis as a form of action which is 'socially and historically situated' in a dialectical relationship with other aspects of the social

society (2002: 62). Ultimately, the goal of critical discourse analysis is to shed light on the linguistic side of both the social and cultural happenings in a society. As the method is outwardly subjective, it is not a politically neutral method of analysis; using this method means that the researcher is committed to social change in some form or another: 'In the name of emancipation, critical discourse analytical approaches take the side of oppressed social groups' (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002: 64). In this dissertation, the oppressed social group should be considered to be those who suffer from mental illness or who have died by suicide. These people are 'othered'¹⁷ by society and by the press. This will become clear in the following analysis chapters.

The first tradition of critical discourse analysis to be examined was formulated by French genealogist Michel Foucault. Foucault's stance when it comes to critical analysis is debatable; however, his work is too important to the method and theory to simply push it to one side. The following is a short, yet concise, view of where his framework fits in the overarching theory of critical discourse analysis. Foucault bases his theory of critical analysis heavily on power and the idea of histories, but strongly disagrees with the theory of ideology. An example of this comes in his work on sexuality. Foucault argues that the discourses created around sex and sexuality came to be an exercise in power relations. He states: 'As if in order to gain mastery over it [sex] in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present' (Foucault, 1979: 5). By doing that, however, sex became a taboo topic around which several discourses were created. The creation

¹⁷ 'Othering' is defined based on Hall's (1997) social constructionist approach: '... people who are in any way significantly different from the majority 'them' rather than 'us'—are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed polarized binary extremes' (226).

of these discourses came from an institutional excitement; those with power in society wanted to talk about sex, they wanted to hear what others had to say about it, and they wanted to create a detailed discourse about sex in society. Foucault argues that this was a case of power gone astray, rather than a case of ideologues perpetuating their viewpoints (Foucault, 1979: 6).

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) articulate his stance clearly:

Foucault focuses on power. In common with discourse, power does not belong to particular agents such as individuals or the state or groups with particular interests; rather power is spread across different social practices. Power should not be understood as exclusively oppressive but as productive; power constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (2002: 13).

Power, Foucault argues, is what creates the social world in which we live: 'it is in power that our social world is produced and objects are separated from one another and thus attain their individual characteristics and relationships to one another' (Foucault, 2002: 13). The individual characteristics of which Foucault speaks is that of unequal power relations between social groups. For example, unequal power relations can be seen between social classes, between men and women, and between ethnic minorities and the majority. This explanation of power relations in terms of how it has already been mentioned in this dissertation comes down to the theory of ideology, one which Foucault adamantly argues against. Foucault disagrees with the theory of ideology because 'truth, subjects and relations between subjects are created in discourse, and there is no possibility of getting behind the discourse to discover a 'truer' truth' (Foucault, 2002: 18). What Foucault is stating is that ideology distorts the 'real' in social relationships. If we rid our society of the theory of ideology, subjects would gain access to social relationships on a new level, and would also gain access to the truth.

According to Phillips and Jorgensen (2002), Foucault 'adheres to the general social constructionist premise that knowledge is not just a reflection of reality. Truth is a discursive

construction and different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false' (2002: 13).

Discourse, Foucault argues, convincingly constructs the topic. Hall (2004) explains it best:

[Discourse] defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it (2004: 72).

Using the method of critical discourse analysis, then, involves determining where meaning comes from (Hall, 2004: 73). For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the issue of suicide and how the press explains it to its audience must be explored. This gives a better understanding of how the topic of suicide is accepted socially. Foucault, however, believes in the ideas of histories:

Discourse is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form... it is, from beginning to end, historical—a fragment of history... posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality (Foucault, 1972: 117).

Foucault's (1972) theory of histories is unsatisfactory, in part because of his insistence that histories have 'no necessary continuity between them' (1972: 118). If this is so, then many social ills, which are passed down from generation to generation, would no longer exist, or they would come and go as the generations pass. Suicide is an example of this. Suicide has been stigmatized throughout the ages, and was even against the law in England and Wales until the early 1960s. If Foucault's theory of histories was logical, then the stigma surrounding suicide should have died out sometime during the Middle Ages. Also taking issue with Foucault's theory are Phillips and Jorgensen (2002):

The majority of contemporary discourse analytical approaches follow Foucault's conception of discourses as relatively rule-bound sets of statements which

impose limits on what gives meaning. And they build on his ideas about truth being something which is, at least to a large extent, created discursively. However, they all diverge from Foucault's tendency to identify only one knowledge regime in each historical period; instead, they operate with a more conflictual picture in which different discourses exist side by side or struggle for the right to define truth. (2002: 13).

Fairclough, however, does not work within the confines of 'truth', but prefers to focus on ideologies, which are understood to be:

... significations/constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, social identities), which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination (1992: 87).

Fairclough prefers to describe power struggles in terms of Gramsci's theory of hegemony: 'discursive practice can be seen as an aspect of a hegemonic struggle that contributes to the reproduction and transformation of the order of discourse of which it is part (and consequently of the existing power relations). Discursive change takes place when discursive elements are articulated in new ways' (Fairclough, 1992: 93). Fairclough, too, subscribes to the concept of unequal power relations, as does Foucault, though Fairclough specifies in his work that such relations need to be understood in terms of social differentiation, gender struggles, generation gaps, and, most of all, class structure. He argues that language is the basis for the formation of class structure as it sets the parameters for which populations are constrained to develop (Fairclough, 1995: 219). As a result then, discourse is thusly determined by social structures. Deacon et al (1999) summarize: 'There is therefore power in discourse and power behind discourse' (1999: 153). This is an important argument to take note of, as what it implies is that the interaction between the production of discourse and consequently the process of interpretation of that discourse is all based on the beliefs, ideas, values, norms, knowledge and assumptions instilled in an audience. Where Fairclough differs from other critical discourse analysis specialists is in his interpretation of discourse and social reproduction. He claims that

discourse is created as a result of social and cultural change, while other critical discourse analysis researchers believe that discourse is a reflection of an underlying structure at work in society (Fairclough, 1995: 126).

Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk, the last two theorists to be studied in regard to critical discourse analysis, come at their theory from a place of social cognition. They state that it is not so much that 'discourse itself has meaning, but rather that meaning is something assigned to a discourse by language users' (van Dijk, 1997: 8). Here it is described further:

Discourse analysis of news is not limited to textual structures. We have seen that these structures express or signal various 'underlying' meaning, opinions and ideologies. In order to show how these underlying meanings are related to the text, we need an analysis of the cognitive, social, political and cultural context. The cognitive approach is premised on the fact that texts do not 'have' meanings, but are assigned meanings by language users, or, to be precise, by the mental processes of language users. In other words, we need to spell out the cognitive representations and strategies of journalists in the production of the news report and those of the reader when understanding and memorizing it (van Dijk, 1991: 116).

Titscher et al (2000) discuss the strategies in place to deal with a constructed reality, which are learned in the process of socialization:

... these include culture, gender, and class membership, and speech situation, together, with personality or psycho-pathogenesis as individual determinants. From this social-psychological preconditioning are derived 'frames' and 'schemata' for the structuring and perception of reality. Frames are understood as global patterns which summarize our general knowledge of some situation (Titscher et al, 2000: 155).

4.5 Framing and Discourse Analysis

In the last chapter, the theory of framing was discussed at length. It is important to refresh the idea here, but in terms of how it works alongside the methodology of discourse analysis. Johnson-Cartee (2005) states that language 'determines to a large extent what can be known and what can be achieved by a society' (2005: 3). It is the media, she states, that communicate messages to society: '...the images that we hold in modern society are primarily created

through an individual's contact with the media rather than direct experience... the mass media provide us with the mosaics from which we build our own personal reality' (2005: 4). News is socially constructed to create a societal 'reality', which occurs when journalists frame stories. 'Framing,' in turn is the 'process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy' (2005: 24). Moreover, the news frame 'is a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration' (2005: 24). Tuchman (1993) adds to this point, suggesting that 'the frame or 'condensing symbols' of news packages are a form of shorthand making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, or other symbolic device. They may resound with cultural themes...' (1993: 89). Media frames, then, influence and affect news audiences, telling them how to interpret a particular issue: 'By framing social and political issues in specific ways, news organizations declare the underlying causes and likely consequences of a problem and establish criteria for evaluating potential remedies of the problem' (Nelson et al, 1997: 567). Tannen (1993) describes frames as something larger and also as serving a wider purpose. Here she explains:

In order to function in the world, people cannot treat each new person, object, or event as unique and separate. The only way we can make sense of the world is to see the connections between things, and between present things and things we have experienced before or heard about. These vital connections are learned as we grow up and live in a given culture (Tannen, 1993: 14).

Looking at frames was at the core of my discourse analysis, as how journalists framed the Bridgend suicides told audiences how to interpret the stories. The frames used were uncovered using Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discussion on discourse analysis from a social psychological perspective. Their three ideas I ascribed to here, were categories, social representation and interpretative repertoires.

Categories

Potter (1996) defines categorization:

We regard an attitude as the categorization of a stimulus object along an evaluative dimension based upon, or generated from, three general classes of information: 1.) cognitive information, 2.) affective/emotional information and/or 3.) information concerning past behaviours or behavioural intentions (124).

To explain this simply, people populate their lives with others, or stimuli, from all walks of life; men, women, doctors, friends, immigrants, political extremists, adolescents etc.: 'People are taken to be members of relatively enduring social categories, and in virtue of their category membership inferences are made from the attributes of individuals to the attributes of the rest of the category' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 116). The research for this dissertation is based firmly on the idea of categories because of how it can help explain discursive constructions about the issue of suicide. Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain:

One of the benefits of the discourse approach to categorization is that it has directed attention away from the cognitive processes assumed to be operating under people's skulls and on towards the detail of how categories are actually used. The study of categories unfolds into the general study of the organization of discourse and its consequences. It is not surprising that categories are so important, because they are the nouns from which we construct versions of the collectivities in which we live. In a sense, they are the building blocks of our many versions of the social world; however, once we look closely at the blocks, we see that they themselves are not solid and defined, but have to be moulded in discourse for use in different accounts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 137).

One of the important aspects of using discourse analysis as a method of analysis is that it allows us to look at the inequality in news language, and how that helps create discriminating discourses around suicide (Matheson, 2005; Fowler, 1998). The media do this through categorization and labelling. Category labels, Fowler states, 'tell us a good deal about the structure of the ideological world represented by a newspaper' (1998: 93). He argues that the newspapers tell us, based on the stories they run and do not run, what is important. While

Fowler (1998) does not believe this is done intentionally on the part of the newspapers, he does believe that when a journalist draws on a discourse which is routinely used within the media, he or she also plays a part in the perpetuation of the media system (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002; Fowler, 1998). For the purpose of this dissertation, two of the categories Potter and Wetherell (1987) laid out were followed: categories and prototypes, and categorization and particularization.

Prototypes are believed to be a typical example of a category. For example, when looking at first year students who attend university, a prototype would be a person aged 17-18 years old, from a middle-class family. These students would have had to pass A-Level exams and also have a desire to attain a higher degree (i.e. at university). Cantor and Mischel (1979) explain further: 'Each person carries around a large set of preformed, mentally encoded prototypes; if the potential member shares enough features with one of these, it will be included in the category' (203). However, Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out that, 'social categories are not homogeneous entities where each member shares a specified set of features and no others; rather they are 'fuzzy sets' in which members have many things in common, but also many differences' (119).

In terms of categorization and particularization, Billig (1985) states that: 'people are constantly prejudiced against groups whose members they have never met and hence we ignore the social convention component in prejudice' (79). Particularization, then, is the opposite of categorizing people. Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that particularization, or 'splitting categories in parts, or distinguishing specific instances from categories is necessary for dealing with the world' (121). What particularization aims to do, then, is place unfamiliar or uneasy topics into 'safe and familiar categories', as a way to order a 'messy stimulus world' (Billig, 1985: 87).

Both categories have a strong presence in the discourse analysis conducted here on the Bridgend suicides. As mentioned several times in this thesis already, the goal of this dissertation is to uncover whether and how the issue of suicide was socially constructed and represented to the British people during the spate of suicides in the borough of Bridgend.

Social Representations

Social representations of an issue provide a way for people to evaluate and understand the society in which they live: 'Social representations are also assumed to underpin attributions or the causal explanations people give for events (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 140). This can be seen in the analysis here of the Bridgend suicides in terms of the reasons given for why the suicides occurred. Moscovici (1985) explains the three processes socially needed to understand social representations in society. There are quoted here at length for his in-depth explanations:

First, social representations are intrinsically linked to communication processes, and in particular to people's unstructured everyday talk; their gossip, chat, pub arguments and family discussions. Second, they are social because they provide an agreed code for communications. That is, to the extent that people share representations, they will be able to understand what other people are talking about and will have fluid and intelligible conversations. The agreed representations provide a stable, external version of the world which can form a topic for conversation. The third sense in which representations are social is their provision of a theoretically coherent way of distinguishing between social groups. Because social representations supply a conventional code for communications, and because they are the central dynamic for understanding, all who share a representation will agree in their understanding and evaluation of an aspect of the world. The representation will thus be a crucial unifying and homogenizing force (1985: 92-93).

Social representations are constructed then, and when people make sense of their world, 'that world will be constructed by, and in terms of, social representations' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 141). They go on to explain how odd, or out-of-the-norm, topics are dealt with using 'anchoring' and 'objectification'. Both of these concepts were used when conducting the discourse analysis for this dissertation as they work well with categorization.

'In the first stage—anchoring—the novel object is assigned to one of the categories of thought, or elements, in an existing representation (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 141). This process, as the researchers point out, is quite similar to assigning prototype stimuli to categories: 'The novel case is related to typical or paradigm cases, and this allows the unfamiliar to be understood in terms of the more familiar' (1987: 141). An example of this that will be seen in the analysis chapters here is when journalists assigned particular reasons for why the suicides in Bridgend occurred.

In terms of 'objectification,' the out-of-the-norm issue is transformed into a 'concrete, pictorial element of the representation to which it is anchored, and this new version of the representation is diffused in the course of conversation throughout the social group' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 142). Thus, what was considered disrupting has now become part of the reality. This, too, was evident when examining the issue of suicide in the borough of Bridgend.

Coyle and MacWhannell (2002) explored the meaning of suicide as represented in news articles in two broadsheet newspapers and two tabloids in Scotland. Their aim was to 'provide insights into how dominant values and discourses on death and suicide are mediated and represented' (2002: 692). Their three research questions were:

1. How do the print media construct suicide?
2. How do newspaper reports shape and structure our perception of 'reality'?
3. What implications does this have for our understanding of suicide and our response to it, at an individual and societal level?

The qualitative findings of 191 suicide articles showed that the articles were reported as a 'why dunnit?' that needed to be unravelled (2002: 705). Using the basic tenets of discourse analysis, the researchers had read and reread each story, creating categories, themes and issues, and, once the categories were specific enough, began analysis. They ultimately found 'that issues of

attribution, blame, responsibility and moral identity may be important to our understanding of how suicide is represented in newspapers' (Coyle and MacWhannell, 2002: 694).

Interpretative Repertoires

The last element examined in terms of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) method of discourse analysis was that of interpretative repertoires, which are defined as:

... recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena (1987: 149).

This can most commonly be seen when a repertoire is organized around 'specific metaphors and figures of speech' (1987: 149). In the case of this research, interpretative repertoires can be seen in the way particular phrases like 'commit suicide,' and 'suicide cult' were used in the news stories. This will be examined further in Chapter Five.

The discussion around discourse analysis in this chapter centred on two schools of thought: critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis from a social psychological perspective. While the discourse analysis used in this dissertation focused mostly on the latter – categorization, social representations and interpretative repertoires – elements were borrowed from the critical discourse analysts discussed here already. From Foucault, the concept of 'rule-in' and 'rule-out' – noting the discourse in the Bridgend suicides about what was mentioned and discussed versus what was not – was used in addition to Fairclough's theory that discourse is determined by socially-created structures. What is important to keep in mind with discourse analysis is that its validity is not absolute. It is always open to further interpretation, analysis and findings – therefore the findings are changeable – but it is those factors that make discourse analysis such an important method of analysis. This dissertation takes the stance that ideologies are at play when creating the news; those ideologies are still at play when analyzing the news, thus by choosing to use discourse analysis, a changeable method, as a tool to analyze texts, this

research opens up future possible interpretations by other researchers who might embark on replicating this study. Consequently, this project can serve as a foundational building block for other researchers to come and add their thoughts about media reporting of suicide.

4.6 The Art of the Interview

As outlined already in this chapter, the two main methods for my research were content analysis and discourse analysis. As a subsidiary to these methods, to help explain my findings from the primary methods, interviews were conducted with journalists, those in the upper echelons of the journalism field, PR representatives and those who worked in the non-profit field (i.e. charities).

At the foundation of this dissertation is the core belief that society, as it is represented in the press, is not a mere reflection of some pre-existing reality, but is instead socially constructed. As such, childhood and youth as we understand them are also socially constructed, as are beliefs about suicide—helped along by the press, which, in its own right, is an institution that is socially constructed as well. Journalists socially construct news stories that empower certain discourses within the society. It is because of this social constructionist view that the method of active interviews to further unpack and help understand my findings from a content analysis and discourse analysis was chosen. Charmaz (2001) explains the purpose of the interview as a way to explore ‘an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight’ (2001: 676). According to Asa Berger (2000), there are four main categories of interview— which in its loosest definition means a ‘conversation between a researcher—someone who wishes to gain information—and an informant—someone who presumably has information of interest on the subject—there is the informal interview, unstructured interview, semistructured interview and the structured interview (2000: 112). It is the semistructured and structured interviews that will be discussed in this section.

Traditionally, the structured long interview has been at the core of the qualitative art of interviewing: 'The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience' (McCracken, 1988: 9). The purpose of any interview, according to Asa Berger, is to observe what they (the informant) does, ask them about what they are doing, and analyze the texts and artifacts produced by them (2000: 112). In the semistructured interview, the researcher 'abandons concerns with standardization and control, and seeks to promote an active, open-ended dialogue' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 65). While control is loosely held, it is not lost; an interviewer still guides the interview with a set of questions – allowing tangents, but always with a set course for the conversation (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). In the structured interview, however, McCracken (1988) argues that the imperative is to impose order and structure, by creating specific interview questions from which no deviation occurs. He also suggests the use of questionnaires as a way to 'ensure that the investigator covers all the terrain in the same order for each respondent' and to maintain 'the care and scheduling of the prompts necessary to manufacture distance (1988: 24). His reasoning for this is based on his firmly-held belief of objectivity, which has been dissuaded in the last chapter: 'Active listening strategies must not be used by the qualitative researcher; they are obtrusive in precisely the manner that this research wishes to avoid' (McCracken, 1988: 21). Semi-structured interviewing tends to be more constructionist than positivist: 'Interview participants are more likely to be viewed as meaning-makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers (Warren, 2002: 83). Indeed, Warren's (2002) argument extends to even the researcher:

Each researcher implicitly draws upon his or her commonsense cultural knowledge—or 'stock of knowledge'... and creates or constructs the truth or

interpretation that will work for all practical (intellectual) purposes (Johnson, 2002: 106)

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) agree, suggesting that:

...meaning is socially constituted; all knowledge is created from the action taken to obtain it... treating interviewing as a social encounter leads us rather quickly to the possibility that the interview is not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge itself (1995: 3).

McCracken (1988), on the other hand, argues that interviews should be a presented manipulation, striking a balance between formality and informality, but ultimately manipulating the informant to believe that they hold the power in the interviewer-interviewee relationship (1988: 26). The fundamental problem with the structured long interview, which McCracken (1988) defends so vehemently, is that it does not take into consideration the natural bias of socially constructed, ideologically based beliefs that both the interviewer and the interviewee bring to the interview setting.

In conducting the active interview, however, the foundation of the method is rooted in the principle that both parties are creating meaning. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) explain that meaning is not found through apt questioning or transported through the interviewee's responses; rather, it is 'actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter' (1995: 4). By using the active interview, and by knowing ahead of time that meaning is being created, the researcher can not only learn how the meaning is produced (in newspapers), but also how the interviewee explains those meanings and creates new meaning in the interview context:

Understanding how the meaning-making process unfolds in the interview is as critical as apprehending what is substantively asked and conveyed. The hows, of course, refer to the interactional, narrative procedures of knowledge production, not merely to interview techniques. The whats pertain to the issues guiding the interview, the content of questions, and the substantive information communicated by the respondent (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 4).

In choosing to conduct an active interview, one must understand that in going into the interview, I was also a participant. I went into my interviews with a history. I had been a practicing print journalist for nearly seven years and I had also been personally affected by suicide: 'The interviewer, like the respondent, participates in the interview from historically grounded biographical as well as disciplinary perspectives. Biographical perspectives may frame entire analyses or affect the selection of illustrative quotes (Warren, 2002: 97). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) agree: 'In part, it is a matter of controlling oneself as an interviewer so that one does not interfere with what the passive subject is only too willing to put forth. The interviewer must shake off self-consciousness, suppress personal opinion, and avoid stereotyping the respondent (1995: 11). It is worth mentioning briefly here that all interviews conducted for this study were recorded phone interviews. Gaining access to journalists is difficult at the best of times, and having been a journalist myself, I knew it would be easier to get someone to talk to me on the phone for 30 minutes, rather than sit in an office with them face-to-face. It could be argued that I tainted the method and lost valuable information by not seeing their body language and how they reacted to the questions. My counter-argument is that journalists work in a demanding, deadline-driven environment. To better understand the workings of a journalist, and how they cover suicide stories, I decided that it would be best to employ my honed journalistic-interviewing skills, from seven years of my own experience, to get at the questions I needed to ask within the time allotted. Working with journalists in a style they understand is key to getting the access that we researchers desire.

A study compiled by the Media Wise Trust (2007) to see how journalists cover suicide and how they could make that coverage more sensitive was ultimately a study in how not to conduct research with journalists. Requests for interviews were sent to 45 journalists and editors, with fifteen agreeing to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted by a freelance

journalist, but they seemed weak and incomplete. The report stated that the information should be regarded as 'indicative rather than representative of journalists generally' (2007: 11). With a captive audience, it might have been useful if the interviewer had spent some more time, and delved further into the issue of using the term 'committed suicide', problems that journalists come up against when reporting suicide, and possibly how much journalists actually understand about the concept of suicide itself. The study reported that those who agreed to interviews mostly had reported on suicide themselves:

... it is clear that the subject is more likely to interest those who either have had experience of covering suicide stories and thus have been confronted with ethical or emotional dilemmas, or those who have had contact with people who have taken their own lives or displayed suicidal behaviour (2007: 10).

I conducted twelve interviews for this dissertation, transcripts of which can be found on the accompanying CD-ROM (Appendix V). I took notes during the interviews, and transcribed each recorded interview following the discussion. All who participated in the interviews gave their permission for their names and transcripts to be used freely for the purpose of this research.

A good example of a study conducted using content analysis and interviews was Jamieson et al (2003). The purpose of the study was to determine if responsible reporting of suicide was taking place in print journalism. Content-wise, the study determined that 75% of suicide stories appeared in the first nine pages of the American newspapers studied in 1999. The word suicide was either used, or implied 50% of the time in headlines. Approximately 60% of the stories suggested a cause as to why the suicide occurred. When it came to interviews, Jamieson et al (2003) states that: 'Our interviews with journalists were designed to determine (a) the criteria they use to evaluate the newsworthiness of a suicide story, (b) the elements they consider important in crafting a compelling narrative and (c) their knowledge of the potential

for suicide contagion resulting from their stories' (2003: 1647). The questions, some of which I asked in my own interviews (see Appendix IV) are as follows:

1. What do you think makes any one suicide more newsworthy than another?
2. Other than the rules governing all reporting, are there any specific rules of reporting that you follow when doing a story about suicide?
3. What are these rules and can you recall any debates in the newsroom about applying these rules?
4. Have you ever heard of contagion effects of news reporting about suicide? If yes, how does this influence your reporting of suicide?

Some startling results emerged from Jamieson et al's (2003) interviews. The researchers determined that there is a larger need to inform reporters 'of the current scientific consensus that suicide contagion can result from news reporting' (1648). As previously stated in this dissertation, I disagree with the scientific findings of these contagion studies, as they cannot be replicated on an ongoing basis. Additionally, Jamieson et al (2003) found that 'reporters felt that an act of suicide is not in and of itself newsworthy' and that 'reporters expressed a sense of unease about covering acts of suicide at all. Words such as personal and private recurred in statements expressing reluctance to cover the act' (2003: 1649). Ultimately, Jamieson et al (2003) conclude:

We learned from our interviews with reporters that they are more likely to cover a suicide story if it can be drawn into a compelling narrative. Important elements in this consideration include access to persons who can serve as sources of information about the victim, photographs of the victim or place of death, and salient trends or storylines that increase the relevance of the death to the news audience (1653).

This, too, was a finding in my own interviews, which will be discussed at length in Chapters Five and Six. By engaging primarily with content analysis and discourse analysis and, secondarily, interviews with journalists, I have been able to draw both generalised and in-depth conclusions from my research. The next and final section of this chapter will discuss how the

research into the Bridgend suicides was conducted and restate again the research questions for this study.

4.7 The Research

As stated earlier in this dissertation, by the time the suicides in the borough of Bridgend hit the headlines in January, 2008, I had already completed a year and a half of my dissertation. I originally started out researching childhood suicide, but when the stories started appearing from Bridgend, it was too geographically close and too present in my everyday research to ignore. The decision was made to envelop it into this dissertation and see if I could use such a sample to draw on the differences between the reporting of an 'adult' suicide versus a 'child' suicide, as well as to determine if the frames of childhood extended beyond actual childhood and if they could tell us anything about the Bridgend suicides. As explained in Chapter One, I then decided to use what I had learned about the three childhood cases as background context for what I could find out in the Bridgend reporting.

The focus of this dissertation was to discover how British Newspapers framed suicide on their news pages during the Bridgend County suicides amongst fifteen to 29 year olds in South Wales between January 1st, 2008 and June 30th, 2008. This particular sample was chosen as it gave some breadth to a debatable 'cluster' of suicides across the range of news coverage, and because of the natural endpoint it provided, as coverage naturally started to decline following its climax in the middle of February, 2008, with smaller highpoints of coverage in March and April. I chose to look specifically at newspaper coverage because this was where most of the coverage was focused. While there was local radio and local television coverage, radio coverage tended to be short news bulletins, or the odd discussion on BBC local stations talking about media influence on suicide, while television coverage was also limited. The broadcast coverage, as a whole, tended to be brief and lacked editorial critique or discussion. This quite possibly

could be due to OFCOM¹⁸ regulations on how broadcasters can report and discuss suicide on the airwaves. It was a natural choice then to study newspaper coverage as it was British newspapers that were blamed for sensationalizing the story; it was newspaper headlines that were blamed for continuation of the suicides in the area, and it was newspapers that predominantly told and sold the story to the British audience.

Content Analysis

A sample of newspapers were looked at for the content analysis in this dissertation—five national newspapers (including their Sunday counterparts) and two regionals (based in South Wales). The content analysis in this dissertation cannot be considered representative of the entire British Press, but it does give a fair overview of how the Bridgend suicides were typically portrayed across a fairly wide sample of newspapers.

As social class was one of the key discourses mentioned in the Bridgend case study, it was imperative to choose newspapers that targeted specific classes of people in Britain, for an inclusive look at how suicide is conveyed to both the lower and middle classes. As a result, from politically conservative or right wing perspectives, newspaper portrayal was examined in *The Times/The Times on Sunday* and *The Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday*, while on the political left, I looked at *The Guardian/The Observer* and *The Daily Mirror/The Sunday Mirror*. Additionally, *The Sun* was examined for a more middle of the road representation. It should be mentioned here, however, that *The Sun*, for the first time since 1997, is now backing the Conservative Party in the run up to the National elections in 2010. (It is debatable whether this shift will return the newspaper to its more conservative ideologies of the past.) The regional newspapers looked at were the *South Wales Echo* and the *Western Mail*. These newspapers were chosen based on their

¹⁸ OFCOM is the British communications regulator, responsible for both television and radio, as well as the airwaves over which wireless communications operate.

availability to the majority of people living in South Wales, but also because those newspapers were covering the Bridgend suicides long before the London-based newspapers started to cover the story. When the national press took up the story, it seemed that the regional newspapers, those that were located at the heart of the community affected, changed their coverage to compete with them.

I began collecting articles in January 2008, and continued until June 30th, 2008. Initially, I used the database *Nexis* to compile the sample, but as I had an actual selection of newspapers at hand, I began to notice that *Nexis* was not reliably retrieving all the articles I already had in my possession. David Deacon (2007) addressed this same issue in his article on the reliability of digital archives, looking specifically at *Nexis*. In his research he discussed 'false negatives', when search terms are too precise and thus exclude 'significant amounts of relevant coverage' (2007: 8). He stated:

'Put simply, key word searching is best suited for identifying tangible 'things' (i.e. people, places, events and policies) rather than 'themes' (i.e. more abstract, subtler and multifaceted concepts). Because of this, there are certain topics that may be readily analysed via manual content searches, but which can never be captured through exclusive dependence on key words (2007: 8).

Similarly concerned, I decided to cross reference my articles regarding the Bridgend suicides with the articles that appeared in the database *News UK*. As final insurance, when conducting the research, I used hard copies of the newspapers to make sure I had a complete archive with which to work.

It became clear early on in the process of data collection that I needed to decide whether I wanted to include online news articles in the chosen newspaper sample or not. I chose to specifically focus on the hard copies of newspapers because of the multiple issues with online data gathering, including verification and methodological, not to mention the audience reception problems.

I concluded early on in the process that I could not verify the different versions of stories available on each news site, nor could I determine how they were actually presented on newspaper pages. Another matter of concern was the fact that several of the articles online were merely presented as news bulletins or news flashes as another death occurred and lasted online for a couple of hours, and in most cases, for less than a day. The biggest problems with online data gathering were time and resources. To pinpoint each particular item I would have needed to refresh online news pages for all 12 newspapers in my sample several times a minute; this was not possible. The second issue that arose were with methodological considerations. Conducting an online content analysis is quite difficult as the method has not been adapted nor enhanced to handle such a task. Unfortunately, due to time restrictions on my own research, it was not conceivable for me to create my own methodology that would allow me to incorporate online articles into my sample. Additionally, had I attempted this method, I would have been faced with trying to identify what a story actually consists of: is it merely the text and the pictures that accompanied it, or would it also include links to other websites, other pages, related stories, helpline information etc.? Based on these potential and significant issues with the data collection of online news stories, I decided against incorporating the online news stories around the Bridgend suicides in my official sample. The third and final issue that I identified with online data gathering was related to audience reception. Much of the current literature around readership numbers states that fewer people in the 18-35 year-old age bracket are reading newspapers; instead they get their news from online web portals such as Google, Yahoo, and MSN (McNair, 2009). Until journalism studies scholars can have a firmer understanding of where and how people are now consuming their news, I felt it appropriate to stick with a traditional medium in which to conduct my research, as newspapers were, during the reporting of the suicides, the key media commentators on what was happening in the

region. Because of these decisions, the sample was reduced from more than 1,000 articles to 322. It is my hope to return to the online sample at some point in the future, when the method is more concretely developed as I think looking at the online coverage of the Bridgend suicides would add another element to the discussion of how the media report suicide. In conducting this content analysis, I piloted the study three times to capture the key discourses used and the predominant causation put forth, as well as adding a section on visuals used, as it is important not to overlook such an important part of a news package. The pilot studies were carried out in the summer of 2008, with the content analysis being completed between September 2008 and March 2009.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when using content analysis, I looked at the frequencies in the sample. For example, how frequently words and phrases such as 'suicide', 'suicide pact', 'suicide club', 'suicide cluster', 'hanged', 'hanging', 'committed suicide', 'killed himself/herself', 'died by suicide', 'relationship breakup', 'unemployment', 'drinking', 'alcohol', and 'drugs' to name a few, were used in news stories. This provided a quantitative statistical framework on which my discourse analysis could then build.

Discourse Analysis

When it came to the analysis of the Bridgend suicides, using discourse analysis, I chose to follow four deaths that spanned the coverage—at the beginning, at the climax and near the end. This showed the range of discourses that continued throughout the six-month sample period and also how the coverage did not change significantly between February 2008 and June 2008. This study was carried out using twelve newspaper articles of a possible 46 relating to these four chosen suicides.

The first was Angie Fuller, who died in February, 2008. Fuller was represented as an ethnic 'other' in the coverage. The second and third deaths chosen were two cousins, Nathaniel

Pritchard and Kelly Stephenson, who died within hours of each other, also in February 2008. Pritchard was fifteen when he died, and his death was represented as a result of teenage angst due to a relationship breakdown; while Stephenson was openly gay and died as a result of hearing of her cousin's death, according to the newspapers. The last death examined was that of Sean Rees. Sean died in April 2008. He was a Sainsbury's shop worker, a 'working-class lad'. The coverage surrounding these deaths was chosen for study because it is ideologically rich, providing an insight into how British Newspapers stigmatized suicide for its public and also for how the stories were framed in terms of conceptions of childhood.

As I have extensively reviewed ideologies in the previous chapters, it was important to determine what common ideologies are encouraged by newspapers to make sense of suicide. This was done by analyzing news copy, headlines and pictures when available (though not in great depth, as the focus of this dissertation was not visual representation). The ultimate focus of the discourse analysis was to arrive at a deeper understanding of how suicide is discursively constructed in the press.

In addition to using Bridgend as a case study, three childhood suicides that received extensive coverage by the British press, on par with that of Bridgend, were also examined. It was my hope that, by using these three childhood suicides, the different techniques journalists use when covering a child suicide versus an 'adult' suicide could be determined, if in fact, there actually was a difference. The three childhood case studies were: Laura Rhodes, thirteen, of Neath, Wales who died September 4th, 2004; Jonathan Reynolds, fifteen of Bridgend, Wales who died January 25th, 2006; and Ben Vodden, eleven, of West Sussex, England who died December 12th, 2006. These three cases were chosen for very specific, yet different, reasons. In a preliminary scan of childhood suicide cases from January 2004 until January 2008, it appeared that these cases shared certain elements— as will be discussed in much greater detail in the

following analysis chapters of this dissertation—with the collective group of 24 suicides in Bridgend County in 2008. The press used Laura Rhodes' death to discuss the fears surrounding the Internet and suicide. In the case of Ben Vodden, the fact that he hanged himself caused great debate on news pages around the country. Jonathan Reynolds' death, however, fell outside this common ground. The only thing his death had in common with the 'Bridgend spate' is the fact that he came from Bridgend; yet his death was not counted amongst those who were listed in the 'Bridgend death list' that frequented *The Times'* news stories. While the three have certain commonalities with the Bridgend County suicides, all three have one discourse in common with each other: bullying. As stated in Chapter Three, the press has socially constructed the discourse of bullying to make the issue of child suicide easier to cope with. When it came to the Bridgend suicides, however, the bullying discourse was not a key finding. What was interesting, however, was that the young adults in Bridgend were categorized as 'deviants' and also discursively described in terms of childhood. These findings will be explored in greater depth in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation.

Interviews

The subsidiary method used in this dissertation, to complement the primary methods of content analysis and discourse analysis, was that of the interview. The purpose of conducting interviews was to determine why the suicides were covered in the way they were. Twelve people were interviewed; journalists, editors, PR spokespeople and representatives from non-profit organizations—all key stakeholders in the Bridgend suicides. While twelve interviews might not normally be considered enough to warrant a representative response in a particular research study, in this case, I feel it was appropriate and imposed by necessity. I had difficulty getting journalists to speak to me, based on the media being blamed for the Bridgend suicides—many feared that I would take their quotes out of context and use their information to further

the argument that the British Press was indeed responsible for the continuation of suicidal deaths. The responses I did get, I feel, added an extra element to the project that might not have been present had I made the decision to not interview them, or not use their responses. The purpose of this study was to shed some light on how suicide is reported in British newspapers. Interviewing those who worked in the media field, despite the low number, was important to have in this study, because of the rich information the interviewees provided about how they perceived media reporting of suicide in the UK, as well as media reporting of the Bridgend suicides. Those who did agree to be interviewed shared their experiences of the suicides and its reporting and provided some critical insights that helped to enhance the findings yielded in my content analysis and discourse analysis.

A final note on my methodological considerations and decisions must include why I decided against conducting an audience/reception study. The nature of suicide is that it is a sensitive and difficult topic to address, not only for those who have been bereaved by suicide, but also for those who have participated in the counselling and guiding of those who have been bereaved. I made a conscious decision not to interview those who were affected by the suicides in the Bridgend area and also not to interview those who lived in the community. My reasons were quite simple, first, I did not wish to impart any further grief, angst or hurt on the community and those that had been bereaved, but second, and probably more important, I could not guarantee with one hundred percent certainty that I would not have a negative impact with my questions and thusly serve as the trigger for another potential suicide, or mental illness episode. Additionally, as I have stated since the beginning of this dissertation, the purpose of this study was to understand how British newspapers report suicide, using the Bridgend suicides as a main case study. I do not think incorporating an audience study would have aided in my analysis, nor do I think leaving it out has made my findings any less rich. I

chose the methods explained in this chapter because of the ways in which they could best answer my research questions:

1. How do British Newspapers report suicide?
2. How do journalists balance their social responsibility to report suicide so as to ensure an informed citizenry with their role of maintaining stability in society?

4.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described in extensive detail the methods chosen in this dissertation: content analysis, discourse analysis and interviews. These methods were chosen based on how well they complemented each other, and how each would enhance the method employed before it. Content analysis provided a tool to garner some statistical data, which could help position the data in terms of numbers, before moving on to a more textual based analysis. The discourse analysis took the numbers from the content analysis and used them as a basis to dig deeper into the text and see if the numbers matched up with what was written and articulated to readers. The discourse analysis method also allowed for deeper meanings of discourses to be uncovered and also flagged up issues that journalists have when reporting suicide. By conducting interviews with journalists, both the content analysis and the discourse analysis raised serious issues in the reporting of suicide, which could then be questioned and answered with the help of those who were writing or who commented on the stories. This chapter also set about introducing the sample used in the study, and outlined the research questions put forth at the beginning of this research.

The next two chapters of this dissertation will now produce the findings of my research. Chapter Five will focus mainly on the results from my content analysis, which will be explained further, when necessary, with interview data. Chapter Six, will focus mainly on the results yielded from my discourse analysis, again explained and augmented by information garnered

from my interviews. Chapter Seven, will conclude this dissertation by summing up the key points raised and point towards future research that still needs to be conducted in this area.

Chapter Five: Stigmatization of Suicide

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus mainly on content analysis findings, using interview data and discourse analysis data to strengthen quantitative findings around the three distinct sections discussed: production, discursive elements and framing. The section on production will discuss and define how journalists reported the Bridgend story in terms of placement of stories on news pages, editorial decisions and sensationalization of the topic. Byline usage, the role of press agency copy in the Bridgend reporting and sourcing will also be examined. The results will illustrate and provide a general overview for how British Newspapers reported suicide.

The second section of this chapter on discursive elements of news stories will show particular features in the production of texts (news reports), while also examining discursive features of those same texts in the forms of language and images. Here the analysis is broken down into key words and phrases which have been analyzed, in the first instance for the frequency of their occurrence. In doing so, an impression of how responsible or irresponsible journalists were at creating stigma, or not, around the issue of suicide can be obtained. Defining the issue of responsibility is a complicated one in the field of journalism, as so often it gets mixed up with the issue of accountability (Hodges, 1986: 14). Simply put, 'the issue of responsibility is a practical one, the answer to which can come from an examination of the society's needs to know and the press' abilities to inform' (1986: 14). Responsible journalism is built upon the assumption that journalists understand that their actions affect those around them:

The roots of responsibility per se lie in the fact that we are both individual and social beings whose decisions and actions inevitably affect others. The very fact that we have the ability or power to affect each other deeply, either for good or for ill, requires that we act responsibly toward each other if society is to endure (Hodges, 1986: 16).

With this idea in mind, I point out in this section the responsibilities newspapers have in reporting suicide. Chapter Two, discussed in detail Zelizer's (2004) argument about the press' role as a mirror of society, meaning it reflects what is already believed (54). Furthering that discussion, Hodges (1986) points out three other press functions. The press, he argues, has a responsibility to fulfil a political role, informing the citizenry of what its government and other centres of power are doing. The second is an educational function, which includes, 'reporting on and promoting discussion of ideas, opinions and truths toward the end of social refinement of those ideas, opinions and truths' (1986: 21). The third press function is that of a societal 'bulletin board', where all the information about the society is reported. I bring these up here as an explanation for what responsible journalism looks like. These roles will be further highlighted throughout this chapter and Chapter Six in relation to press reporting around the issue of suicide. By analyzing the language used in describing the act of suicide, it can be demonstrated how newspapers discursively constructed the story, and thus what readers are directed to think about this complicated issue.

The last section of this chapter will examine closely the dominant frames that emerged from the content analysis, especially around causation, method, location, the Internet and broader social questions as to why suicide is thought to occur. These frames illustrate some of the ways in which journalists engage in the reporting of suicide and alerting citizens to its potential social ramifications.

5.2 Production

Reviewing the Bridgend suicide newspaper coverage at this point in the chapter is helpful in supporting an understanding of the key events that took place, and is useful to examine before I present the analysis of the content analysis data. Prior to January 17th, 2008, no suicide-related

stories dealing with Bridgend, or those that came to be represented as part of the story, ran in Welsh or national newspapers in the previous year. The first hint of a possible situation around suicide occurred January 17th, 2008 in the *South Wales Echo*. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, extensive discussion of the Werther Effect, or the 'copycat suicide' theory, was provided. To briefly summarize, this theory states that the more the media report suicide, the greater the likelihood that incidences of suicide will increase. Traditionally, the Werther Effect, when it has been successfully replicated (meaning the same results can be found by other researchers) measures suicide as a year-on-year phenomenon. In the case of Bridgend, this was not the case, especially as there was no coverage of suicide in the Bridgend region in 2007, yet the theory was used time and again in newspaper coverage to help explain why the suicides in Bridgend were occurring. With regard to this point, Stephen Pritchard, Readers Editor at *The Observer* noted in a telephone interview I conducted with him that:

I think it's very difficult, incredibly difficult, to point the finger and say that young folk were reading the papers every day and were thinking, 'well maybe I should do that'. I think that's really tricky, a tricky, tricky area. ... The copycat element, seemed at the time to be almost irrefutable, it seemed, what else, how else could you explain what was going on? Now, some months after the event, I'm not sure that that's absolutely the case. I really don't know. There are lots of sources, lots of different factors, certainly in each individual death, that it's probably wrong to draw that conclusion.

As Pritchard notes, however, journalists needed something to help explain why the suicides were happening, thus they turned to the accepted academic discourse and research on media reporting of suicide to provide those answers.

Following the January 17th, 2008 article in the *South Wales Echo*, the Bridgend story became national news on January 23rd, nearly a full week after the original story ran. One might assume that the national newspapers were slow to pick up on a potential suicide 'cluster', but, in fact, it appears that it was a news release from the Wales News Service on January 22nd that

kicked the coverage off and deemed that the suicides were part of a more sinister ploy: 'A teenage suicide cult is sweeping through a town with seven young people killing themselves in copycat deaths', the lead of that release read (Appendix I). Paul Horton, the News Editor and Director for Wales News Services Ltd. said that he was tipped off to the story by a senior member of the emergency services brigade in the Bridgend area, who was concerned at what he thought was an increase in the number of suicide-related calls he was getting. In an interview with Horton, I enquired as to whether, in retrospect, he would have changed the words that he used to describe events in Bridgend, and which seemed to provide the impetus for the ensuing spike in media coverage, to which he responded:

I read our copy again today, and looked at the words 'cult' and 'craze'. Now we got those words, a senior member of the emergency services said it was a cult, or something sinister was going on down there, and a parent said the word craze, it was like a craze, suicide had become a craze of some sort. There was a time a few months ago when I said that we wished we didn't use those words, but today I remembered the emotion. No, I wouldn't change it. It made people sit up and take notice.

Horton illustrates here the role that journalists played in reporting the Bridgend suicides. He also highlights the continuing construction of young people being described in childlike ways; that they are vulnerable and still in need of adult or parental protection. This also reinforces what I argued in Chapter Three about 'adultist' power that adults are in charge of setting the confines of the constructed life stage of childhood. In fact, his discussion of coverage points out how young adult suicide is being articulated as an extension of childhood. The decision to report the story came, as he points out, because there was 'something' going on that needed to be flagged to the general public. He defends his agency's usage of sensational words such as 'cult' or 'craze', highlighting the argument I make that, by using charged language, despite fulfilling its social role of reporting suicide, the news agency, while attempting to maintain the

status quo, in actuality ended up 'othering' the act of suicide and those who took their own lives in the area.

Following Horton's press release, newspapers in my sample ran 57 stories between January 23rd and January 28th, 2008. The coverage did not stop there. Another key event, the publication of a press release by the suicide prevention organization PAPYRUS (Appendix II), demanding that journalists stop reporting the suicides, only fuelled the fire. The reporting, after the initial 57 stories was dwindling, but on February 6th, 2008 and continuing until February 16th, 2008, newspaper coverage leaped with 25 news articles published during that time. It is important to note that PAPYRUS disseminated this release during the height of the coverage in an attempt to calm the press down, but instead of achieving its goal, my sample showed a spike in coverage. In a telephone interview, I asked Rosemary Vaux, spokeswoman for PAPYRUS, why the decision was made to try and stop journalists from reporting the story. She explains here:

[We] had one or two pretty young girls, um, taking their own lives in the area, we then started to get big pictures, you know, pretty young girls who, who, you know, there was the risk of glamorization, um, normalization possibly. Um and the trustees were very concerned that there would be further deaths. It's known that um, people who have lost somebody close to them can become vulnerable themselves. That takes you up to when the trustees asked me to put up a temporary cessation, just for a period of calm, that's what we, that's all we, were asking for.

As evidenced, the story did not cease, and the press release, it could be argued, sparked further press interest in the story. Some of this interest came from that fact that it was a 'pretty young girl' who had hanged herself. This point highlights yet again, the infantilization of these young adults who took their own lives. Using the word 'girl' instead of 'woman' reduces the status of the adult to that of a child, and also implies her perceived 'vulnerability, similar to what happened to James Bulger, when he was murdered – his name was changed to 'Jamie' by

the press, and his two murderers were only made mention to by their last names, Thompson and Venables, as discussed extensively in Chapter Three. Another reason the interest continued in this story with fervor, I believe, is because of the cynicism that exists in journalism which is engrained in every cub reporter in a newsroom: If you are told to stop reporting, then something is being hidden and must be uncovered (Keeble, 2001: 4). From my own experience as a journalist, when I was told I could not or should not report something, it only made me more eager. I felt that it was my duty, or, as I argue here, my social responsibility, to report something that affects so many. I believe, too, that this was just one reason why newspaper reporting around the Bridgend suicides continued for as long as it did. In addition, during February, 2008, two cousins, Nathaniel Pritchard and Kelly Stephenson, both killed themselves, creating a climax to the story with the highest amount of reporting coverage over the 20th and 21st of February with 46 news stories published. The press was already encouraged to report further on Bridgend by the deaths of the two cousins, as well as an additional suicide on 19th February. On the 20th February, however, the South Wales Police, as well as the parents of Nathaniel Pritchard, publicly accused the media of causing the suicides, specifically pointing to the *South Wales Echo* in a live, televised, national press conference, as the primary culprit. This apparently created outrage amongst journalists because, as some pointed out, there was no concrete evidence to support such a claim. For instance, Mike Hill, Editor of the *South Wales Echo*, who declined to be interviewed for this research, nevertheless did respond to my questions via e-mail:

Following a shameful South Wales Police press conference last year I wrote an editorial because I thought we owed it to our readers to explain why we were covering the story and the manner in which we were doing so. That editorial was also a response to what I saw as various people using the tragedies for their own ends - and that includes those in the police, politicians and the media - rather than looking for why so many young people were taking their own lives. I don't intend to say any more than I did in that editorial, save for that I stand by the

way we have covered and continue to cover the story in Bridgend. I've never believed there was or is a simple answer to what has happened there and it has been one of the most difficult stories I've ever had to cover. Nevertheless I have remained conscious of the responsibility that we have as journalists to cover it fairly, accurately and, above all, with sensitivity.

Hill's statement here shows the frustration newspapers had with those who disseminated information about the suicides, but more importantly, he points out the confusion around why the suicides were occurring. Hill acknowledges that journalists had a responsibility to report the suicides, but he also reiterates the argument of this dissertation that journalists report suicide in a way that maintains the status quo, eliminating the possibility of instability within society. They do this, as he states, by reporting, 'fairly, accurately and, above all, with sensitivity'.

Throughout this chapter and the next, I will illustrate the frustration that news reporting contained around why suicide happened; I will also show how irresponsible reporting, on the part of most of the newspapers in my sample, worked more in the favour of continuing suicide stigma, rather than helping to destigmatize the issue. Journalists report according to the traditional reporting tenets of responsibility, fairness, accuracy and sensitivity. In the case of reporting the Bridgend suicides, these tenets were used, either consciously or unconsciously, as a method to maintain stability, which further stigmatized the issue of suicide. I have attached Hill's editorial with my interview transcripts at the back of this dissertation (Appendix V)¹⁹.

Following the press conference with the police and parents, Bridgend continued to be visible on news pages, though not always in each newspaper. It was March 20th before another spike in coverage could be seen, when the coroner for Bridgend ruled on five of the deaths, ruling three as open deaths and only two as actual suicides. For a death to be labelled a suicide in the UK, the coroner must have concrete evidence that the person intended to kill themselves.

¹⁹ Many reporters at the *South Wales Echo* declined my invitation to be interviewed, with the exception of one. The interview with this journalist, Ben Glaze, will be reported and analyzed in Chapter Six.

Twenty-one articles were published in my sample around that event. After this announcement, the stories dwindled until the death of Sean Rees, a Sainsbury's employee who killed himself on April 20th, 2008. On the 21st and 22nd of April, a total of ten stories ran in the newspapers sampled in this study. Between April 24th, 2008, and June 30th, 2008, only a further 45 stories ran, thus ending the most intensive reporting of the Bridgend suicides in newspapers.

In his development of a theory for news dissemination and flow Ostgaard (1965) found that sensationalized news events were written, 'so as to move the reader to feel some emotion – amusement, excitement, sorrow, even grief' (1965: 49). This theory holds true today, as seen in the case of the Bridgend reporting. The Bridgend story naturally ended in June, 2008. This does not mean that the suicides stopped; it means that the reporting of the story ceased. The declining interest from newspaper organizations occurred, I believe, because the suicides in the region were not coming as fast as they had been in the early part of 2008. Additionally, journalists had exhausted their arsenal of blame, and had no further answers as to why the suicides were happening.

As evidenced in this section, journalists play an important role in the reporting of social issues such as suicide. 'Responsibility' seems to be the magic word that journalists and academic suicidologists alike use when describing how newspapers report suicide. Yet it is clear from this basic history of the six-month event that sensationalism was more important than understanding, and asking why the suicides happened and directing blame was more important than educating the public about suicide and accepting that suicide is a natural occurrence (thought not acceptable) in most societies.

5.2(a) Reporting the Story

The results of the content analysis showed that, in this sample, the Bridgend suicide story was predominantly reported by the Welsh Press²⁰ which made up 50.9% (164) of the coverage. *The Sun*, the middle of the road tabloid, led the national coverage with 35, followed by *The Times* 33, and *The Daily Mirror* 27. *The Daily Mail*, of the political right and *The Guardian*, of the political left, ran a similar number of stories over the six-month sampling period with 19 and 18 respectively. A story's placement in a newspaper is determined based on its news value: 'news values are the criteria employed by journalists to measure and therefore to judge the 'newsworthiness' of events (Richardson, 2007: 91). While the Bridgend suicides were prevalent on news pages throughout the six-month period, only 29 stories made it onto the front page. Of those, however, 21 (72.4%) were run in the Welsh media. This means that while Bridgend was a highly-regarded, well-publicised story throughout the UK, it did not feature heavily throughout the six months on the front pages of the national newspapers in this sample. This makes sense in terms of the news agenda and the proximity (a news value,) (see Galtung and Ruge, 1965) that the suicides had in Wales, compared to the unusualness (a news value) that was employed by those working at the national newspapers. In fact, the majority of stories 187 ran on the first seven pages of the newspaper. While 95.3% of all the articles ran in the main/news sections of the newspapers, *The Daily Mail*, *The Mirror* and *The Times on Sunday* ran stories in a weekly news review, which tended to be a page near the back of each newspaper, rounding up the week's news, in short, brief, catchy stories. *The Times* and *The Mirror* also ran stories in a Culture/Society section. *The Times* also had a story in its financial section which tried to provide an alternative perspective on suicide, showing the economic impact a suicide can have on a

²⁰ The *South Wales Echo*, *Western Mail* and *Wales on Sunday*.

society, while *The Guardian* addressed the suicides on three of its Media and IT pages. As the story initially featured so much emphasis on the role of the Internet in the suicides, *The Guardian* ran some of its coverage in an IT section, making the story more about the role of the Internet and social networking sites, rather than about the social complexities of suicide itself. What is interesting about these findings is that newspapers, in their attempt to fulfil their social responsibility of reporting the suicides as news stories, also attempted to subtly show the effects that suicide has on our culture, how it affects our society economically, and also how it can infringe on the technological aspects of the society as well. By doing this, and, granted, it was not significantly reported, newspapers attempted to show the damage that a suicide can do to the society in which they are happening.

5.2(b) News Formats

The majority of the Bridgend coverage was created in the form of lengthy articles 212 (65.8%), followed by news briefs, 67 (20.8%) which ran between 100 and 120 words. The news brief descends originally from the police blotter, or police brief—a short, daily synopsis of the day’s crime. When analyzing the frames of news briefs, 20 were framed as ‘crime’²¹, while 15 were framed as ‘culture’²². These types of news were coded based on the general types of news which journalists report. For example, in the case of the Bridgend suicides, the suicides themselves fell into two ‘types of news’²³: Crime Reporting and Health Reporting (Pape and Featherstone, 2005: 104). ‘... the stories that a crime reporter will cover are often the attention grabbers and the front page splashes’, while health reporting, on the other hand is an area of reporting where, ‘it’s important to look beyond and find the truth and to be able to ask the awkward questions and,

²¹ Crime was coded in this sample when articles suggested that some illegal activity had taken place, or drugs and alcohol might have had an influence on why the suicide occurred.

²² Culture was coded in this sample when articles referred to the reason the suicide happened as a general societal decline.

²³ Other types of news, according to Pape and Featherstone (2005), include: courts, council, crime, sport, health, business, education and general.

more importantly, get answers' (Pape and Featherstone, 2005: 104-105). Throughout this research, it could be found that shorter pieces dealing with frames around causation relied heavily on crime as the reason for the suicides, despite suicide not being a crime in England or Wales since the early 1960s. I would suggest that the news brief draws heavily on the format and construction of the traditional police blotter. Following up on this point, Siobhain Butterworth, Reader's Editor at *The Guardian*, stated in a telephone interview: '...so, I think, you know, it [suicide] really was kind of um, part of court reporting for a long time and part of the tradition of, kind of the sort of things that newspapers report...' While reporting suicide as if it were a crime might seem insignificant, stigma is reproduced in the minutiae (Thornicroft, 2006: xii); thus reporting suicide in the traditional format of crime reporting, implies that suicide, too, is a criminal act.

When it came to editorials, newspapers in this sample mostly did not take an editorial position on the suicides – news articles presented a newspaper's ideological stance. This seemed quite odd, as 'the editorial and op-ed (opposite-editorial) pages are central to a newspaper's identity (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008: 71). Karin Wahl-Jorgensen elaborates:

They [the editorial pages] are the only place in the paper where journalists are authorized to express opinion, often guided by the political leanings of the newspaper. It is in editorials that newspapers speak both for and to their audience, creating a distinctive voice for the newspaper that is otherwise buried under the conventions of objective journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008: 71).

In total, during the Bridgend coverage, just nine editorials²⁴ were printed; four each in the *South Wales Echo* and the *Western Mail*, and the only national newspaper to run an editorial was *The Times*.

²⁴ I will not analyze what has been said in these editorials as they are quite weak ideologically. Instead, I have chosen to examine news articles from these newspapers because they were ideologically rich and provided insight into reporting habits journalists employ when reporting suicide.

Columns²⁵ were a little more present, but only ran in *The Sun*, the *South Wales Echo*, *The Times on Sunday*, *The Mail on Sunday* and *The Sunday Mirror*. When it came to running letters to the editor, only *The Guardian* and its Sunday counterpart, *The Observer*, as well as *The Daily Mail*, the *South Wales Echo* and the *Western Mail*, chose to run them. This seemed peculiar in the overall coverage of the Bridgend suicides as letters tend to be the second most read item in a newspaper, only behind the front page (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007). The purpose of running letters to the editor, Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) argues, is to provide a 'vigorous forum for public debate (2007: 3). She explains here:

Journalism sees itself as a 'watchdog' on government or a 'fourth estate'—a critical institution that exists to scrutinize the practices of government. As part of this commitment, the press has emphasized its obligation to provide a platform for a diverse public debate and to encourage citizen participation in politics. The letters section represents the newspaper's attempt at realizing this fundamental tenet of the liberal democratic vision. When citizens talk to each other through letters to the editor, it represents a rare moment of direct and active participation in politics. More than that, the letters section is one of the few places where society as a whole fashions knowledge of itself (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007: 3).

Yet, in the case of Bridgend, letters seemed to be chosen based on ideological stances that the newspapers had already taken on their editorial pages. Two examples of this are *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, who ran letters that blamed media reporting for the continuation of the suicides in the Bridgend borough. These quality, left-leaning, newspapers adopted a stance and language which epitomizes the Werther Effect, which states that the more suicide is reported by the media, the greater the increase of actual suicides. However, in my interview with Siobhain Butterworth, the Reader's Editor for *The Guardian*, she discussed some of the inherent problems with the Werther Effect, which were not reflected on *The Guardian's* editorial pages:

²⁵ Personal columns in newspapers provide a different perspective on topics of interest. They can be witty, controversial, no-nonsense, hard-hitting, culturally eclectic, conversational, quirky, bitchy, whimsical, confessional, authoritative, subversive or irritating. Columnists use appropriate style, language and tone for the newspaper for which they write, and they 'make up and are influenced by the overall 'personality' of the newspaper (Keeble, 2001: 216).

To try and work out whether the suicides around Bridgend at the time were the product of hysteria uh, as a result of the web, and you know, I, I, it's wrong to focus, and I know this is probably a complicating factor for your PhD, but it's a bit odd to focus on print... You know, there are other ways of getting information, that, you know I think it's an accusation that could have been leveled at the media more easily a hundred years ago than now, or easily twenty years ago, but I-I just don't know, I don't know how, obviously more studies need to be done and I don't know what influences people to commit suicide in 2009, as opposed to 1989. Mmmm...kay. I mean I-I you know I just don't know ... I suppose my-my response is I-I- I just I don't know how, I don't know how it's possible to tell, but what I do know is the research that I've read on suicides and copycat behaviour is so convincing that I think voluntary restraint in reporting suicides is important.

Butterworth points out here the default position of most of the Bridgend coverage—that journalists did not have the answers for their readers as to why the suicides occurred. The best newspapers could do was fall back on academic research that pointed them towards just one literature area around why suicide happens; in this case it happened to be the Werther Effect theory. It is worth pointing out, however, that journalists were blamed for the continuation of the deaths in the Bridgend area because of their 'excessive' reporting, thus allowing the more highbrow of the quality British Newspapers to fall in line behind the academic research, and provide an ideological stance—that irresponsible news reporting (other newspapers, not their own) was to blame for the suicides in the Bridgend borough.

On their own, these representations using various news formats (crime reporting, editorials, columns and letters to the editor) do not seem too alarming. However, I highlight again, that the role of a journalist is to responsibly inform the public about possible threats to the social fabric, and to take a position on its editorial page telling readers what to think. Few of the newspapers analyzed in this dissertation took an official editorial position on what should or could be done about the apparent spate of suicides. Even fewer columnists still commented on the suicides. Additionally, few letters made it onto the editorial pages, thus hindering debate around the issue of suicide that could have taken place. What became clear from the coverage

was that newspapers took a collective ideological stance that suicide is a taboo topic for opinion-led reporting, and one that British Newspapers, at that time, were not willing to explore and explain to readers. Editorial pages used to be the place that newspapers talked about the important issues of the day, giving their readers food for thought (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008; Harrower, 2002), but in the case of Bridgend, it can be argued that newspapers allowed their sensational and poorly-researched articles to speak instead of using the traditional editorial soapbox.

5.2(c) News Elements

One example of how sensationalism was present in the newspapers was the way in which journalists appealed to readers: through the suicide count. For instance, 188 (58.4%) of all articles mentioned the total number of suicides in their stories, and some even went as far as to keep a running death count, or tally, at the bottom of each story. For example, in the lead of *The Guardian*, 'Their deaths bring the number of apparent suicides in the town to 16 in the last year, with the victims aged between 15 and 27' (Appendix XIII), or, as in *The Sun's* headline: 'Bridgend toll 16 as cousins hang' (Appendix XI) or in the lead of the *South Wales Echo*, 'Sean Rees is the 19th person; there have been 18 other hanging deaths' (Appendix XIV). Repetition of numbers tended to suggest that an uncontrollable epidemic of suicides was occurring. Seeing a long list of dead people on a regular basis might be regarded as helping to fuel a moral panic around the issue of suicide. One way to combat that, as I was taught in my journalistic training, would be to use statistics to put things in perspective. Overwhelmingly, in the Bridgend case study, 288 (89.4%) of the stories did not use statistics. When journalists did use statistics 34 (10.6%), they used them when creating panic around the Internet and when discussing the links between the people who had died. By providing statistics, journalists can give perspective and context to a story. In the case of these suicide stories, there was no way for a reader to judge

whether the suicides in Bridgend County were out of the ordinary or not. Journalists allowed the continuous coverage of the deaths to provide both the context and perspective, when, in fact, had journalists published statistics from the preceding two or three years, they would have let readers know that the current 'spate' was nothing out of the ordinary for the region. The story could have become more educationally-focused, and purpose-driven, and could have encouraged the Welsh Assembly to implement a country-wide suicide prevention plan sooner, as well as preventing the ultimate sensationalist, dramatic 'why-dunnit?' death count that the story ultimately became.

Choosing journalists to interview for this dissertation became quite difficult, as more than 30% of all the articles written did not have a byline. Of those with bylines 176 (54.7%) turned out to be written by staff reporters. Dominic Kennedy of *The Times*, who declined to be interviewed but did share an e-mail response, sums up the situation facing journalism today well:

The only article I worked on about Bridgend was one Sunday when it emerged that a 19th young person had taken his life. My article was based on agency reports from the area, and on reading previous news reports about the suicides. It was published in the Monday edition of the newspaper. I am sorry but on this occasion I do not feel that I have anything useful to contribute.

Kennedy highlights in his response the role that press agency or public relations material plays in the construction and publication of news stories. As Franklin et al (2010) point out in their research into press agency and PR copy in news content, bylines that appear with these types of copy suggest that articles represent 'the work of independent in-house reporters (2010: 206).

They elaborate here:

The significance of these high levels of journalistic dependency on both PR and news agency materials is that they exercise a mutually reinforcing effect on newspapers' editorial contents. Our study revealed that journalists use PR subsidies directly, but PR text is also encoded in the agency copy which journalists use so routinely in news production. Forty-seven percent of press

stories which were based 'wholly' around PR materials closely replicated agency copy, suggesting the existence of a 'multi-staged' process of news sourcing in which PR materials initially generate agency stories which in turn promote coverage in newspapers. Consequently, news agency copy serves as a Trojan horse for PR materials and must be analyzed carefully if the full impact of PR on editorial agendas is to be established (Franklin et al, 2010: 207).

In this study, Welsh Newspapers mostly did not list bylines with 47 of the *South Wales Echo* articles and 26 of the *Western Mail* articles not having any bylines. That said, the Welsh Newspapers were the only ones in the sample to list news agency stories as such, with 1 article in the *South Wales Echo* and 2 articles in the *Western Mail*. These findings were surprising, as the Bridgend suicide story was a local, Welsh, matter of interest. It reinforces what Thomas (2006) argued; that the Welsh Press is poorly funded and in decline (2006: 51). The usage of news agency copy was not as rampant as previously shown by Lewis et al (2008); it did seem odd, however, that it was the local newspapers, who were geographically closest to the story that listed its use. Mike Dodd, spokesman for the Press Association, the UK and Ireland's National press agency, said that this has become a common practice in newsrooms around the country. Elaborating on this point he indicated to me that:

AL: ... Now, what I noticed was, um, and I know this is... a lot of newspapers around the country pay into PA, and you know, and then are able to use your copy, but what I noticed a lot in the coverage, was the fact that a lot of national newspapers actually passed PA stories off as their own

MD: Oh, that happens all the time.

AL: It does?

MD: Yeah, that's because that's the deal we do, unfortunately. I mean it's just part of the way in which, um...

AL: Do you think that's misleading though, to the reader? You know that PA...

MD: No, because no, I wouldn't, I wouldn't say so. I mean, what the Press Association is, is a news agency, like, we're rather like Associated Press, we don't do investigative work, right, you know, so we don't do any investigative stories, uh, on the grounds that a good investigation needs to be conducted properly by journalists who, who have the trust of the editor

AL: Right

MD: But, of course, the editor of the individual paper is the one who has to um, run the investigation, he has to do it in conjunction with his lawyers and so on and so forth, well we're not in the position to do that. What we do is we report

what people say, and we report what happens, so we report what happens in court, we do general news, we do medicine, you know, medical news, education news, we do all the usual news sources, and we sell our copy, well we don't sell our copy, we sell the service to our subscribers on the basis that they can take what they want and they can use what they want, but they, they then, their final responsibility, if they make changes to our copy. Um, it's quite common, it's always been the case that Press Association copies is, is put into other people's newspapers under their own, you know, they'll put their own byline on it. They may have had their own reporter working on something and his stuff hasn't been as good as ours, or he hasn't got as much, or he's done something, he's taken a slightly different view and they decide our copy is the more newsworthy or the more most worth, you know the more worth using, um that, that's very common.

It has been well documented by Franklin (2006) that declining budgets in newsrooms do lead to an increase in outside-generated copy (2006: 13). There seemed to be an indication of this practice in the Bridgend case study, but it would need further exploration for any more definitive results.

5.2(d) Sources

What was interesting to note in the articles, whether they were in-house generated, or Press Association copy, was the limited representation of sources. One of the key ways to determine what voices are being heard is to look at sources – who is being chosen to share their viewpoint, and where that viewpoint is placed in a story: 'the term source is used only to refer to the people who reporters turn to for their information, often officials and experts connected to society's central institutions' (Berkowitz, 2009: 102). In this sample, I looked at primary and secondary sources. A primary source should be considered as the first person quoted in a story, while the secondary source is the second person quoted. In terms of primary sources, journalists choose who to quote first, thus helping construct an article, and place the power of construction in the hands of that source: 'Sources located within a power structure, who have both authority of knowledge and autonomy to speak about that knowledge, tend to be most powerful' (Berkowitz, 2009: 105). Secondary sources, then, while important, do not have as much power in

the eyes of the journalist to help shape and construct the news agenda (2009: 105). O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) found in their study of local newspapers in Yorkshire that a reliance on a single source for stories perhaps reflected 'a shortage of time and resources, combined with sources' skills in presenting positive public images, is a significant contributory factor to uncritical local press reporting (2008: 493). McNair (2009) echoed this sentiment:

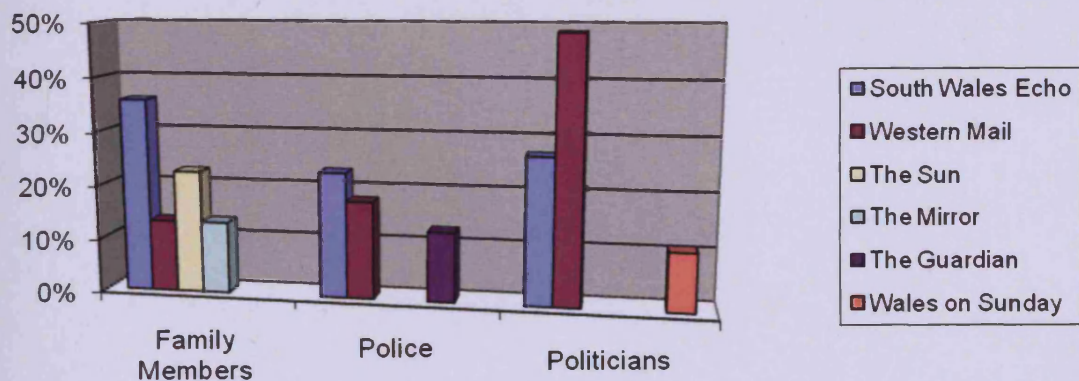
... it is beyond argument that journalists are limited in their work by constraints built into the production process, such as deadlines, limits on space and access to sources. All contribute to the shaping of output and the form of the final product. Any sociological account that fails to acknowledge the importance of these constraints is of minimal value in our understanding of how journalism is made. But neither can one allow journalists to refer all criticisms of their work as 'organizational factors' over which they have no control. Journalists hold beliefs and assumptions about who are the most authoritative and credible sources in the construction of a given story; about what is the most important story on a given day; and about how a story fits in with common sense or 'consensual' ways of seeing the world' (McNair, 2009: 65).

While the choosing of sources based on power can be seen and interpreted as quite negative, the lack of them entirely, as O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) pointed out, can leave newspapers and journalists alike open to criticism, as in the case of the Bridgend suicides. When looking at primary sources in this sample it came to light that 47 (14.6%) of the stories did not have any primary sources. Not only does this point towards poor journalistic reporting, it also points to a possible regurgitation of rumours with no credible evidence to back up claims. An example of this is in a story, published in the *South Wales Echo*: 'The couple got engaged last year, but had delayed their wedding several times, according to friends' (Appendix VII). The sentence was used to allude to the fact that the girl who killed herself suffered from mental illness and was also quite 'needy'. By not using a specific quote to provide context, this leads to stigmatized reporting around the issue of mental illness.

Overall, when primary sources were used in this sample, family members were quoted 53 (16.5%), police, 39 (12.1%) followed by politicians 37 (18.9%). I also looked at primary sources

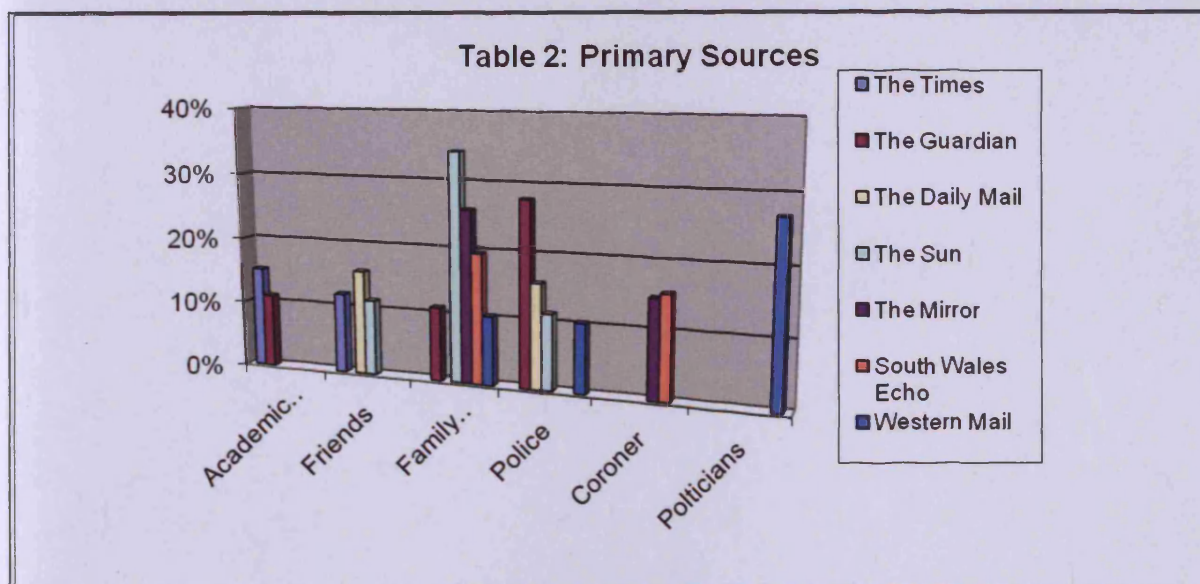
by newspaper, based on the highest occurrences, to determine if particular sources were relied upon more heavily than others. The *South Wales Echo* relied mostly on family members, with 19 (35.8%) stories, followed by *The Sun*, 12 (22.6%), *The Mirror*, 7 (13.2%) and the *Western Mail*, 7 (13.2%). The *South Wales Echo* again led the way in sourcing police, 9 (23.1%) followed by the *Western Mail* 7 (17.9%) and *The Guardian* 5 (12.8%). It was only the Welsh media that sourced politicians: the *Western Mail* 18 (48.6%), the *South Wales Echo* 10 (27%) and *Wales on Sunday* 4 (10.8%). This anomaly leads me to believe that suicide was more of a political issue in Wales. The suicides in the Bridgend borough were held up as representing more serious economic issues in the country, such as deprivation, low unemployment and an absence of cultural cohesiveness that was once present in Wales. With journalists quoting politicians as primary and secondary sources, journalists were trying to reinforce the fact that powerful elites had the situation under control and that the suicides were more of an anomaly than something that should be worrying the citizenry as a whole.

Table 1: Common Sources x Newspapers



Individual newspapers, however, relied on their own particular sources. *The Times* referenced academic experts 5 times and friends, 4; while *The Guardian* quoted police 5 times

family members, 2 and academic experts, 2. *The Daily Mail* referenced police 3 times and friends, 3. *The Sun* quoted family members 12, and police and friends, each 4 times. *The Mirror* quoted family members 7 times and the coroner, 4. *The South Wales Echo* chose family members 19 times and the coroner 15. *The Western Mail* referenced politicians 18 times, family members, 7, and police, 7. *The Times on Sunday* quoted friends once; *The Observer* quoted police twice; *The Mail on Sunday* chose police once; *The Sunday Mirror* chose police and other 1 each, while *Wales on Sunday* quoted politicians, 4 times, family members, 2, academic experts, 2, and partners, 2.



While looking at primary sources is important, looking at secondary sources provides context for readers as well as giving a more rounded idea of where journalists seek further information. Overwhelmingly, when it came to secondary sources, there were none in 134 (41.6%) of the stories. When secondary sources were used, friends, 32, politicians, 29 and the coroner, 25 were the most heavily used. Alarmingly, secondary sources are not always used in stories about suicide, as evidenced from this sample. This means that stories are often under sourced and rely on only one voice, or the same voices in some cases, to help put a story in perspective, thus replicating socially-accepted discourses that are put forth by the sources themselves. This

research showed that secondary sources are not used the majority of the time. With fewer resources at their disposal and less time to report stories, it is perhaps not surprising that journalists tend not to seek out secondary sources. Not only does this do readers a disservice because a balanced context cannot be provided, but it also proves difficult for journalists to fulfil their social responsibility in reporting suicide responsibly. Linksy (1986) states, 'If they [journalists] know the impact of what they are reporting and publishing in a specific case, then they may be said to have contributed to and be held partially responsible for the result' (1986: 138). When only one source or no sources are used in reporting a story, readers cannot form an informed impression about the challenges facing suicide prevention. In the case of the Bridgend suicides, it could also be argued that, by not using secondary sources, journalists were trying to create distance between themselves and the issue of suicide, as it is an issue they do not clearly understand.

As with the primary sources, I also took a closer look at secondary sources broken down by newspapers to see the common sources they would turn to. The *South Wales Echo* and the *Western Mail*, 7 each, and *The Mirror*, 6, sourced friends in a second instance. The *Western Mail* 13, *South Wales Echo*, 7 and *The Times*, 4, each sourced politicians after friends as a secondary source. The coroner was also sourced, led by the *Western Mail*, 8 and *The Sun*, 6. When looking at secondary sources by their individual newspapers, *The Times* chose politicians, 4, and non profits, 4; *The Guardian*, quoted family members in 3 instances; *The Mirror*, quoted friends 6 times; the *Western Mail* referenced politicians 13 times; *The Observer* quoted politicians and the coroner once in each instance; *The Sunday Mirror* quoted friends once; *The Daily Mail* chose to reference family members 4 times; *The Sun* quoted the coroner 6 times; the *South Wales Echo* quoted police 14 times; *The Times on Sunday* referenced a non profit organization once; *The Wales on Sunday* quoted friends 4 times and *The Mail on Sunday* had no secondary sources.

In this section on production, I looked at how the Bridgend story was reported, the news formats employed, the specific elements used to provide context in reporting the story and the sources journalists quoted to construct their stories. Additionally, I have looked at the frequency with which suicide appeared on the front pages, which newspapers covered the story, where suicide stories ran on news pages, the length of the articles, and the editorial stances newspapers took on the issue of suicide. Additionally, I have shown some examples of sensationalistic reporting and delved into the sources each newspaper used to provide voices in their stories. I have illustrated how British Newspapers have a social responsibility to report suicide, and the consequences if they do not do this responsibly. This section helped to answer the overarching, general research question: How do British Newspapers report suicide?

The next section of this chapter will discuss at length the quantifiable results around words and phrases that were used in the six-month sample. These results should be taken as a foundation for general discourses that emerged, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

5.3 Discursive Elements

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, in Judeo-Christian cultures suicide has traditionally been heavily stigmatized. This situation has helped to perpetuate discourses that are potentially damaging to those suffering from poor mental health. As this dissertation is concerned with the discourses British Newspapers used when reporting suicide, it seemed fitting to firstly provide quantitative evidence relating to the discursive elements that make up those discourses. By highlighting phrases used in describing the act of suicide, and by also examining discursive features of those stories, I can show some of the ways in which the newspapers tried to control narratives around the Bridgend suicides.

This section on discursive elements will be broken down into two sub-sections, one looking at discursive labelling, such as 'suicide' and 'commit suicide', while the second sub-section will focus on discursive features of the stories, looking specifically at method, questioning and visuals and the role these three played in the continuation of the suicide coverage.

The discursive elements in this section were coded in headlines, subheads, the lead (first paragraph), the nut graf (second paragraph), info boxes and pull quotes. Each element was coded as it appeared in the story. For instance, if the word suicide occurred in a headline, second paragraph and pull quote, the story was coded as such. Overlap between the discursive elements was prevalent. For example, suicide could also be coded as 'commit suicide'. The method of coding was chosen based on an extensive review of available media guidelines on reporting suicide in the UK. Based on the WHO's guidelines, internationally recognized as the standard bearer, and backed by the International Association of Suicide Prevention, these guidelines advise: 'avoid language which sensationalizes or normalizes suicide, or presents it as a solution to problems; avoid explicit description of the method used in a completed or attempted suicide; word headlines carefully; show due consideration for people bereaved by suicide and provide information about where to seek help' (WHO, 2008: 3). The guidelines advise against the use of the word 'suicide' in a headline, yet this study found its use was prevalent in both the headline and lead of the samples coded.

5.3(a) Discursive Labelling: 'Suicide'

The *South Wales Echo* 26, the *Western Mail* 23 and *The Mirror* and *The Times* 16 each utilised the word 'suicide' in a headline, while 202 (62.7%) of all stories used the word 'suicide' in a lead. One would anticipate that the word 'suicide' might appear in a story about a self-inflicted death, but in this study, there were 21 stories that did not use the term. While this number is

small, it is an important one. It lends itself to the argument that alternate discourses could be used in reporting suicide; the reasons for a death might be more societally based, as Durkheim stated. Durkheim argued that suicide is the result of society's strength or weakness of control over an individual (Berman and Jobes, 1991: 37). Based on the reasons given for death when the discursive term 'suicide' was not employed, Durkheim's assertion that anomic suicides occur when the victim is not capable of dealing with a crisis rationally, or when his or her relationship with society is suddenly changed, seems to be reinforced here, though not strongly. Moreover, this means an alternate discourse which mentions other triggers for death, instead of simply the suicider taking his or her own life. I suggest here that the word 'illicide' might offer a clearer understanding or create a stronger possibility for an alternative discourse to be used by journalists. I define 'illicide' as 'self-murder in order to make clear my mind'. Its etymology comes from 'ill', based on the word illustrate, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the word in the 1580s which was, 'to make clear in my mind' (<http://www.oxfordreference.com> [Accessed July 12th, 2009]). The second 'i' in 'illicide' references the self, as in the first person, 'I chose to die'. The last part of the word, 'cide' means to kill or murder. With a definition such as this at a journalist's disposal, suicide, or rather, 'illicide' could be seen more as a mental illness based on psychache²⁶, rather than an issue steeped in stigma and crime.

5.3(b) Discursive Labelling: 'Commit Suicide'

Tying this together, the phrase 'commit suicide' is commonly understood within the field of suicidology to imply a criminal act. This dates back to the negative stigma around suicide created by the Catholic Church, as explained in Chapter Three. Because of this, prior to the

²⁶ Shneidman (1996) defines psychache as stemming from thwarted or distorted psychological needs. In other words, suicide is chiefly a drama of the mind (1996: 4-5).

1960s, suicide was a crime against humanity in both England and Wales. While the law has changed, the usage of the phrase is still prevalent and commonplace in reporting and speech. I asked Stephen Pritchard, Readers Editor for *The Observer* in a telephone interview why it was that journalists wrote about suicide in an abstract way, 'as if it were this 'thing' that actually took lives away and it wasn't an active choice by somebody.' He responded:

We're still, still using the term commit suicide, as though it somehow, uh, it's not a conscious decision and also to commit something, of course, rather reflects the fact that not very long ago, it was actually a crime to take your own life

As Pritchard states here, using the phrase 'commit suicide' is engrained in the British psyche because of previous laws, making change difficult to implement. That said, 274 (85.1%) stories in this sample did not use the phrase, which is a positive step in trying to destigmatize suicide; however, there were publications that did choose to use it. *The Times* used it 11 times, followed by *The Daily Mail* and the *Western Mail* at 10 each. *The Times*, however, was the only publication to also use the phrase in a headline.

When 'commit suicide' was used in a story, it was mostly relegated to the rest of the story (38 times), meaning the paragraphs following the nut graf (second paragraph). The phrase did not appear in *The Observer* or *The Mail on Sunday*. One could draw the conclusion that the discourse around the phrase 'commit suicide' is changing. No longer does the phrase imply a legal 'criminal act against humanity', an abstract phrase that does little to help those that are suffering from mental illness, or those bereaved by suicide (rather it implies a morally reprehensible act that damages the friendships and relationships of those that are left behind). While this small change might seem irrelevant, in fact, what it does is change the discourse from focusing on the why and how of the suicide, and instead focuses on those left behind and how the actions of the suicider affects someone else. Using this phrase could imply a shift in thinking

about the suicide act; thus helping society to adapt its way of thinking about suicide. Where once the focus of a suicide was the person who had died, now the focus is on those who have been affected by the suicide. More likely, however, is that this shift is representative of the press' attempt at maintaining the already socially-accepted discourses around suicide. However, by shifting the discourse just slightly and by removing the phrase 'commit suicide' from the printed vernacular, and focusing on those left behind, the newspapers appeared to be suggesting to those who contemplate suicide that it would be wrong to do so, thus fulfilling its role of maintaining balance within the society.

5.3(c) Discursive Features: 'Method'

Discursive phrasing, as can be seen, plays an important role in understanding the issue of suicide, but so too are the discursive features that journalists use when they are reporting a suicide story. For example, the method a person chooses to use to die is a good discursive hook for journalists when trying to entice readers into a story. In 90 (28%) stories in the Bridgend case, the method was mentioned in the lead. An additional 40 (12.4%) references were mentioned in the headline. According to the WHO's media guidelines for reporting suicide, journalists should avoid excessive detail when describing how a suicide occurred (2008: 3). While saying that a person hanged themselves does not constitute excessive detail, when it is repeated in the top third of the story (headline, subhead, lead, and second paragraph), one begins to formulate an idea about what 'hanging' entails. The common belief within the media field is that readers only engage with the top one third of a story before moving on to the next news item (Harrower, 2002: 43). This gives journalists precious little space to make an impact around a particular social issue. The field of suicidology tends to argue that method is the

defining aspect of media reporting that can cause²⁷ suicide. In a telephone interview, Chris Frost, Ethics Chair for the National Union of Journalists said:

[Keith Hawton] did some excellent work, drawing together a number of studies, um which seemed to show that it's unlikely that the media generally would drive suicide, but they certainly could influence method. So, then we needed to be extraordinarily careful, exactly how much detail we wrote, that said, in, in Bridgend, I thought that would have fitted more closely the method, because we weren't talking generally about sort of suicides or a suicide here or there, by saying all these suicides in one place, probably added more focus so that some people in Bridgend who may have been thinking about it, might just have been encouraged to do that. But that said, I mean Keith's work seems to suggest that potentially you're not very likely to encourage people to commit suicide, unless they were determined to do that in the first place. All you can do is influence how they're going to do it, so I can see why the, why the police wanted the media to shut up about it and not because they wanted the media to not be involved in, um, looking at how they were investigating it, although that's always a possibility, but um, because it would look as though we were encouraging it.

Frost raises some interesting points here, highlighting an issue I have been examining throughout this dissertation regarding the media effects debate, and the Werther Effect research with regard to suicide reporting. Media effects research works on the basis that audiences do not critically engage with media messages (Lacey, 2002: 145). As Frost mentioned, Hawton conducted research that found that media reporting is not likely to 'encourage people to commit suicide, unless they were determined to do that in the first place'. While this dissertation's aim is not to prove or disprove whether the media has an impact on increasing suicides, it is important to note Gauntlett's thoughts on the matter:

If, after sixty years of a considerable amount of research effect, direct effects of media upon behaviour have not been clearly identified, then we should conclude that they are simply not there to be found (Gauntlett, 1998: 20).

I focus on this here, as the Werther Effect theory permeates through every aspect of this dissertation, despite not being the focus of it. Journalists are well aware that the theory exists,

²⁷ Note the Werther Effect theory literature in Chapter Three.

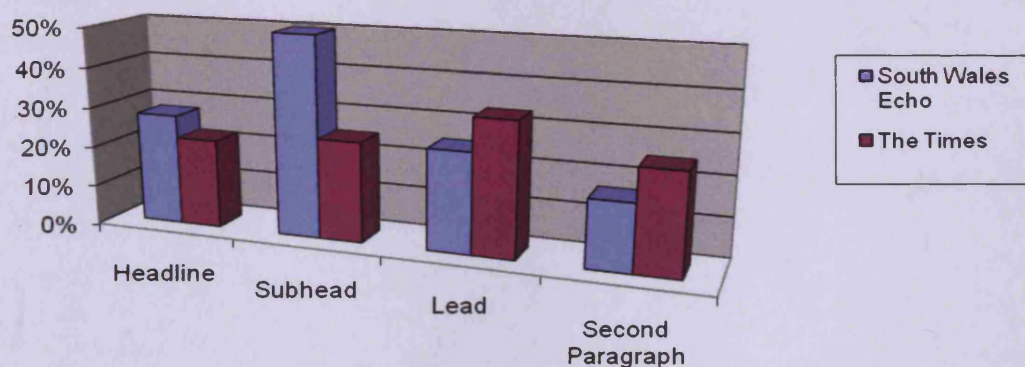
reporting it as part of the Bridgend story. Frost, too, raises the point, but he highlights one of my general concerns with this particular way of thinking: the media is not likely to cause suicide, yet it can influence method. I would put it to my colleagues who research suicide that perhaps it is not that the media influence the method, but rather, as shown throughout my research findings that British Newspapers reinforce stigma as in the case of the word 'hang' by representing the word over and over again to its readers. In this over-representation of the particular method used (eg. hanged), newspapers 'othered' those that chose to die, but at the same time was able to reinforce what society believes to be 'normal' around the topic of death. To elaborate further, in quite simplistic terms, we are born; we die. This is the 'natural or normal' event of living. However, in the case of those who died in Bridgend – we are born, and 'they' hanged themselves. By using this method to explain death, British Newspapers reinforced the accepted discourse around life and about what is not accepted around death.

5.3(d) Discursive Features: 'Questioning'

What became quite evident and further highlights my discussion regarding societally-accepted discourses around death, is how journalists questioned why suicide occurs, arduously trying to uncover an answer. Questions are a natural part of dealing with the aftermath of a suicide. In the case of Bridgend, British Newspapers took it upon themselves to play the role of national inquirer. Bob Satchwell, Executive Director of the Society of Editors, believes it was right for newspapers to cover the suicides in exactly the way they did. He told me in a telephone interview: '... which is perfectly proper in my view, absolutely right that they should be covered. God forbid young people kill themselves and no one bothers to make a fuss about it'. Satchwell's frustration here highlights conceptions held by society about childhood and young people. Aries (1960) argues that today adults have realized, the 'innocence and the weakness of childhood, and consequently the duty of adults to safeguard the former and strengthen the

latter (1960: 316). Journalists carried out this role of national defender of 'childhood' and 'youth' by questioning why the suicides were happening. The findings show that questioning occurred in the latter two-thirds of the stories, 144 (44.7%). It occurred 18 times in headlines—for example: 'Internet Death Cults? Or is it a Humdrum Cause Closer to Home?' (Appendix VIII); '17 Hangings, 13 Months, 1 Town, 1 Question, Why?' (Appendix XVII). The *South Wales Echo* had 5 instances and *The Times* 4. In the subhead questioning appeared 4 times, while in the *South Wales Echo* 2 times, *The Times*, once, and *The Mirror*, once. In the lead, it appeared 12 times with *The Times* having 4 occurrences, the *South Wales Echo* 3, the *Western Mail* 2. In the second paragraph, questioning occurred 12 times, with *The Times* having 3 instances, and *The Mirror*, the *South Wales Echo*, and *Western Mail* all having 2 each.

Table 3: Discursive Feature: 'Questioning'



The Times, then, as well as the *South Wales Echo* consistently questioned why the suicides happened in the top third of a story (headline, subhead, lead and second paragraph). Consequently, *The Times* became the questioning voice amongst the national newspapers and the *South Wales Echo* was the questioning voice in Wales.

Questioning why a death happens is to be expected, but in the case of suicidal death, it is mandatory. A society judges how well it is functioning based on the number of people in it

killing themselves (Koch and Smith, 2006: 2). Questioning why people die is only natural based on that thesis. When it comes to suicide, however, the only person who knows why the death occurred is in the ground²⁸. The press, then, must fill in the gaps so that the citizenry does not think that suicide is an acceptable act. Paul Horton, News Editor and Director for Wales News Services, Ltd. voiced his frustrations in a telephone interview:

It's difficult, the problem is, the problem is, you can't sit any of those young people down and say, why did you do it? And, that why is the big question, and you know this much better than me, why, why, why, why, why, why is the big question and nobody can ever bloody answer it. Each of those kids has their own back story, and there are certain similarities and connections between them, but they don't even know why²⁹ they did things in the end, there's no magic bullet, anyway, no

Horton illustrates the big gap in reporting a suicide—there is no way to answer the question 'why?'. That said, however, at the heart of reporting a news story, the fundamentals of journalism, the core news values, demand that the 'Why' question be addressed. It is a key aspect of reporting a story—*who, what, when, where and why?* Asking the question, however, and providing an answer, regardless if it is the right one or not, helps to maintain the ever-fragile equilibrium of a society.

5.3(e) Discursive Features: 'Visuals'

News stories, however, are not just told via discursive phrasing, or by highlighting key discursive features such as the method or questioning, as I have done here. A key element in the reporting of any story is the visual. While this dissertation did not methodologically conduct a visual analysis, it did take note of some of the key features that visuals added to the reporting of the Bridgend suicides. Journalists are encouraged in the WHO media reporting guidelines on

²⁸ While suicide notes do provide information in some cases as to why a person chose to take his or her own life, in most cases, as Shneidman (1996) found, suicide notes are not left behind by those who have died (14).

²⁹ It should be noted here that this quote by News Editor Paul Horton was used to illustrate that journalists, much like the populous, has a difficult time understanding why suicide occurs.

suicide to not embellish with pictorial content, but, that said, most editors and journalists strive to have at least one picture run with each story. Harrower (2002) describes in a tongue-and-cheek way why a news page designer would want to run photos with a story:

Yes, you can design stories without art. But your pages will look lifeless and gray. After all, most stories are about people: people winning, losing, getting arrested, getting elected. (Often they get elected first, *then* arrested). Readers want to know what these people look like. So show them. Remember, mug shots attract readers. And attracting readers is your job (Harrower, 2002: 46).

In the case of the Bridgend story, over the course of the six-month sampling of stories, 199 (61.8%) articles in newspapers had a picture, while 123 (38.2%) did not. The *South Wales Echo* ran 56 (28.1%); the *Western Mail* ran 37 (18.6%), *The Sun* ran 28 (14.1%), and *The Times* ran 21 (10.6%). *The Mail on Sunday* was the only newspaper to not run any photos over the six-month period. These results show that, visually, this story was not as stimulating in the national newspapers, as in the Welsh Newspapers. The Welsh Newspapers made the story local, using pictures to illustrate the angst and confusion around the suicides in the Bridgend area. Most, 215 (66.8%) versus 106 (32.9%), did not have more than one photo with a story. Of those that did have more than one photo with a story, the *South Wales Echo* led the way with 31 (29.2%), followed by the *Western Mail* and *The Times* each with 14 (13.2%), and *The Sun* with 12 (11.3%). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Bridgend suicides did not appear in a large way on the front page of newspapers, except in the Welsh Newspapers. Consequently, jumping stories³⁰ from the front page with a picture was also quite low with 25 (7.5%).

The WHO encourages journalists to 'avoid prominent placement and undue repetition of stories about suicide', stating: 'Newspaper stories about suicide should ideally be located on the inside pages, towards the bottom of the page, rather than on the front page or at the top of

³⁰ This is a journalistic term to mean starting a story on one page and 'jumping' or finishing it on another. An example of this is starting a story on page one, and then turning to page six to read its ending.

an inside page' (2008: 8). While many newspapers did not run the story on the front page, the story did receive prominent placement on inside top right and inside top left pages. Throughout the six-month period and across the 322 individual newspapers sampled, 440 (75.9%) mugshots (generally just a face in the picture) were run with the stories; 63 (10.9%) landscape photos (pictures of the town or place where the person died) were run, followed by 77 (13.2%) portraits (pictures of the family or deceased with family/friends, artistic shots with friends, flowers etc.). The *South Wales Echo* relied the heaviest on mugshots, running 100 (22.7%). *The Sun* also relied on them, publishing 69 (15.7%), followed by *The Mirror* 64 (14.5%) and *The Times* 53 (12%). Portraits³¹, which seemed to be used to illicit sympathy for family members and friends, were relied on by the *South Wales Echo* 31 (40.3%), *The Sun* 10 (13%) and *The Daily Mail* and the *Western Mail* 7 (9.1%) each.

Landscape pictures³² were also used 63 (10.8%). *The Times* relied on these 14 (22.2%), followed by the *Western Mail* 12 (19%), *The Sun* 11 (17.5%) and the *South Wales Echo* 10 (15.9%). It was *The Times* that pictorially referenced Bridgend as a possible reason for the deaths, using the same picture over and over again, despite the fact that the 'depressed area of Bridgend' was referenced less than one per cent throughout the entire six-month sample as a possible causation of death. This result shows yet again that despite leading the coverage for the national newspapers, *The Times*, through every means of production, sought a way to distance themselves from the suicides, representing the story as an 'us' and 'them' situation, or in terms of social class.

When it came to who was in those pictures, newspapers in the sample mostly chose to run pictures of the deceased alone 379 (67%). Newspapers also chose to run the deceased with

³¹ Pictures of family, deceased with family/friends, artistic shots with friends, flowers etc.

³² Pictures of town, place where the person died

friends 22 (3.9%). Family was also present 22 (3.9%). The *South Wales Echo* published family pictures 7 (31.8%) and *The Sun* and the *Western Mail* each published 4 (18.3%). It is interesting to note that politicians were also visible pictorially, but only in Welsh Newspapers, 17 (3%). The *South Wales Echo* ran 9 (52.9%) pictures of politicians, followed by the *Western Mail* 5 (29.4%) and the *Wales on Sunday* 3 (17.6%). This is further evidence, that suicide was a political story in Wales; in local and regional newspapers, sources tend to be those who hold power and make decisions:

... the principal contributors are elite white men, with the 'ordinary' citizen, women, and members of ethnic minorities being far less frequently identified, since journalists are much more likely to seek out elite sources whom they believe will give their reports the requisite degree of gravitas and authority (Ross, 2006: 233).

In Wales, those elite sources are politicians, and this is why they featured heavily in the Bridgend reporting.

As with the choice of sources, the choice of pictures for a story is also important. A picture can be illustrative of a particular voice. As seen here, the content analysis showed that pictures of the deceased with friends, and family were used, but also showed that pictures of politicians were used too. What this does is reinforce the argument running throughout this dissertation thus far: Newspapers have a responsibility to report the news, based on their commonly held tenets and ideologies, but newspapers also play a significant role in maintaining stability in a democracy. From these visuals, it can be seen that, similar to when using the phrase 'commit suicide', journalists have subtly shifted the discourse around suicide to focus on those left behind (family and friends). Additionally, through visual means, journalists have presented politicians as the voices of power, those who hold the answers, those who can solve the problem of suicide and those who we, the citizenry, must turn to when we feel that our democracy is becoming destabilized.

This section on discursive elements, which included looking at the discursive labels, 'suicide' and 'commit suicide', and discursive features, 'method', 'questioning' and 'visuals' provides a quantitative basis to enable an extra level of understanding with regard to how suicide is portrayed by British Newspapers. What the findings show is that there is evidence that journalists are attempting to follow media reporting guidelines, as the majority of suicide stories ran on inside pages, albeit on the top right and top left, instead of on the bottom, as advised by the WHO. However, stories of importance are always signified by their prominent placement at the top of pages instead of the bottom, so a compromise on this guideline seems to work for the common good. There also seemed to be a shift in the discourse around the phrase 'commit suicide'. That shift could suggest that the person who ended their life is no longer the focal point in a suicidal act, but rather, those left behind. A small percentage of stories discussed how the act of suicide affected those left behind rather than the 'why' of the act itself. It also became clear, if just slightly, that journalists see suicide as a way to infantilize those who kill themselves. This came to light when looking at how journalists needed to uncover why suicide was happening in the borough of Bridgend and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six. Throughout this section, and the chapter thus far, I have maintained the argument that journalists must fulfil a social role of responsibly reporting suicide. What I also highlight is that, in fulfilling that societal obligation, journalists tend to 'mirror' what society already deems acceptable discourses around the issue of suicide, regardless of whether those discourses are stigmatized or not. The next section of this chapter, will explore quantitatively the frames that emerged around the Bridgend suicides.

5.4 Framing

Gitlin (1980) explains the issue of framing as a way to 'naturalize the social world in accordance with certain discursive conventions' (1980: 6). Allan (1998) goes on to say that news frames

'make the world beyond direct experience look natural' (1998: 120). This section will explore in depth the dominant frames that emerged in this quantitative sample around causation, method, location, the Internet and why suicide is thought to occur. These frames, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, illustrate some of the ways in which journalists engage in the reporting of suicide, and how they use these frames to stabilize the society once a suicide has happened.

The dominant frames throughout the six-month sample were: culture 128 (39.8%), questioning 63 (19.6%), mental health 52 (16.1%) and crime 46 (14.3%). Culture was coded as a general societal decline (could also be inferred as social class), while questioning was coded as the frustration of not understanding why the suicides were happening. A code of mental health deemed mental illness as a cause for death, but it was also coded when psychologists, medical doctors and epidemiologists were referenced in the story, while a code of crime, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, suggested that some illegal activity had taken place, or that drugs and alcohol might have had an influence. Education was a represented frame 39 (12.1%) overall, with the *South Wales Echo* leading the way 19 (48.7%), followed by *The Sun* 4 (10.3%) and *The Guardian* 1 (2.6%). This frame encourages educating the public about mental health, the signs and triggers for depression, as well as encouraging parents about the 'dangers' of allowing young people online. Of interest here is *The Guardian's* presence, and how it warned against the ills of online usage. *The Guardian's* coverage of the suicides seemed to be steeped in an awareness of social class, implying that suicide, in Wales especially, was a lower class issue, and not something with which middle-class readers needed to be concerned.

The Guardian lobbied for caution about allowing young people to use social networking sites, and argued that their usage could be yet another example of a decline amongst British youth. Yet Subrahmanyam et al (2008) found that social networking sites are used by young people to 'promote social interaction and reinforce important offline relationships,

demonstrating that for them, technology is a tool for supporting interpersonal connections' (2008: 423). These findings do not correspond with the discourse of social class put forth by most of the British Newspapers examined. What becomes clear, however, is that online usage now seems to be the benchmark by which social class is measured. As seen in my findings, employment was not a primary fixture to determine social class—it was only the *South Wales Echo* that used a frame of employment in one article. When asked in a telephone interview if social class had anything to do with the reporting of suicide, Mike Dodd, spokesman for the Press Association, responded with a definitive no. However, later in the interview, he went on to contradict himself, saying:

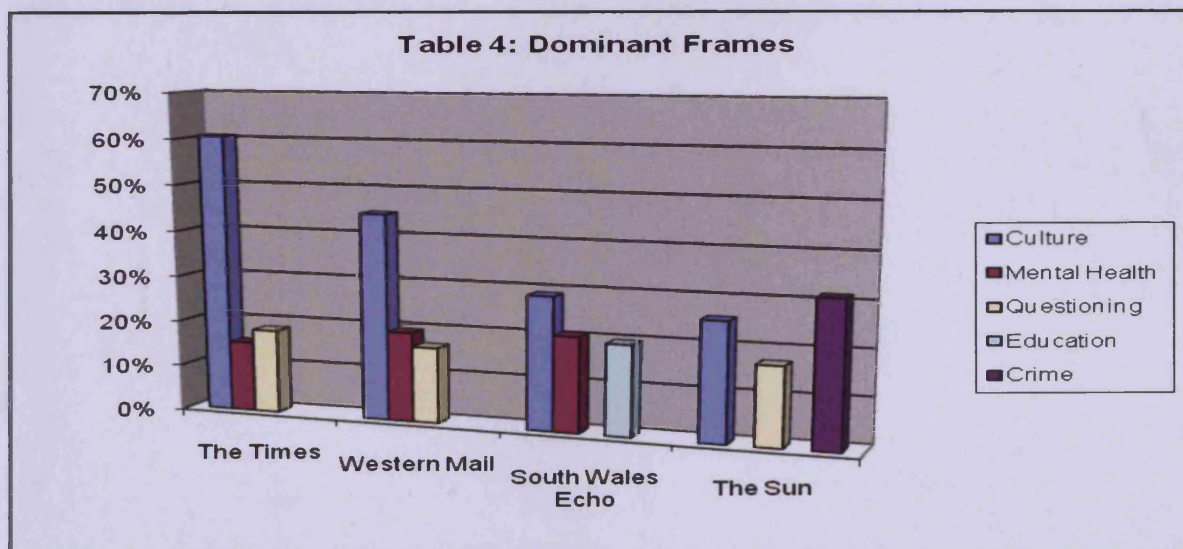
But then, what do you do when you've got a large population of young people and in South Wales, I mean, this is something of a problem. You've got a large population of quite young people, many of whom are what they call 'NEETS' I think, which is 'not in education, employment, training or studying.' You know, so you've got a, if they've got no income, if they're living off, maybe living off benefits or scraping by on whatever they can get, I think it's a fairly um, a fairly depressing life and it may well be that it's just their own social circumstances which lead them to [suicide] ...

Despite stating that social class does not play a role in the reporting of suicide, Dodd does nevertheless say that suicide can be caused by a lower social standing in society. This issue comes up time and again in my findings, and will be discursively explored in greater depth in Chapter Six.

When looking at how individual newspapers framed suicide, *The Times* 33 (10.2%), employed frames of culture 20 (60.6%), questioning 6 (18.2%) and mental health 5 (15.2%). *The Sun* 35 (10.9%) used frames of crime 11 (31.4%), culture 9 (25.7%) and questioning 6 (17.1%). The dominant discourse in *The Sun* was that suicide was a criminal act, and it should be noted here that *The Sun* also ran the second highest number (nearly 20%) of News Briefs (as described earlier in this chapter), in which the suicides were all framed as criminal acts. The *South Wales*

Echo seemed to have the most appropriate frames in coverage using 97 (30.1%) of which culture 28 (28.9%), mental health 20 (20.6%) and education 19 (19.6%) were dominant. These frames would be perceived as good and responsible because they shed light on mental health and education together, while encompassing it within a frame of culture—life has changed and young people have changed. Based on this quantitative analysis, the *South Wales Echo*, can be said to have had the most responsible coverage throughout the sample in this study, due to the attitude taken by Editor, Mike Hill, who said: 'I've never believed there was, or is, a simple answer to what has happened there [in Bridgend] and it has been one of the most difficult stories I've ever had to cover. Nevertheless I have remained conscious of the responsibility that we have as journalists to cover it fairly, accurately and, above all, with sensitivity.' In its stories, the *Western Mail* 67 (20.8%) used culture 30 (44.8%), mental health 13 (19.4%) and questioning 11 (16.4%) as the dominant frames.

Table 4: Dominant Frames



The Guardian was the only newspaper that employed the frame of media reporting with 18 references, throughout its coverage. Media reporting was referenced 6 times, followed by culture, 5. This ties in with *The Guardian's* use of sources for its articles. For example, the

newspaper quoted quite heavily from academic experts who supported the academic argument of the Werther Effect—that media coverage of suicide causes more suicides—which helped create this frame of media reporting.

Sources play a major role in how journalists construct their news stories. In discussing the selection of primary³³ and secondary³⁴ sources, Keeble (2001) argues that, ‘journalists’ sourcing routines tend to reflect the distribution of power in society, representatives of leading institutions and public services dominate having easier access to the press’ (2001: 42).

My research on the Bridgend suicides shows that when looking at primary source usage, family members were quoted 53 (16.5%). Family then framed the stories as questioning 18 (34%), culture 16 (30.2%) and education 12 (22.6%). This is to be expected, as family members are trying to make sense of their loved ones death and determine its cause, as well as wondering how they did not know what signs to look out for. Police were next on the list 39 (12.1%). They tended to frame stories as crime 16 (41%), questioning 11 (28.2%), culture 10 (25.6%). This result shows that police seem to have as little understanding of the nature of suicide as journalists. They, too, were confused and baffled as to why the suicides in Bridgend were happening. Next, politicians contributed 37 (18.9%), framing stories as culture 19 (51.4%), youth 7 (18.9%) and questioning 7 (18.9%). From the beginning of the Bridgend reporting, politicians were pushing the ‘social networking sites as dangerous for young people angle’. When quoted, they continuously regurgitated the same lines— that social networking sites, which connected young people together, were ultimately responsible for their deaths. While politicians were pushing for the culture frame, religious leaders were sources for frames of

³³ Keeble (2001) defines primary sources at the local level as ‘councils, Members of Parliament, courts, police, fire brigade, ambulance service, hospitals, local industries and their representative bodies, trade unions and trades councils’ (2001: 42).

³⁴ Keeble (2001) defines secondary sources as ‘schools, colleges, churches, local clubs and societies, army, naval and air force bases, local branches of national pressure groups and charities’ (2001: 42).

'suicide is wrong' 3 (60%), while non-profits were sources for frames of education 13 (56.5%) and mental health 11 (47.8%). Berkowitz (2009) reminds us that looking at framing in terms of sources is a way to understand how reporters and their sources are creating meaning: 'When reporters or their sources reign in an issue, certain depictions become the dominant way of thinking as the issue runs its course' (2009: 106). In the case of the Bridgend suicides, as seen here, the dominant frame that continued to be present was that the Internet and social networking sites had a lot to answer for in terms of explaining why the suicides occurred.

5.4(a) Frame and Causation

When looking at framing and causation, the causes given for a suicide were: knowledge of other/others' death 66 (20.5%), social networking sites 62 (19.3%), mental health 47 (14.6%), and alcohol/drugs, 37 (11.5%). Overwhelmingly, the dominant frames tended to be culture, questioning and mental health. In the case of social networking sites as the cause, youth 10 (16.1%) was an additional frame. Within this frame, newspapers cautioned against young people being allowed to engage with each other on the Internet for fear it would lead to death. Livingstone (2008) sums up the common discourse around online social networks and young people:

In short, it is commonly held that, at best, social networking is time-wasting and socially isolating, and, at worst, it allows paedophiles to groom children in their bedroom or sees teenagers lured into suicide pacts while parents think they are doing their homework (2008: 395).

The issue that Livingstone raises about suicide pacts is not one to discard. In fact, during the coverage of the Bridgend suicides, newspapers did put forward the idea that an 'online suicide cult' was to blame for the deaths. No evidence was found to support this claim, yet the use of these terms led to further sensationalization of the suicides.

When looking at the cause of death as drugs/alcohol, two extra frames were introduced, crime 13 (35.1%) and mental health 26 (55.3%). This result is to be expected, especially as crime and mental health are dominant discourses within the frame of alcohol and drug abuse. Weiss and Stephens (1992) state that those with mental health challenges turn to drugs and alcohol as a way to alleviate their discomfort (1992: 102). While it is important to examine the common discourses around causation and framing, it is also important to look at what was more infrequently presented as a reason for death. In this sample, I found that bullying, referenced 9 times, and unemployment 5 times, were not dominant discourses. As mentioned in Chapter Three, bullying is a dominant frame and discourse for childhood suicide, as illustrated by the three childhood suicide cases presented earlier in this dissertation – the deaths of Laura Rhodes, Ben Vodden and Jonathan Reynolds. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I found a small showing of journalists infantilizing³⁵ those who took their own lives. My findings show that bullying is not a dominant discourse or frame when it comes to suicide in my sample of young adult populations.

Throughout the coverage, politicians voiced their concern that the borough of Bridgend itself was being blamed for the deaths, but my research showed only 11 cases where this was actually discussed or commented on by journalists. When there was a discussion of the causation of suicide by individual newspapers, based on their political leanings, the causes for death were varied. For instance, *The Times* on the right ideologically, blamed social networking sites 9 (27.3%). The *Western Mail* blamed social networking sites 13 (19.4%) and knowledge of other/others' death 13 (19.4%). *The Daily Mail*, on the right, and *The Mirror* on the left, blamed knowledge of others/others' death 8 (42.1%) and 8 (29.6%) respectively. *The Guardian*, on the left, blamed media reporting 6 (33.3%), while *The Sun* in the centre, blamed drugs and alcohol

³⁵ This will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six.

10 (28.6%). It was only the *South Wales Echo* that put forth the argument of no cause or trigger 17 (17.5%)—not meaning that the suicides had no cause³⁶, but that the newspaper could not adequately pinpoint where to allocate blame.

What this research showed is that political leanings did not matter, especially in the case of *The Daily Mail* and *The Mirror*. Mark Brayne, former Director of the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma, explained to me in a telephone interview that journalists do not understand why suicide happens, and that this is something with which they grapple:

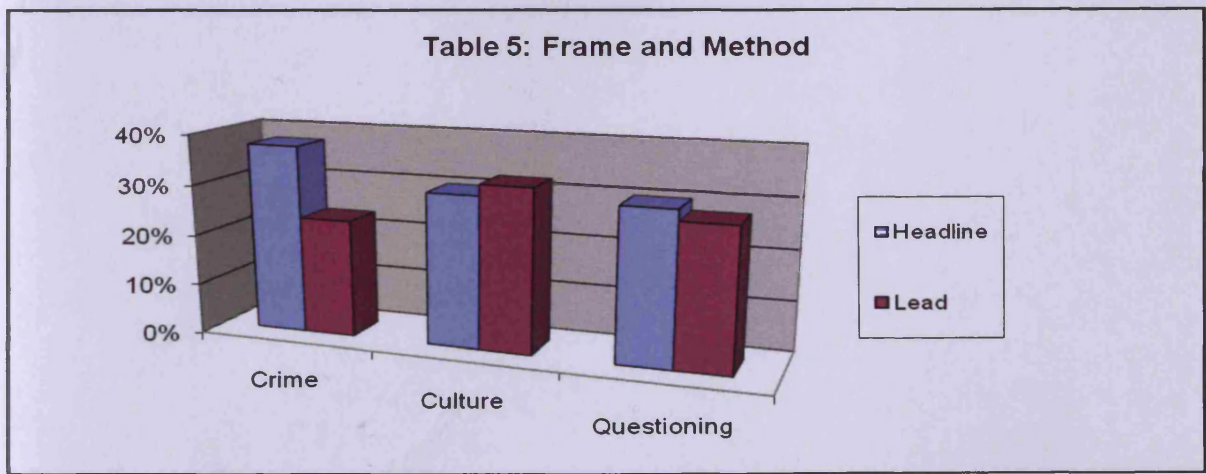
... how much do most journalists know about, about what they're reporting when they report suicide? I would say, nine out of ten journalists who cover suicide, they may be doing it from the very best of intentions, with the very best, uh, without any intention to, to cause further harm, but they don't know what they're doing. They will be salacious, there will be salacious reporting, there will be exaggerated reporting, there will be sensational reporting, and I think, I think a lot of the Bridgend reporting falls into that. I'm not criticizing the individual journalists, I'm not accusing them of, of willfully uh, setting out to cause damage, but I, I think in the greater scheme of things, uh, the reporting almost certainly did more damage than it did good.

Those that study suicide and work in the field of suicide prevention are familiar with the impossibility of being able to point to one trigger that causes suicide. It is, in fact, a social issue that is individual and consequently variable, which can be frustrating, as Brayne highlighted, to journalists who want a neat little cause-and-effect package. It seems that the *South Wales Echo* is the only publication in this sample to realize that such a thing is not possible. Taking this into account then, the argument that journalists have a responsibility to report suicide and attempt to explain it to the public while also maintaining calm in our society, is stronger than ever. By limiting the discussion around suicide, journalists have damaged the quality of debate that the citizenry can have about this important social issue.

³⁶ Kerkhof and Arensman (2001) list reasons for why a suicide could occur: living conditions, personal relationships, ambitions, fulfillments, physical, sexual and mental maltreatment by parents in childhood, substance abuse, depression, hopelessness, powerlessness, personality disorders, criminal records, previous psychiatric treatments and a history of stressful traumatic life events including broken homes and family violence (2001: 32).

5.4(b) Frame and Method

The method that a person chooses to kill him/herself can be difficult to look at in terms of framing in the press, as quite often, it tends to be linked with causation/reason for a suicide. The easiest way to discuss it is through the use of discursive phrases, which I explored in depth in the last section of this chapter. In this sample, the three main frames to emerge around causation and method were knowledge of others/others' death 27 (8.4%), drugs and alcohol 19 (5.9%) and relationship breakdown 15 (4.7%). When looking at the specific discursive elements, however, what can be seen is that culture and questioning seem to go hand-in-hand. In the headline, for instance, when studying the method and frame employed, one would find crime 15 (37.5%) and culture and questioning each at 12 (30%). Rafferty (2008) explains that headlines serve two functions; the first is to act as a 'signpost to readers, telling them what the most important stories are,' and the second, is to act as a way 'to summarize the 'gist' of the report' (2008: 226). Based on my findings, before readers even got past the headline in the Bridgend stories they knew that there was a criminal aspect to the deaths that was influencing the youth of today, but that those in authority did not know why... yet. In the lead it was much the same, with culture 29 (32.2%), questioning 25 (27.8%) and crime 21 (23.3%) being highlighted as the critical frames when discussing method.



These frames reinforce what was seen in the last section: that journalists do not understand why suicide happens³⁷, and therefore try and fit each death into a neat little package. One way that they do so is by introducing discursive features around social class. For instance, when describing the death of Angie Fuller, a journalist wrote: 'Minutes later he [her boyfriend, Joel] was stemming the blood with a pair of tracksuit bottoms' (Appendix VIII). Angie's boyfriend, who found her hanging in the hallway, was shown to be a working-class lad. By including the detail of the pair of tracksuit bottoms the journalist was honing in on the discourse around the working-class stereotypes regarding the clothing that they wear³⁸. Journalists reinforced discourses that it only happens to 'them', 'those lower-class people', 'those people who suffer mental illness', 'those people who knew someone else who had died', 'those people who were doing drugs and alcohol.'

By framing the story in this way, journalists do two things. The first is they create a buffer zone around readers, telling them that suicide is not an acceptable way to die, and almost hint at the fact that if 'you' die by suicide, then 'you' will be relegated to a lower social standing. The second is that they reinforce the notion that working-class life is miserable, simultaneously warning those in the working class that suicide is not an acceptable way in which to die, while encouraging those in the middle class to feel good about their economic position. This was clearly evidenced when looking at frames and the suicide count³⁹. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many newspapers kept a count of those who died, using it as a hook to lure readers into a story. Based on the suicide count, *The Guardian* concluded that the suicide 'spate' in Bridgend was a Welsh, lower-class problem. That said, it was the Welsh Newspapers, as well as

³⁷ This will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six.

³⁸ The presence of social class in suicide reporting will be explored further in Chapter Six.

³⁹ Newspapers repeatedly listed the names of those who took their lives and the current death toll, either at the end of stories, or as part of sidebar stories.

The Sun (middle-of-the-road-tabloid) and *The Times* (political right) that referenced the suicide count the most. The Welsh Newspapers did so, I would argue, as more of a hook to bring to light a serious issue affecting a local community. *The Sun* 30 (85.7%) and *The Times* 26 (76.5%) did so to create distance from the deaths and to make it seem more of a South Wales problem, affecting only that region, rather than something that affected the entire UK. Regardless, when looking at framing and method, it is clear that journalists did not understand why the Bridgend suicides occurred, and by 'othering' the region, distance can be created, which reinforces the idea that suicide is not an acceptable method in which to die.

5.4(c) Frame and Location

As mentioned, the area of Bridgend gained a bad reputation as being a 'cause' for the suicides. Contrary to popular belief that the 'depressed area of Bridgend' was to blame for the deaths, unemployment was only linked to 3 stories that discussed the suicide count. But, even then, a closer textual analysis showed that 'Bridgend is the teenage suicide capital of Britain—death cult town', or 'a small town hit by a spate of suicides'. It was described as 'the South Wales community of Bridgend', a 'town hit by a wave of young suicides', or 'the Welsh town of Bridgend'. No matter what way one looks at it, the area in which these suicides took place was being 'othered'. Illustrating the area in terms of it being Welsh meant that a natural 'us against them' situation could take place. For example, it is not very often that one would see in a newspaper the phrase, 'the English community of Stratford-Upon-Avon'. By stressing the Welsh aspect, the national newspapers in England were able to create a barrier between the UK and Wales, and define suicide as a Welsh issue⁴⁰. Again, when newspapers highlighted that Bridgend was the 'teenage suicide capital of Britain', the discourse that was reinforced was that

⁴⁰ This only applied to national newspapers. Welsh newspapers simply referred to the area as 'Bridgend' or the 'Bridgend Borough'.

Wales had an issue with suicide; England did not, therefore, there must be something seriously wrong in Wales if people are killing themselves. By creating and reinforcing these discourses both in text and through the use of discursive features such as photographs (newspapers ran the same bleak picture to illustrate Bridgend over and over again), newspapers relegated the issue to a Welsh-only problem, thus limiting a serious and open debate about suicide that needs to be had in the UK.

5.4(d) Frame and Internet

Yet another way that journalists isolated the issue of suicide was by framing causation of death around the Internet. Newspapers blamed social networking sites as a cause for death based on the fact that several of the suiciders were friends on the likes of Bebo, Facebook and MySpace. Both the police and press alike attempted to draw links between the social networking sites and the suicides, but both were unsuccessful; no substantial evidence could be found to make this true. What seemed to be fuelling the discourse around the Internet as having played a role in the deaths of the suiciders was a lack of understanding on the part of the press as to how exactly social networking sites work. Paul Horton, News Editor and Director for Wales News Services Ltd. summed up the argument well in a telephone interview:

... because there was seven young people who had died, and there's this big question mark or not about Internet usage, um, parents don't understand Bebo, what's this latest craze all about? The same way when people started using the modern-fangled telephone, they were worried about use of, you know, it's natural, eh, thing when new machinery, new gadgets, you know come along. When the television started, I'm sure the older generation complained and said where's this new-fangled television gonna take us? I mean, I think part of that was the Internet, social networking, e-mailing; it's a closed world that teenagers have to themselves, which middle-aged parents, elders aren't, aren't tuned in with and don't understand it, and they're frightened about it. I bet you anything they don't understand that it's not the sort of thing to be frightened about, and I think, think that's certainly part of it. We do stories like this all the time, and for some reason, some catch people's imaginations and this is one of them, and I mean, it did run, and of course, within the short time, the numbers were growing and people couldn't explain it. I can't explain it, I mean, I've had everyone,

people ask me all the time, 'What do you think happened down in Bridgend?' I mean we've all got our own little pet theories, but, but I can't, I can't really explain it. Contagion, I think, is probably the best explanation.

Horton explains the fear that exists around the Internet, as well as the anxiety around not being able to explain away the suicidal deaths. He also highlights the fear adults have about a world in which children, or in the case of Bridgend, young adults, have to themselves. This reaffirms the discussion in Chapter Three around 'adultist' power over childhood, where I explained that childhood is a created life stage by adults, with created constructions of how children should act. As seen throughout this dissertation, the Bridgend suicides were constructed as an extension of childhood, thus the suicides in Bridgend were deemed to be outside the acceptable confines of childhood, and were deemed as 'deviant' acts. Additionally, Horton's reference to 'contagion', which is used quite frequently in the suicide field to stand in for 'copycat' is an interesting turn of phrase; contagion can also mean epidemic, virus, disease. While suicide can be seen as the consequence of an untreated disease—depression—in this context it is clear that falling back on the Werther Effect theory is the only viable explanation journalists had. Thompson (1999) reiterates, however that those who have been affected by suicide are at a much greater risk of completing suicide themselves:

Many of these suicides directly mimic the methods used by the initial individual who successfully completed suicide. These 'copycat' suicides are especially prevalent among the young... (Thompson, 1999: 449).

Again, Thompson's quote shows the commonly-held perceptions that suicide is a 'childish' act, and those that do complete the suicidal act were people who were vulnerable and susceptible to suggestion, something that 'adults' do not allegedly experience based on commonly-held discourses. During the Bridgend suicide reporting, journalists jumped to the conclusion that being friends on a social networking site meant close friendship; someone who was friends on a social networking site, with the person who had died, could potentially take their own life in a

copycat suicide. This became quite evident in the statements taken from social networking sites by newspapers to illustrate the point that they were causing the deaths. Additionally, as mentioned by Horton, by saying that social networking sites caused the deaths, journalists, politicians, and academics, were all able to spout the contagion theory of the Werther Effect—the more that suicide is reported, the more it happens—as the reason for the suicides. Horton explains further in this rather long passage that illustrates the misunderstanding between generations, as well as between older journalists and younger journalists in how the Internet/social networking sites play a role in suicide:

I think the media, and when you say media, I honestly think that social networking, Bebo, that is the media to that age group. Not *The Daily Express*, not the BBC Radio Wales, not, you know, middle-aged people read *The Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*. You don't see 17-year old kids wandering down the road clutching their *Daily Mail*. You don't see 21 year old boys tuning in to BBC Radio Wales. No. No, no they're not doing it. They're buying *Heat Magazine*. Yea? They're social networking on MSN, they're on Bebo. You know, I've got kids. You know, newspapers to them are old men's things; that's what I do, I'm an old man. They don't read newspapers, they don't watch the regional news, they don't listen to the local radio, but, but, they are obsessed with MSN, Bebo, texting, so, I, it's just my personal theory that there is massive media involvement, but it's self-generated media content; it's those kids, those young people, you know, building up a whirlwind of emotion about someone they knew: cousin's died across, across the other side of town, and a mystique grows up about Natasha, 'who's in a better place,' 'good luck babe', you know, 'I'll see you in heaven', 'the world's too good for a place' and it's like it's hero worship built up around the young person that's gone. I can't prove that, but it's just my pet theory.

Horton calls attention to two things—the first, that media use amongst young people centres around the Internet and social networking sites; the second, that older generations and older journalists do not understand the emotional language and the conventions by which young people explore their grief in an open, online community. Chapter Three focused partly on just that point, concluding, as did Williams and Merten (2009) that posting online after a suicide can help young people cope with their grief:

Posting commentary online allows multiple users to talk about their feelings and experiences and express grief in ways that might not feel comfortable in face-to-face interaction as they are simultaneously experiencing the grief process (2009: 71).

While there are risks related to online posting after suicide⁴¹, in the case of Bridgend, the research shows that copycat deaths were more likely to occur not because of media reporting, or because a person was 'friends' with the victim on a social networking site, but rather if a person had had direct contact with someone who had already taken their own life.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Journalism represents a cornerstone of liberal democracy, since it is charged with the role of holding people in power accountable and providing an objective, representative voice for the people, reflecting and reinforcing day-to-day political ideologies and societal discourses on their news pages. The analysis offered in this chapter demonstrates that suicide is an issue that is not understood by either journalists or the citizenry. It is a social issue that causes fear, anxiety and destabilization within a liberal democracy. This dissertation focuses on the role responsible journalism plays in society, and examines how journalists report suicide in an attempt to fulfil that social role.

This chapter focused mainly on findings taken from a six-month quantitative analysis sample of twelve newspapers reporting on the Bridgend suicides. Several important findings emerged during this analysis, probably the most prevalent of which was the fact that journalists did not understand why the suicides in Bridgend happened. Journalists have a responsibility to

⁴¹ See the following research:

Alao, A.K., Soderberg, M., Pohl, E.L., and Alao, A.L. (2006). Cyberspace: Review of the Role of Internet on Suicide. *Cyberpsychology and Behaviour* 9, pp. 489-493.

Eichenberg, C. (2008). Internet Message Boards for Suicidal People: A Typology of Users. *Cyberpsychology and Behaviour* 11, pp. 107-113.

Tam, J., Tang, W.S. and Fernando, D.J.S. (2007). The Internet and Suicide: A Double-Edged Tool. *European Journal of Internal Medicine* 18, pp. 453-455.

Thompson, S. (1999). The Internet and its Potential Influence on Suicide. *Psychiatric Bulletin* 23, pp. 449-451.

report the news to inform readers about what they should know, but journalists should also lead on editorial pages, advising readers what to think about the news. In my findings, only nine editorials ran in six months of coverage. Eight of those editorials ran in Wales, with *The Times* being the sole national newspaper to take a stance on the suicides. Suicide, as determined by the current societally-accepted discourse, is a threat to the social fabric. Based on that, newspapers should have been paving the way for citizens to engage in debate about this issue. Instead, newspapers turned away from their leadership roles, and let their sensationalist news coverage speak on their behalf.

Another key finding was that the Bridgend suicides were politically charged in Wales. The suicides represented more than just young adults taking their own lives; rather, these suicides highlighted serious issues facing Wales, such as deprivation, low unemployment and an absence of cultural cohesiveness that once had once been a part of country life was quite prevalent in the country. Journalists in Wales chose politicians as their primary sources for information, and also featured them quite prominently in photographs as well. Based on these findings, it became clear that journalists were helping politicians to ease the concerns of the citizenry by sending a clear message that the situation in the borough of Bridgend was under control.

In response to these findings, I would reiterate my suggestion that a new word for 'suicide' needs to be considered if alternative media discourses are to be created. I proposed the word 'illicide', defined as 'self-murder in order to make clear my mind', based on Shneidman's theory of psychache, which states that suicide is 'chiefly a drama of the mind' (1996: 3-4). One of the issues with using the word 'suicide' is that it is steeped in historical stigma, dating back to times of Antiquity. The word 'suicide' also does not incorporate an understanding that mental illness is primarily the leading cause of suicidal deaths. By changing how we speak about a

'suicide', I hypothesize a shift in the discourse around 'suicidal deaths'. No longer will a 'suicide' be confusing and frustrating to journalists – it can be understood that a mental illness caused the death, not, that the person truly wished to die; he or she simply wanted to rid themselves of the mental pain they were suffering. The fundamental issue with the current language used to describe someone who takes their own life is the fact that they have *chosen* death; it did not occur naturally, as Western discourses on death emphasize. By changing the language, perhaps the discourses, too, can change.

It was also clear from this quantitative research that the Internet is seen as a major threat to society, and that it is a double threat when suicide is involved. As shown in Chapter Three, the common belief in the literature around suicide is that young people who seek out entertainment and friendship online will end up being influenced and will consequently kill themselves. This has been reported in the press so as to create awareness of the threat and ensure that both the public and the government can respond to correct this unstable situation.

The fact of the matter is that suicide is a multi-faceted, complex social issue. When suicide occurs, it exposes tears in the social fabric that journalists then struggle to mend. Some of the visible 'tears' uncovered in this quantitative research are: that people choosing to die, goes against the accepted societal belief of 'survival'; that childhood is a threatened life stage, evidenced by the fact that those who kill themselves are infantilized and also evidenced by the moral panic in the wake of the Bridgend suicides around the Internet and social networking sites; and, lastly, that suicide underscores, yet again, the issues of social class that British society continues to face. At the crux of it all, journalists try to maintain stability within Britain's liberal democracy by writing around these three points, regurgitating stigmatized views on suicide, and ignoring these larger issues for the sake of trying to maintain control.

The next chapter of this dissertation, will examine more closely a sample of the news stories that ran throughout the first six months of 2008 in relation to the Bridgend suicides. The method of discourse analysis will be employed to delve deeper into the texts and determine what underlying discourses were available that were not picked up in my quantitative analysis. Chapter Six also examines one article extensively pointing out key trends in the newspaper coverage, using an interview with the journalist who wrote the story in order to provide some insight into production processes.

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Chapter Six: Discursive Practices in Suicide Reporting

6.1 Introduction

When studying discourse, the researcher is looking at a meaning-making process: 'discourse analysis is also a theory of language and communication, a perspective on social interaction and an approach to knowledge construction across history, societies and cultures' (Wetherell et al, 2004: 1). With these points in mind, the method of discourse analysis will be employed to take a closer look at the constructions in discourse that took place across the coverage of the Bridgend suicides between January 2008 and June 2008.

In the last chapter, quantitative results yielded from my content analysis were examined. What became clear from those findings was that journalists, in the case of the Bridgend suicides, further stigmatized the issue of suicide, thus limiting the debate about this social issue in favour of replicating already-acceptable stigmatized beliefs. This chapter will examine twelve stories to determine the common discourses that emerged, and one death⁴² in particular which draws together my findings from the last chapter, while also incorporating the findings that will be discussed here.

There will be three key sections in this chapter, broken down into subsections as needed. The first section will look at the sample of twelve articles, exploring interpretative repertoires: 'Interpretative repertoires are systematically related sets of terms, often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence, and often organized around one or more central metaphors' (Potter, 2000: 116). These interpretative repertoires are drawn upon quite extensively by journalists when trying to construct a particular vision of the world. This section will deal with

⁴² The death of 18-year-old Angie Fuller, who died at the beginning of February 2008 will be examined here. I decided to look at her death with greater care because of how ideologically rich her story was. Her death encompassed many of the discourses that emerged, and stigmas that were reinforced. For example, discourses around ethnicity, social class, childhood, gender and race emerged, while stigmas around mental illness, social class and childhood were also reinforced.

generalities, meaning how journalists used interpretative repertoires to generally describe the act of suicide and those who killed themselves in Bridgend: 'Discourse of this kind treats data as primary and only generalized, inexplicit formulations of the actions and beliefs [of the journalist]' (Potter, 2000: 116). One of the twelve stories will also be examined in depth and commentary from the journalist who wrote the story will be provided.

The second section of this chapter will look at categories of description. Categories, or the method of categorization, as described in Chapter Four, is a way of organizing people, objects and events as a thing with specific qualities and meaning. This section will examine five main categories that journalists used to explain suicide to its readers in the case of Bridgend: reaction to death by those left behind, reason for death, description of deceased, infantilization and suicide and Internet usage. By looking at the categories, it is possible to 'identify the ways in which participants [journalists] themselves actively construct and employ categories' (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 29). What will be seen in this section is that, rather than follow categorization by prototypes, meaning explaining suicide as something that is 'normal' and accepted in society, journalists instead defined the categories by particularization, placing all of the discourses firmly in the category of 'other', but in a way that attempted to normalize or reinforce for society-at-large.

The third section of this chapter will explain how the Bridgend suicides were socially represented to readers. Potter (2000) explains that how an issue is socially represented to the world 'helps people to perceive their world as safe and orderly' and helps promote 'communication between people' (2000: 211). The Bridgend suicides were socially represented by the newspapers in this sample through two ideological frames: Why suicide happens, and a frame of childhood. By doing this, Allan (1998) argues that journalists have ordered the world 'in conjunction with hierarchical rules of inclusion and exclusion (1998: 120).

The focus of this discourse analysis is the deaths of four people who were included in the Bridgend sample and were referenced time and again in the reporting of the other sixteen deaths that occurred in the six-month sample period. The four were: Angie Fuller, Nathaniel Pritchard, Kelly Stephenson and Sean Rees. The deaths represent different times in the coverage. Fuller's suicide was near the beginning, Pritchard and Stephenson's suicides were at the height of the coverage of the story, and Rees's suicide was towards the end. This is useful in showing the range of discourses that continued throughout the six-month sample period and also in showing how the coverage did not change significantly between February 2008 and June 2008. Between the four deaths, there were 46 news articles written over the six-month sample period. Of those, I chose twelve to study in depth⁴³. The articles came from the *South Wales Echo*, the *Western Mail*, *Wales on Sunday*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Guardian*. The newspapers were chosen, not only for their coverage, but as covering a spectrum of political leanings, with *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mirror* on the left, *The Sun* in the middle, and *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* on the right. The articles chosen were also representative, meaning that it was more important to analyze an article that dealt with a specific death, instead of just mentioning it in passing, or using it to illustrate the long list of deaths in the Bridgend area.

Before engaging with the sample, some background information on those people whose deaths studied would be helpful, in order that the results can be taken in context per specific case. Angeline (Angie) Fuller, eighteen, died at the beginning of February, 2008. In analyzing the coverage around her death, it was found that she was portrayed as a goth-like figure who

⁴³ These articles were chosen for two reasons; first to ensure a range of newspapers across the UK and across the political spectrum with which to work and to be able to draw comparisons. Second, in order to study the work of particular journalists; all of the journalists in this sample have written more than three articles about the Bridgend suicides, and, in most cases, were lead reporters on the story.

also happened to have a loving 'regular' boyfriend. Angie, not from Wales originally, had suffered from mental illness and also had attempted suicide several times before she completed the act. Nathaniel Pritchard was the youngest of the suiciders at fifteen years old. His death has always been portrayed in conjunction with that of his cousin, Kelly Stephenson, 20, who killed herself within hours of hearing that Pritchard had died. The two killed themselves in mid-February, 2008. Not much has been reported in the press about Pritchard's death. Initial media reports said that he killed himself to get back at a girlfriend who had started dating someone else behind his back. He allegedly called the girlfriend moments before he hanged himself, telling her it was her fault that he was going to die. This discourse, however, remained firmly within the arena of online stories, and no evidence of it could be found in printed articles in this sample. Upon hearing of Pritchard's death, Stephenson was distraught. Articles reported that Stephenson and Pritchard, who lived streets apart, were extremely close. Stephenson was gay and dated a university student. She was portrayed as a 'keen sportswoman'. It was Pritchard's parents who attacked the media at the height of the coverage (on February 20th and February 21st, 2008), deeming it responsible for all the suicidal deaths in the area. While Pritchard and Stephenson's deaths occurred in mid-February, the coverage of the two has since continued. In fact, since Stephenson has died, her own father has hanged himself (March 2009). For the purpose of this study, however, the coverage of their deaths over the period of 16th and 17th February, 2008 was looked at as this was sufficient to determine the categories and interpretative repertoires that journalists created. The last death examined in this study was that of Sean Rees, nineteen, a worker in the local Sainsbury's supermarket. During the reporting of his death, journalists described him as a man with a future: he had just learned how to drive, and he was contemplating going to university. His work at Sainsbury's, however, seemed to be the focal point of the coverage. A suggested hypothesis is that Rees was representative of

‘Valley boy makes good’, meaning that while he came from a working-class background, his chances of social mobility were significantly higher than others in this sample.

The suicides looked at in this chapter provide ideologically rich discourses around ethnicity, social class, childhood/youth, gender, sexuality, mental illness and the Internet, thereby reinforcing common stereotypes and stigmas around these issues. The findings in this chapter will reinforce my argument that, by continuing to stigmatize suicide, journalists help to maintain the status quo in society, but consequently deny the citizenry a chance to have open discussion and debate about this most important and complex social issue.

6.2 A Sampling of Interpretative Repertoires

What follows is a description of the articles chosen for inclusion in the discourse analysis. While Angie Fuller’s death was chronologically the first in the sample the articles pertaining to her will be left until the end of this section, to be analyzed in more depth and in order to situate her death within the wider context of the other deaths. The second death in my sample was that of Nathaniel Pritchard, aged fifteen. None of the articles printed in the newspapers dealt with Pritchard’s death in isolation. As his cousin, 20-year old Kelly Stephenson, hanged herself upon hearing of his death, the two were consistently reported together. In fact, because the two stories were referenced together, there was no analysis of why Pritchard chose to take his own life. Additionally, the reporting implied that the two deaths were linked, which was not actually the case: ‘The pair lived 14 houses away from each other in the Cefn Glas area of Bridgend and were said to have been close’ (Appendix XIII).

The articles chosen for analysis regarding their deaths came from *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Mirror* and the *Wales on Sunday*. Ironically enough, it was *The Guardian*, a left-leaning newspaper, and *The Daily Mail*, a right-leaning newspaper, that ran similar stories, with similar interpretative repertoires emerging. In their respective headlines, *The Guardian* wrote:

'Two cousins die from town hit by spate of young suicides', while *The Daily Mail* wrote: 'Cousins are in town hit by a spate of suicides'. This type of discursive phrasing was common throughout the coverage relating to the cousins: the suddenness of the deaths, the fact that the town was literally 'hit' by a force of death, showed the anxiety in the reporting around the suicides. Additionally, the headlines imply a depersonalization of the suicides; that the deaths were random and could not have been predicted. This explanation of suicide as an interpretative repertoire, as Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) explain, shows how the issue of suicide is a 'flexible resource', meaning that the act of suicide is a completely random and unpredictable act (2002: 105). In fact, this depersonalization and anxiety around the suicides was reinforced by a quote in *The Daily Mail*:

It's going crazy down in Bridgend and it's not going to stop. No one can understand what is going on. I know seven of the people who have killed themselves. People are saying it's got something to do with the Internet, but I don't believe that. But then I can't explain it either (Appendix XII).

What this quote illustrates is a lack of understanding about suicide and why it can happen, but also the quote implies a fear that suicide could be catching. There is a tinge of hopelessness, as if nothing at all will stop more suicides from happening.

The three remaining newspapers that reported Pritchard and Stephenson's deaths mostly tackled categories, socially constructed groupings that help make inferences about a particular issue (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 29). *The Sun* and *The Mirror* both went into great detail about the grief a suicide leaves in its wake, as well as questioning the Internet's role, and trying to create meaning as to why the suicides occurred. *The Wales on Sunday*, on the other hand, sought to put the death into perspective for its readers, while also defending the roles of family members and friends. These categories will be discussed in greater depth in the next section of this chapter. When it came to Kelly Stephenson, however, it was the Welsh Newspapers that

introduced some of the stigma around her death. The *Wales on Sunday* described the gay 20-year old as a 'sports fanatic', who liked to have 'nights out in Swansea', who 'worked, and loved making cocktails for the customers' while dating a 'university student'. The article also made it clear that 'both their parents were aware of their relationship'. As far as the family unit itself, the newspaper stressed that Kelly's family was cohesive, and described her cousin's family as 'close' and 'supportive'. Within these interpretative repertoires, journalists sought to regain stability, maintain the status quo, all in an effort to 'normalize' her death. Few would be surprised at the discourses that emerged around Kelly's sexuality, or that her 'gayness' was deemed somewhat acceptable due to the fact that she was dating a university student; a perfect example of Foucault's notion of 'rule-in, rule-out'. By explaining Kelly Stephenson's death in this manner of interpretative repertoires, journalists 'ruled in' the stereotypes about a gay woman who decides to die by suicide, all in an effort to 'normalize' the discourse for society.

Foucault explains:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based (Foucault, 1977: 304).

Thus, in this instance, journalists were the judge as to what was acceptable or not in the case of Kelly Stephenson's suicide.

In reference to Sean Rees, nineteen, the fourth death in this sample, the newspapers chosen – *The Times*, *South Wales Echo* and *The Western Mail* – similarly focused on the category of shock and grief of a suicide, with stories around this young man clearly embedded within certain assumptions about social class. In fact, in death, Sean Rees became known for working at Sainsbury's, yet he had plans to attend university. His future economic earning potential was also frequently brought to light and questioned; thus, Sean Rees's death became representative of social class. As stated earlier in this chapter, Sean Rees became idealized in newspapers as

having had the potential to 'make good', meaning that despite having a job at a supermarket, he had a chance of social mobility⁴⁴ because of his intentions to attend university. Despite that potential for social mobility, by choosing to take his own life, Sean Rees' death went against the socially-accepted discourse around how/when one can die, thus giving newspapers enough ammunition to reinforce that while it could have been possible for him to attend university, Rees would still have been a working-class 'lad'. As Entwistle (1978) states, social class is a much larger construction that encompasses more than just education; it also includes artistic taste, religion, speech, manners, dress, geographical location, size of residence, ownership of property, sources of income, and, one can now argue, method of death (1978: 35).

In terms of interpretative repertoires and social class, journalists frequently used language that implied that suicide is something that happens out of the blue and is not a chosen act. Take these two quotes about Sean Rees' death. In the *South Wales Echo*:

Madeleine Moon, MP for Bridgend and a Parliamentary champion for the Samaritans, said: 'This is another tragedy for a family and another life cut off – his whole potential has been wasted and left unknown' (Appendix XIV).

In *The Western Mail*:

Mr. Michaelides added: 'We keep on asking why these young people are dying, but we are not getting any answers. I would like to see everyone involved from family and friends to police and the authorities really working together to see if there is a connection' (Appendix XVI).

Both quotes imply that suicide is 'catching', similar to the common cold that can be passed from person to person; suicide is an abstract issue, one that happens, but is not chosen. In a telephone interview, Darren Matthews, Bridgend Branch Director for the Samaritans, discussed the issue of reporting suicide as an abstract concept:

⁴⁴ Social mobility is being able to elevate oneself from the working class to the middle class (Goldthorpe et al, 1980; Abercrombie et al, 1994; Halsey, 1986; Morrison, 1997; Heath and Payne, 2000; Aries, 1960).

They [journalists] didn't seem to take that there was a real life tragedy. Um, but yeah, they didn't focus on the fact of, well, hang on, they chose to do this, why do we think they chose to do it, um and so you know they, they seem to hook onto people saying, well you know, to me, they seemed fine, and they were happy, they were laughing and joking, um, but then, I would've thought that that perhaps they could have delved a little bit deeper into suicide and mental health and realized, well some of the happiest people, will come across as very, very happy, but that's because they've decided they're going to kill themselves and they've reached that decision and have made peace with themselves. Um, and so, they're putting things in order at home, and they are making sure the house is clean, the cat is fed, and things like that, can all be part of suicidal behaviour. So they didn't really look at anything like that, they just took it as, well, these kids died, but they seemed so happy, they had everything they wanted, why did they do it?

A particular interpretative repertoire around the 'type of person who would die by suicide' emerged from the reporting of Sean Rees' death. In the *South Wales Echo* story about Rees' death, a quote read: 'I'm really shocked—he wasn't the sort of person who would do this' (Appendix XIV). This sentiment can be seen across all articles in the six-month sample period examined here. There is a specific discursive construction around the type of person who would kill themselves. Mostly it revolves around outdated stigmatized vocabulary and the view that society is 'supposed' to have of those who suffer with mental illness. For instance, using the words 'crazy', 'mental' and 'nuts', conjures a particular image of people who are depressed, schizophrenic or bipolar. Additionally, mental illness has always been an issue of 'othering'. Depression happens to 'other people', suicide happens to 'other people'. At the root of this tends to be the issue of social class. There is little research to back up this argument, as it is difficult to prescribe a social class bracket to a person who is dead (coroners do not record this information on death certificates), but what has been found throughout the course of this study is that social class most certainly is reported in conjunction with a suicide story. It is represented through descriptions of the deceased, their jobs, education, family life, who they associate with, sexuality, spirituality and race. Thus, through the phrasing of interpretative repertoires,

journalists are providing context for how readers should interpret the social class aspect of a suicidal death. This context, then, as my own argument states, constructs a way for suicide to be interpreted that falls in line with the commonly-held beliefs around suicide in society, without throwing the social fabric off its balance.

6.2(a) The Suicide of Angie Fuller

Chronologically speaking, the first death of the four that were examined closely was that of Angie Fuller. Angie, aged eighteen, was the second girl to hang herself and the fourteenth suicide reported in the total coverage of the Bridgend suicides. Her story stood out mostly because of the picture⁴⁵ that typically ran with reports of her death, but also because of the interpretative repertoires used to define and describe her and the issue of suicide. In the case of Angie Fuller, three articles from two newspapers, *The Times* and the *South Wales Echo* were examined. Angie Fuller's suicide was delved into, not only because of its ideological richness, providing much information for the various categories journalists created to describe suicide, but also because the journalist who covered her death for the *South Wales Echo* agreed to be interviewed for this research.

The first thing that stands out with reporter Ben Glaze's three-page package is the photographs and the use of quotes as headlines (Appendix VI, VII). The headline on the front page of the February 6th, 2008, issue of the *South Wales Echo* reads: "'I love you my baby... and I always will'". The quote comes from Angie Fuller's boyfriend Joel Williams, who is pictured with her on the front page. Joel Williams head rests upon Angie Fuller's breast; while Fuller looks on sensual, with large, almond-shaped brown eyes, a dark and flawless complexion, and dark hair, wearing a dark, striped top and choker necklaces. In a telephone interview with me,

⁴⁵ See Appendix VI for an example.

Ben Glaze, a reporter with the *South Wales Echo*, who has covered the local Bridgend area for six years, discussed how he went about reporting Angie Fuller's death:

Um, yeah, we, we heard that there'd been another suicide, um, because I'd worked for Bridgend for two years initially, my contacts there were really good. I found out which sort of street it was, went up, you know, you go to the local news, you know you go out and meet people, go to the pub, go into the local shop, get there and five minutes later, you've found out which street. Find out which street, start knocking on a couple more doors, you get the name. Um, once you've got the name I phoned through to someone in the office, they fed the name to Facebook and MySpace and Bebo, it came up with this good looking girl, with her boyfriend, all the tributes are already there, I mean and that, to be honest, that was it, job done. When we found out, I mean it sounds crude again, because she was a good looking girl, the picture was always going to have more impact than the fact that she was a girl...

This quote from Glaze illustrates how journalists did not live up to their social responsibility to report suicide in a responsible manner. In fact, I would argue, how the story of Angie Fuller came to be reported was quite sensationalist and borders on unethical, as Ward (2009) explains:

Journalism ethics is a species of applied media ethics that investigates the 'micro' problems of what individual journalists should do in particular situations, and the 'macro' problems of what news media should do, given their role in society. Journalists, as members of news organizations, have rights, duties and norms because, as human beings, they fall under general ethical principles such as to tell the truth and minimize harm, and because as professionals they have social power to frame the political agenda and influence public opinion (Ward, 2009: 296).

Fuller's death, in this instance, might not have been reported, as Glaze himself admitted, had the photos on her social networking site not been so visually appealing. When looking at the text on the front page of the *South Wales Echo*, a key interpretative repertoire emerged: suicide was discussed in the abstract. Glaze quoted Joel Williams (Angie's boyfriend) as saying: 'At 1 am Monday morning, life took away from us one of the kindest, sweet-hearted, loving people we could ever have been blessed to know. I love Angie and I always will'. The quote infers that the abstract 'life' took Fuller away from her fiancé. Additionally, when looking at the choice of phrasing used, writing in the abstract can also be seen: 'But police have denied that the

teenager's death was linked to the spate of young people killing themselves in the borough – which has claimed 14 lives in just over a year'. Using the verb 'claimed' reinforced imagery of a 'suicidal' hand coming down and taking back what rightfully belonged to it. This is a clear example of 'anchoring', as Wetherell and Potter (1987) explain: '... [anchoring] allows the unfamiliar to be understood in terms of the more familiar' (1987: 141). The front page of the *South Wales Echo* reinforced the idea that suicide is something that spontaneously 'happens' and is not an active choice by the suicider. When asked about reporting suicide in an abstract manner, what Glaze believed to be true versus what was printed were at odds:

... I mean, when I wrote it [the article] I always, you know, you can't say, you can't write in a callous, cold-hearted way, because this person decided to kill themselves. a.) you can't pre-judge the inquest, um, I mean, no one's going to suggest that they just happened to be tying a noose in their bedroom and then accidentally slipped through it um, but, you know, these people, of course they decided to do this, themselves, the coroner, who dealt with most of the inquests he, said he didn't think that a lot of the young people realized how quickly one dies, when one hangs themselves. Uh, my personal belief is that, yeah it's a personal choice whether that's affected by grief of your friend, um, pain because you've broken up with your girlfriend, whether you're on drink or drugs. They still made the decision, albeit your mind might be altered at the time.

Moving into the inside double-truck (two facing pages), readers were once again faced with a quote in a headline: "Fiancé's grief for 'poor, lost Angie'". The subhead read: 'Another apparent teen suicide in Bridgend area as shop assistant found hanged after night party' (Appendix VII). There were three pictures of Fuller on the inside pages; one, the picture already shown on the front page, but a smaller version, another, where Fuller was wearing a strapless dress, clearly dressed up for a special event. The third, and largest, picture of the three, on the top inside left side, where the reader's eye is automatically drawn, is a smiling picture of Fuller, wearing a dark top, black hat, with her hair braided, holding what can be assumed to be a cup with an alcoholic beverage in it and a packet of cigarettes. The cut line under the picture reads:

“‘I don’t like myself.’ Angie Fuller was found dead in the home she shared with her fiancé Joel Williams, above right”. Reporter Glaze explained his reasons for running the story as he did:

I tried to treat it as I would any other tragic death, so had Angie died in a car crash and her boyfriend had left some of the messages, and she hadn’t of died as part of, you know, these Bridgend suicides, then the headline would’ve been the same, the picture would’ve been the same, and the treatment it got would have been the same, it would’ve still been on front because the beautiful quotes, because it’s a tragic story, because she’s a good looking girl, it was a beautiful picture . . .

Glaze reinforces what was discussed earlier; that the reason this suicide was covered as it was, was not because it was based on some idea of ‘news’, but rather that there was a ‘beauty’ to her death, a sensationalist draw because of the ‘beautiful quotes’, the fact of it being a ‘tragic story’, that she was a ‘good-looking girl’, and because he had a ‘beautiful picture’. In fact, Glaze highlights the issue that I have been arguing throughout this dissertation that suicide in a ‘young person’, such as Angie Fuller was a waste of not yet realized potential. The journalist, instead of playing the ‘responsible’ role and informing readers of a social problem that was affecting his regional area instead turned the story into something of a tragic fairy tale, one that would tug at the heartstrings, reinforcing the sense that Angie Fuller, similar to that of all the other ‘young’ suiciders in the region were too young to fully grasp the consequences of their choice to die. By doing this, journalists covering these suicides limited discussion and debate about the issue of suicide.

Without glancing at the text, categorization has emerged in just the headlines and sub-heads of the *South Wales Echo* story. These categories will be discussed in more specific detail, taking into account the entire sample, in the next section of this chapter. Here, however, in terms of this current discussion on interpretative repertoires— which is ‘pre-eminently a way of understanding the content of discourse and how that content is organized’—the headline implies that Fuller, who, the article reveals, suffered from mental health difficulties, was

someone to be pitied, who had no direction in her life (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 90). This is a large claim to make about those who suffer from mental illness, with little evidence to support it. Again, in the subhead, the story is framed in terms of certain social conceptions of childhood; despite the fact that Fuller was an employed, eighteen-year-old woman, her death is referenced as 'another apparent teen suicide'. Social class is also introduced in the subhead, with the description of Fuller as a 'shop assistant'. The subhead reinforces the argument about her mental state hinted at in the headline; that she was a 'partier', because she hanged herself after she attended a 'night party'. It is the large picture, though, that ties everything together: here is a dead, smiling, working-class girl, who liked to party, but hated herself, therefore she killed herself. What is being conveyed to readers is that unless you, the reader, fall into one of these categories, then suicide will not affect your life. In an attempt to maintain stability in society and reaffirm that suicide only happens to a particular 'sort' or 'grouping' of person, journalists have overwhelmingly marginalized the complexities of suicide.

One example of such marginalizing of suicide can be seen in the description of Fuller, just hours before she died, and the 'victim' of her suicide, her fiancé, Joel Williams. While Williams was not interviewed for this article himself, Glaze took his words from various social networking sites and used them as quotes; in addition, Glaze quoted others who explained what Williams went through the night he found Fuller dead. One paragraph sums it up well:

Angie is understood to have killed herself after the couple held a late-night party. Joel went to bed early but Angie continued partying downstairs. He woke hours later and was worried because Angie was not in bed beside him. Sarah said: 'Joel found the bedroom door was locked and had to kick his way out, only to find Angie dead on the landing' (Appendix VII).

This paragraph reinforces the 'partier' theme that was found in the headline, subhead and cut line. It also portrays Fuller as conniving, in that she locked the door so that Williams could not get out of the room. It portrays him as a victim in his own home, first by being locked in, and

second by finding his dead fiancé on the landing. Other references to the victimization⁴⁶ of those left behind can be found in the description of the couple: 'The couple got engaged last year, but had delayed their wedding several times, according to friends.' There is no explanation as to why this happened, but the story does go on to explain that Fuller suffered from mental illness and was also 'needy'. Excluding specific information about why the marriage did not take place adds to the argument that Fuller was fickle, or 'lost', as the headline stated. Glaze also described Williams as being in mourning, and quoted from his MySpace page to describe his mood as 'lonely and crushed'. By treating Williams as a 'victim' of suicide, the *South Wales Echo*, like all other newspapers in this six month sample, 'othered' the person who died (See Appendices VI-XVI). There is little sympathy or understanding for the person who died; little discussion of why they took their own life; and there is no exploration in newspapers as to how it could happen. This is further evidence that British Newspapers did not report these suicides responsibly, and consequently limited discussion about the issue of suicide.

This article, as with the remaining twelve in this qualitative analysis shows that the reasons for death and the description of the deceased were closely linked. The articles feed into the discussion that was had earlier in this chapter around social class. In the case of Fuller, she was described as a 'young suicide victim', which implies connotations of childhood⁴⁷, and also abstract reporting around the phrase 'suicide victim'. If Fuller chose to take her own life, as police and the coroner said, then how could she also be a victim? One can be a victim of sexual assault by another, a victim of a crime by another, but if one chooses a course of action, and then dies as a result, you cannot be portrayed as the victim. Fuller was also described in terms of her cultural identity, as well as her mental status:

⁴⁶ Such interpretative repertoires around victimization were quantified in my content analysis findings. Such terms were found in headlines 15(4.7%) and in the lead of a story 28(8.7%).

⁴⁷ This will be explored extensively in the last section of this chapter.

Mum-of-four Sarah said Angie, a fan of Goth culture and music and who worked at Jaeger clothes shop at Bridgend Designer Outlet, Sarn, suffered from depression and had previously slashed her wrists and taken an overdose: 'I've known Angie since she was five. She was very needy' (Appendix VII).

The story went on to describe Fuller's future as 'looking good' because she had just become engaged, but, through a sidebar, attempted, somewhat half-heartedly to delve into the state of Fuller's mental health, based on what she had written on a social networking site: The comments she has posted about herself offer a valuable insight into why the bright eighteen-year-old who was engaged to Joel Williams, may have taken her own life: 'I hate religion, I love my boyfriend and I had all my hair cut short and dyed purple yesterday' (Appendix VII). One of the fundamental issues with this commentary is that it is just that: commentary from a journalist. Glaze tried to rationalize Fuller's death, based on what she had written on a social networking site. The statements she made about herself explain no more about her mental health status on the night she died than they do on the day she was born, yet they were relied upon, as if they gave some new insight as to why her suicide occurred.

An issue that emerged as a result of this study is that journalists relied quite heavily on information posted on social networking sites. This information, however, is not always updated regularly, and really can only shed some light on a person's (self-represented) mood on the particular day that the information was posted. In the case of Fuller, Glaze described how important social networking sites have become to reporters when covering stories like suicide, where police and charities are telling journalists to stop writing yet journalists are still negotiating that role of having a duty to report the issue of suicide:

Unfortunately, the police completely shut down, um, their sort of co-operation with us. That wasn't forthcoming, so as soon as, you know, someone would die, the police wouldn't release the name either, because they only, they adopted this policy that they could only release the name if they were looking for someone in connection with it, i.e., if it wasn't suspicious and they didn't need the media's help, they wouldn't release the name. It always comes out because a.) you start

knocking doors and everyone knows everyone else and people are happy, or, at least, content to tell you the name of the dead person. As soon as that happens, you get on your mobile phone, or your laptop, you type their name into Google, or MySpace, or Facebook, up will come dozens of pictures, up will come all tributes, so it's a simple job, and I mean, other people sort of have accused us of lazy journalism, they're not lazy, it's the fact that, if this is the only avenue available to you, this is the avenue you will take. All the tributes are there, so you copy and paste the tributes, you copy and paste the pictures, um, they're already in the public domain, so other, some of the youngsters who's written these tributes, they accuse us of being vultures and parasites, and say that we shouldn't be taking them. Well, they're on a public website, literally anyone in the entire world can access these; they know when they're writing, that they are writing on a public website.

The public/private debate around the public sphere⁴⁸ seems to highlight one of the most common misperceptions about social networking sites presented here in terms of coverage of the Bridgend suicides. Not everyone who posts on one of these sites understands that they are open to the public, that what they write can be printed in newspapers, regardless of whether permission is given or not. Upon further analysis of Glaze's quote, it can be seen, yet again, how 'young people' were treated as if they were children; for example when he discusses how those who were bereaved called journalists 'vultures and parasites' for taking information from websites that were in the public domain, he implies their upset is more a temper tantrum that could be seen in a child, rather than a complaint lodged by an adult. Fenton (2010) describes the usage of material like this as a 'decline of journalistic integrity', meaning that journalists are exploiting 'a human tragedy' for entertainment, rather than to inform (2010: 558).

As mentioned, elements of social class were also present throughout the *South Wales Echo* article. While it is clear that Fuller was a working-class girl, as implied by the newspaper article in the description of her job as a shop assistant, and her alleged partying lifestyle, the paper also made mention, as with Sean Rees, that there was the possibility for upward social

⁴⁸ I am conscious that this is an entirely different debate to the one being had in this dissertation. Research into social networking, the public sphere and the privacy debate, is needed, but cannot be tackled here due to its extensiveness.

mobility. This mobility was inferred based on her engagement to the 'love-dovey' Williams, the fact that they lived in a 'three-bedroom, mid-terraced home', and also based on quotes from friends that 'the future looked good'. For Fuller the positive constructions of her life seemed to outweigh the negative ones. Fuller was English, not Welsh, originally from Shrewsbury; she had only lived in Wales for about six months before her death. She also followed a 'Goth' lifestyle, choosing to listen to rock musicians Placebo, Alice in Chains and The Smashing Pumpkins. Fuller was also mixed race, with one parent Caucasian and the other Indian. While none of these elements in and of themselves can shed light on why she decided to hang herself, journalists constructed a narrative of her life which portrayed her as 'different', both mentally and physically, to the rest of us, thus establishing a discourse that could be considered representative across the entire six-month sample—that those who kill themselves are not 'normal'; they are 'different'. Journalists illustrated this point by creating interpretative repertoires, as discussed in this section, around sexuality, social class, mental status and Internet usage.

Suicide is considered, as explained throughout this thesis, to be the least socially accepted type of death. It is stigmatized, misunderstood, marginalized, sensationalized and feared. When those conceptions of suicide are combined with society's prevailing discourses around sexuality, social class, and mental status, we are left with an issue that is fundamentally shaped by stereotypes, and thusly vilified. British Newspapers have created an acceptable meaning-making process as to why suicide occurs, which reinforces stigmatization, stereotyping and the vilification of those who do take their own lives. In the case of Fuller's death, Glaze finally admits that her death should not have been reported at all and that it was sensationalism, not responsible journalism that reporters were seeking:

... I, particularly with this story, because there was still, you know, reporting by others of a suicide pact and everything else; well, it was clear that Angie wasn't part of any suicide pact she was being, a troubled young woman who had tried to take her life several times before. She obviously had her own issues, she didn't know a lot of the other people, um, she, you know, let's say she was an isolated incident, and had she have killed herself 20 miles away she wouldn't really be a story

This section on interpretative repertoires serves to explore the general descriptions of those who took their lives. The four deaths examined each highlight some of the key categories that will be discussed in the next section. These categories should be considered ever-changing groupings, defined and constructed by journalists, which can therefore be changed and redefined by them as well. The fundamental reason to conduct this discourse analysis in this way is, as Wetherell and Potter (1992) explained 'to gain a better understanding of social life and social interaction from texts' (1992: 2).

6.3 Categories of Description

It became clear during the Bridgend suicides that journalists constructed particular ways in which the deaths should be understood. Suicide, as discussed throughout this dissertation, is a complex and multifaceted social issue. Sorting through its complexities is not easy, yet British Newspapers, in the case of the Bridgend suicides, constructed five categories as methods of explanation, leaving no room for any other discourses. Categories, as Wetherell (1996) stated, 'act like a template for making sense of society and for organizing perceptions of self and other. The categories we use in everyday life do not arise spontaneously, however. They are not idiosyncratic but consensual, conventional and socially constructed' (1996: 212). Thus the five categories—reaction to death by those left behind, reasons for death, description of the deceased, infantilization and suicide and Internet usage— that will be explored in-depth were not spontaneously created by journalists; rather, journalists have socially constructed them, based on socially-accepted discourses of suicide in society. Categories by their nature are

malleable and can change over time, but, in this instance, the stories in this sample, whether Welsh or national in their origins, fit into these five categories of description (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 29). As Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out, 'categories are flexibly articulated in the course of certain sorts of talk and writing to accomplish particular goals, such as blamings or justifications' (1987: 116). As will be shown in the rest of this chapter, in order to explain both blaming and justification for suicide, journalists created these categories to reinforce commonly held and stigmatized beliefs around the issue of suicide. Those beliefs led to the particularization of categories, as discussed in Chapter Four. In short, within the categories there is the 'norm', or, as Wetherell and Potter (1987) put it, the 'prototype', but, for every accepted discourse, there is also an unaccepted one. In this case, it is termed particularization, or the 'other'. Particularization is necessary, Billig (1985) argues, to help people deal with the world:

Much of thinking is seen as a process of locking the unfamiliar into safe, familiar categories... the image of the person to emerge from this approach resembles that of a bureaucrat sensibly ordering the messy stimulus world (1985: 87).

Thus, with an issue like suicide, journalists had no choice, as Billig would argue, than to create safe, familiar categories with which they could understand this issue. Consequently, what was seen from these categories is that every single one of them particularized its category, meaning that each of these categories, simply by their construction, 'othered' the issue of suicide, leaving no room for alternate discourses.

6.3(a) Reaction to Death By Those Left Behind

When a loved one takes their own life, the reaction goes beyond that of a normal death. While the five stages of grief can be seen to take place in the grieving process, with a suicide there is an extra level of grief and reaction. Suicide carries stigma, and when a loved one takes his or her own life, it leaves those who are left behind a difficult path to trudge. From my own experience,

for example, there is the decision whether to tell anyone or not; the incessant hashing and rehashing of last hours and days to recall whether or not a signal was missed; there is concern and fear that others could do the same thing; and there is the never-ending questioning of why it happened. *The Times*, when reporting the death of Angie Fuller, highlighted the 'why' question quite well. Quoting a man named only as Phillip, who had previously attempted suicide, *The Times* provided some much-needed understanding for those who were grieving:

It feels like nobody has identified the real causes why young people and teenagers are having difficulties. The 'romanticizing death' angle is a nice line, but nobody who is connected with other people goes onto the Internet and thinks, 'I know, I think I'll kill myself'. You're not going to do it to get on to television. Looking at the reports into these deaths, I was struck by the lack of insight into the real reasons why any person might feel depressed. That families are very much separate. That there are parents who just switch on the television instead of being involved in their children's lives. They are too interested in mundane stuff like celebrities. It sounds so simple, but what I lacked in my life was a person who would engage with me at a profound level, who would allow me to be exactly as I was (Appendix VIII).

The *South Wales Echo* and the *Western Mail*, on the other hand, illustrated the more common reaction to a suicide when reporting Sean Rees' death: 'Yet again here in Bridgend we are mourning the loss of another young life. We just keep on asking why' (Appendices XIV, XVI). The first newspaper example points out that suicide can be complicated; there is mental illness involved, and simple answers, like blaming news coverage, or the Internet is an easy way out when dealing with this most complicated of issues. The Welsh newspapers, however, reflect more the process of reacting to a suicidal death, the sincere despair of wondering why someone would take their own life. *The Times* and *The Guardian* both expressed confusion that someone who was 'happy' and 'brilliant' should die by suicide; such qualities should make them immune (Appendices VII, XIII).

To highlight this, I refer to the following two quotes. The first appeared in *The Times*, where someone who knew Rees said, 'Sean was always really happy, always smiling. I'm really

shocked. He wasn't the sort of person who would do this. He had loads of friends and was really popular' (Appendix XV). This passage shows the disbelief felt by those left behind that someone who appears to be happy could in fact want to take their own life. *The Guardian* pursued a similar angle. In describing Nathaniel Pritchard and Kelly Stephenson's deaths, the newspaper quoted someone close to them as saying: 'Kelly and Nathaniel were both brilliant kids with good futures ahead of them. We would never have thought in a million years that they were capable of anything like this' (Appendix XIII). There is a societal construction around the 'sort' of person who would kill themselves; this quote reinforces the fear attached to that construction when a family announces to the world that a loved one has died by suicide. Inherent in this construction is societal stigma, particularized and thrust upon families in times of grief. What this shows is a larger disconnect in societal understanding that mental illness and suicide can actually happen to anyone. No one is immune. Yet the way that these deaths were constructed for readers inferred that there are particular commonalities between those that die, hence the construction of the category, but, within that, there is further particularization to make the uneasy, easy.

Another fear that was represented in newspaper articles in this sample was the fear that suicide is 'catching'. This too was referenced in the *South Wales Echo* article regarding Angie Fuller's death: 'Alice Collins, 21, who lives in Nantymoel, said: 'It's ridiculous, I'm worried now for the health of every young person in the Valleys. Most of those that have died are about my age' (Appendix VII). *The Daily Mail* also reinforced this when discussing the deaths of Nathaniel Pritchard and Kelly Stephenson: 'It's not going to stop. No one can understand what is going on' (Appendix XII). Instead of putting suicide into perspective for readers, the newspapers chose to let the quotes stand alone, which further particularized the issue, creating a panic of sorts. Goode and Ben-Yehuda explain this panic as, 'a kind of fever... characterized by

heightened emotion, fear, dread, anxiety, hostility and a strong sense of righteousness' (1994: 31). These quotes illustrated that when a suicide happens, it is not just those immediately in contact with the deceased who are affected; in fact, suicide affects and can panic an entire community. These quotes, and the newspapers use of them, show a lack of understanding around suicide, and also highlight the fact that journalists did not live up to their social responsibility in portraying suicide in a way that readers could understand. The fact that a person in the community fears that those around her 'could be next' highlights the existence of a discursive gap between the issue and how the issue is portrayed. Suicide is not something that can be given from one person to another; it is not a contagious disease, but newspapers did little throughout this six-month sample to dispel this notion.

Another example illustrating the lack of understanding of how and why suicide happens came in a *Daily Mail* article regarding the deaths of Nathaniel Pritchard and Kelly Stephenson: 'One of Kelly's Internet friends said: 'I know seven of the people who have killed themselves. People are saying it's got something to do with the Internet but I don't believe that. But then I can't explain it either'' (Appendix XII). *The Mirror*, also in its reporting about the deaths of Pritchard and Stephenson stated: 'We just don't understand what is going on in Bridgend' (Appendix X). These quotes lend further evidence that journalists missed a critical opportunity to explain suicide to readers. With the evidence stacking up against press reporters about how they report suicide, based on the fact that they did not explain it well enough to prevent a moral panic, the question that begs to be asked is: do journalists get any training on how to report suicide? Mike Dodd, spokesman for the Press Association explored this topic with me in a telephone interview. He said:

No we don't get any training on how to report, I mean who's going to give it to you? Who's actually, what you're going to get, I mean, this is one of the things that again concerns me, is that when people want, they want to talk about

training on reporting suicide and what they actually want to do is tell you this is the way I think you ought to do it, that's what they're saying. Now, the fact of the matter is, um, I don't think there is any ideal way to report suicide, in any way shape, manner or form. Uh, there are those who would like to impose some time, some form of, of doing it, but it depends, it depends one, on the situation, um, you know, it depends on all sorts of things, I mean, some suicides, no matter what you say are, are grim and horrible, and it, and although people write about suicide, they tend to write about suicide in the abstract, it may well be of course because they then want to say '17-year-old Fred Jones' found his life so horrible that he ended it.

Dodd expresses indignation in response to my raising the question of training being provided to journalists reporting suicide, but his response also reveals how journalists construct categories to make it easier to report: '... and although people write about suicide, they tend to write about suicide in the abstract'. He underscores that adults cannot deal with the fact that someone so young would want to kill themselves; that they do not realize how precious life actually is. This illustrates the distancing techniques, or particularization, that occurs in the category of 'reaction to death'. While having a reaction of grief to a suicide is 'normal', what has been done in the reporting of Bridgend is, as Billig (1985) suggested, a particularization which consisted of 'splitting categories in parts' to help delineate between tolerance of the issue (reaction of grief) versus prejudice of the issue (reaction of grief to a suicide) (1985: 88).

6.3(b) Reason for Death

The second category to emerge from an analysis of the twelve-story qualitative sample was the reasons for death. So far this chapter has already discussed the reporting of suicide in the abstract, which seems to have a firm placement amongst both interpretative repertoires, and the last category, reaction to death. Three discursive reasons in the sample were given for why the suicides happened in the Bridgend area: media reporting, coping skills and mental illness. When looking at the overall sample quantitatively, and when analyzing causation with the suicide count (a death list that journalists ran with each story to keep track of the number of

deaths), my research showed three main reasons for death: knowledge of others/others' death 53 (16.5%), social networking sites 44 (13.7%), and mental health 31 (9.6%). Contrary to popular belief that the 'depressed area of Bridgend' was to blame for the deaths, unemployment was only linked to 3 (0.9%) stories that discussed the suicide count. I point this out here to illustrate how, on this particular topic, causation of death results in both my quantitative study and qualitative study are quite similar. The ways in which journalists have reported death in the abstract has been discussed in both this chapter, and the previous chapter. In brief, here again the analysis showed how journalists frequently used language that implied that suicide is something that happens 'out of the blue' and is not a chosen act; it is spontaneous, rather than planned, (quite similar to how young people and children are perceived; they are impetuous and do not have 'life experience' from which to draw before making hasty decisions) or so the British Press would have us believe. For example, in a *South Wales Echo* story about the death of Angie Fuller, the newspaper begins one of its stories with the following statement: 'Bridgend MP Madeleine Moon is to lead a House of Commons debate addressing the spate of suicides from the borough, which on Monday apparently claimed its 14th victim' (Appendix VII). While suicide can be classified as a disease of the mind, it is not a disease that can be caught, as reiterated several times throughout this chapter. The action of suicide itself cannot 'claim' anything as it is not a concrete disease. This reporting of suicide in the abstract creates distance between the act itself and those who are reading and reporting the story. In a telephone interview with me, Chris Frost, Chair of the Ethics Committee with the National Union of Journalists, tried to shed some light on why journalists might turn to reporting suicide in the abstract:

Um, it, it goes, um, and our view of suicide hasn't changed hugely as far as I can tell over the last 50 years, I mean, this is something I've, I have done some more research on, not fantastic amounts but uh, certainly on the ethical side of it, and

uh, our view of suicide as something criminal is no longer with us, I mean that was changed back in the 60's, um, so we've managed to get rid of that but we've not moved very much further than that, it's still something moderately shameful um, so we will go to some extent to try and suggest that it wasn't the person's fault, it wasn't a deliberate choice to take their life, we won't go as far as they do in some of the Catholic countries for instance, but I mean certainly there's an expectation that we would try and suggest there were other solutions, but that's purely culturalist, not any kind of deliberate approach.

Frost's comments on how journalists report suicide in the abstract highlights again the commonly accepted societal discourses that journalists mirror back to society. Instead of responsibly reporting the act of suicide, and trying to shed light on alternative interpretative repertoires, or categories, journalists reinforce the ones available to them, creating distance between the act and what is 'normal', as well as blaming other things for the deaths. The largest, and, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, the most far-fetched idea presented was that media reporting was causing the continuation of the suicides. The Werther Effect, as it is called, states that the more suicide is reported, the more deaths there will be. I take issue with this research as it cannot be reliably replicated⁴⁹, but also note here that it is not the purpose of this dissertation to refute the findings. Rather, I raise the Werther Effect research as a way to illustrate what journalists were thinking about when apportioning blame for the suicides, and also to show their lack of responsible reporting when disseminating this research to readers. There is a difference between responsible and irresponsible reporting of suicide. As argued throughout this thesis, journalists have a social responsibility to report journalism in a sensitive

⁴⁹ As discussed in depth in Chapter Three, this piece of research by Phillips (1974) has been hotly contested since its publication. The research was based in the US and has been used to argue against media reporting of suicide throughout the world. The key issues with the research are, first that, in the choosing of newspapers, a representational sample, available and readable to all social classes, was not chosen. Second, that the sample was based on the post-war period, but did not acknowledge research around higher increases of suicide during and after wartime (Kushner and Sterk, 2005: 1141-1142). Lastly, while the study tried to draw national comparisons of suicide, Phillips did not take into account the regionality of 'national' newspapers in the US. For example, while *The New York Times* is considered a national newspaper, it mostly covers the New York and Northeastern regions of the US. What is most important here, however, is the fact that the correlation between suicide and reporting has to be considered year-on-year. In the case of Bridgend, the suicides in the region had not been reported in 2007 in either the Welsh or national press.

and accurate manner, without adding moral panic or stigmatization to the issue. In a telephone interview, Mark Brayne, former Director for the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma, talked about the role of journalism and journalists in trauma reporting, such as suicide. He said:

MB: I think my fundamental point that I would want to make in this context then is to, uh come back to, come down to a, a rare uncomfortable question for journalists, a very challenging question for journalism, which is what is journalism for, is journalism there to entertain, sell newspapers, push up ratings, appeal to, um the lowest common denominator, that sell for their own sake, or is journalism there for an higher purpose? Now, I have a rather unfashionable view of journalism, um, unfashionable among journalists, in that I think journalism, journalists have a far greater responsibility to society than many are willing to contemplate. Um, journalism matters much more than journalists realize because an irresponsible journalism, that represents the planet on which we live, the society in which we live, um in a disjointed, dysfunctional manner, and is, is corrosive, is dangerous and is ultimately profoundly irresponsible, you know, whether we're looking how individuals live in community, uh, uh, or whether one is looking at how humankind lives on the planet, so I think the argument, arguments, about press freedom that we report what's there because we have a right to do that, I don't think that those arguments will stand the test, of, of history, um and I, my own view is that journalism has taken an understandable, but very dangerous wrong turning for quite some time now, where it has all about, been about the rights to report, um, freedom of information, with very little contemplation of responsibility, um, and, so that's the, sort of the context in which I see journalism, the practice of journalism as a whole, and it's very unfashionable, in fact very, very few people are making this, this case, um...

AL: Why is that?

MB: Because journalists, I think they're one of the very last professions to be unregulated, to somehow put themselves above, sort of on a, on a, on a pedestal that's separate from society, as if journalists are putting themselves in a kind of 'holier than thou' self righteous position of somewhere in having the right, the right end, the right to and the responsibility for, pointing out everybody else's mistakes, um, so that journalists are, certainly in the UK and on the continents as well, don't really seem as accountable to anybody, except some kind of higher, self-defined definition of 'truth' um, the fact, um, and I think that's extraordinary, extraordinarily arrogant actually

To further Brayne's point about journalists arrogantly pointing out a 'kind of higher, self-defined definition of truth', newspapers throughout the course of the Bridgend suicides made unsubstantiated statements about a suicider's state of mind without providing context, nor evidence for readers. For example, in *The Western Mail* article about Kelly Stephenson killing

herself, the article quoted her girlfriend as saying: 'She never spoke about killing herself, ever. She always said suicide was a stupid and selfish thing to do. What she did was totally out of character' (Appendix IX). The reporter did not go on to unpack this idea. First, it is clear that her girlfriend was suffering what is termed 'survivor's guilt'; she was trying to make sense of the death and was pondering past conversations about Stephenson's viewpoints on suicide. The article also does not put this quote in context. There is no explanation as to why Stephenson might have died. Stephenson knew several of the other Bridgend suiciders before her cousin died – this was published quite frequently – however, none of the coverage throughout the six-month period discussed that those who have been affected by a suicide are more likely to attempt suicide themselves in the months that follow (Pirelli et al, 2009; Gould et al, 2003; Brent et al, 1993). Stephenson's reported comment about suicide being 'stupid and selfish' is a standard reaction to a suicide. Ironically, her comment about suicide before her death could be considered foreshadowing for how her own death was treated. She bought into societal discourses of suicide being a 'childish' act, as she said in her own words, perhaps something 'stupid and selfish' that a child would carry out. Yet, she herself, at 20, could not be considered a child. This reinforces how engrained societal discourses around suicide and linking it to childhood actually are in the collective psyche. It also shows how she was trying to cope with the deaths. Unfortunately, as the media reported, when her cousin then took his own life, it was too much, and she then ended her own life. Based on Stephenson's experience with suicide, responsible journalists had a role to play when reporting the comments of those who are left behind. Suicide bereavement is just as complicated and critical as the act of a suicide, and the reporting of it as important as reporting the actual act itself, and yet again, as Wetherell and Potter (1987) pointed out, particularization, or creating boundaries of suicidal grief, occurred

within this category's discourse (1987: 124). Prevention, in this case it seems, would have been intervention. A responsible journalist would have made *that* the story.

The last reason that emerged as a cause for death in the qualitative analysis was that of mental illness. The issue with reporting mental illness is twofold. First, journalists are to be commended for stating that mental illness might play a role in suicide. It was here that journalists attempted to typify, or create, a category prototype⁵⁰, a small step in the right direction; however, the way that mental illness was reported still shows a misunderstanding of what it is and what role it eventually plays in a suicide, thereby creating a 'fuzzy set' within the category. This highlights the fact that, while category members have much in common, they also have many differences (Wetherell and Potter, 1987: 119). For example, newspaper articles about Angie Fuller, Kelly Stephenson and Sean Rees all implied that a smiling happy person will not/should not kill themselves. As stated earlier in this chapter by Darren Matthews of the Bridgend branch of the Samaritans, a person who is happy could be that way because they have finalized their plans for taking their own life. *The Sun* quoted someone as saying: 'I saw Kelly a month ago and she was fine – smiling and laughing' (Appendix XI). There is a societal image of a mentally ill person which is based on a stigmatized view of depression; a sad, down-in-the-dumps person, who does not leave the house, who cries all the time, and is separate from society (Thornicroft, xii). While this might be one picture of a depressed person, most certainly it is not the only one.

6.3(c) Description of Deceased

The newspapers in this twelve-article sample offer a detailed picture of how the four deaths were reported in the larger sample of 46, which was the total number of stories published across

⁵⁰ As stated in Chapter Four, a category prototype is a 'typical or paradigm example' (Wetherell and Potter, 1987: 119).

the six-month sample for these four suicides. Angie Fuller was deemed the mentally ill one; Kelly Stephenson, the drunk-loving gay; Nathaniel Pritchard, the child whose life was cut too short, and Sean Rees, the loveable hard worker who had a better future ahead. Each of these labels was constructed as a way to make the deaths pitiable, while at the same time particularizing them, or setting them apart from the 'norm'. For instance, *The Mirror* described Kelly Stephenson as a 'keen footballer' who 'loves to go out and get drunk and have a laugh with mates' (Appendix X). The 'keen sportswoman', as she was labelled by *The Daily Mail*, despite being gay, was also loveable; she was portrayed in this way by *The Sun* who wrote that her biggest fear in life was 'losing the people I love' (Appendices XII, XI). The way that she is described provides the opportunity for readers to identify with her; yet not fully, because there is an element to her lifestyle (being gay) that is not fully socially acceptable in society. Categories, by their definition, as Potter (1996) states, 'present some action as routine or, conversely, exceptional' (1996: 111). In the case of these four deaths, how they are described puts them into a category of 'exceptional', meaning that their lifestyles, for whatever reasons, do not fit in with acceptable discourses in society.

The description of Sean Rees reinforces Billig's (1985) theory of particularization. The *South Wales Echo* described him as 'the promising 19-year old', who had just 'passed his driving test'; he had a 'decent job working in Sainsbury's', as stated by *The Times* (Appendices XIV, XV). *The Western Mail* described him as having 'loads of friends and was really popular' (Appendix XVI). Yet, Rees killed himself. The tone of the articles implies in their discursive description of Rees that had he worked just a little harder, maybe tried a little more, then he would have elevated himself from his current 'working-class lad' status and become middle class. This was implied in the description of his education status. The *South Wales Echo* encapsulated this concern best: 'Sean had been a pupil at the nearby Ynsawdre Comprehensive School, leaving

school after completing his A levels. He had started the job at Sainsbury's but was hoping to go to college later this year' (Appendix XIV).

As previously stated in this chapter, little has been written about Nathaniel Pritchard. Most of the articles published group him with Stephenson and lead with headlines like, 'Two cousins die', as in *The Mirror*, or 'Cousins hang', as in *The Sun* (Appendices X, XI). What can be deduced about this fifteen-year old is that he was the lone child suicide amongst the group, yet newspapers played it down, reporting his death only with that of his cousin. *The Guardian* reported: 'a 15-year old boy had harmed himself', while *The Sun* called him 'Schoolboy Nathaniel', with *The Mirror* stating, 'his life support was switched off' (Appendices XIII, XI, X). These newspapers are from three different political spectrums, yet they all follow normalized conceptions of childhood in reporting his death. *The Guardian* reported his age and labelled him a 'boy', but instead of saying that he died by suicide, the newspaper chose to soften the blow by saying he 'harmed himself' (Appendix XIII). *The Sun* also referenced his age, while giving readers a not-too-subtle clue that he was a child (Appendix XI). Again, instead of stating that he had died by suicide, *The Mirror* chose to ignore that fact and instead to say that his 'life support was switched off' (Appendix X). Pritchard's death is an interesting one to look at as representative of a larger issue with the coverage of the Bridgend suicides. When a child chooses to end his own life, it highlights potential problems around not only the state of childhood, but also the mental well-being of its citizenry. As Koch and Smith (2006) state, the best way to judge the health of a democracy is to look at the number of suicides it has each year (2006: 2). Engaging with the issue of suicide, however, is where the inherent problem lies. Suicide is a difficult issue to discuss; it is distressing, and can bring up emotions and passions most people would rather keep buried. These beliefs, which are socially accepted within society and discursively reproduced by journalists, come from religion, the legal system and the field of

psychology, as discussed in Chapter Three. The media reporting regarding the Bridgend suicides certainly highlighted the important role that journalists play in maintaining stability in society. By creating personas to describe those who died, newspapers were able to discursively situate the suiciders outside the norm, through the use of particularization. The category that was constructed by journalists around 'description of the deceased' is just one way in which they 'normalized' the deaths while simultaneously 'othering' them. All news stories pertaining to death have a description about the person who died, whether it is background information or quotes about the person that supply character information, and it was not unusual for journalists to create a category about the description of the suicide. What did occur was particularization, or placing the normalized discourse into a state of 'other'. By doing this, British Newspapers were, once again, able to create distance between readers and those that had killed themselves.

6.3(d) Infantilization

Another way that distance was created was through the cunning use of infantilization throughout the six-month sample. What puzzled me throughout this research was the fact that, each time a person died, despite their age, they were referred to as a young person or a teenager, thus introducing the idea that suicide in younger adults is infantilized. As discussed in Chapter Three, most researchers would argue that childhood starts at birth and ends sometime between age fifteen and eighteen. In countries like the US, where certain privileges are not given until age 21, sometimes the argument can be extended to age 21. However, for the most part, in the UK, childhood ends by the age of eighteen. The ages of the Bridgend suicides that were reported ranged between fifteen and 29. I have conceded already that Nathaniel Pritchard, in my view, was indeed a child suicide; however, that leaves nineteen other suicides in the six-month sample that were technically adults. So why then were the remaining suiciders

referred to as if they were children? My argument is so that these deaths could be situated outside of the accepted norm of how adults are expected to behave. However, even within the confines of childhood, these suicides are not considered acceptable. Thus, nineteen adults were situated even further outside of the norm and categorized as 'deviant children'. As argued in Chapter Three, by dividing childhood into two levels, those that follow the accepted conceptions of childhood, and those that are deviants, our society has created a social hierarchy and class within the idea of childhood itself. In a telephone interview, Bob Satchwell, Executive Director for the Society of Editors, spoke about why journalists report suicides of those under the age of 30 so extensively. He said:

We accept that people in their thirties and forties sometimes die, for whatever reason, but if it's young children, and teenagers, then we get very upset about it. That's a perfectly normal, human reaction

Satchwell does not go further, but the fact is that the death of a person under the age of 30 makes the rest of the society very uneasy; it creates instability in the society and highlights possible problems in the social makeup and structures of a democracy, which is why journalists create categories and particularize in their reporting of suicide. Ultimately, children are the future of any society. If children are killing themselves, this might signal that there are deeper problems within the fabric of the society that need to be addressed. Journalists, in their role of maintainers of the status quo, as argued throughout this thesis, must reinstall normalcy in the quickest way possible. The easiest way to do this is to talk about suicide and those who attempt and complete the act in a way that is understandable to all and also provides a warning to those who might contemplate it; that way would be to infantilize adults, discursively describing the act of suicide as something a child would do, but then particularizing the issue even further by then assigning adult suicide to the category of 'deviant child'.

6.3(e) Suicide and Internet Usage

The last topic to be discussed within this section on the categories that emerged from the newspaper articles in the sample examined is Internet usage. This chapter has already discussed particularization in terms of lifestyle, sexuality, race, gender, age, nationality and ethnicity. Here, it will describe and analyze how those who killed themselves were 'othered' in terms of their Internet usage. It will also describe how the role of the Internet was a key element in the coverage of these deaths. *The Times* wrote in early February, when reporting the death of Angie Fuller:

Bridgend is the 'teenage suicide capital of Britain' — 'death cult town' for short, whose 'victims' were 'groomed' to kill themselves by sinister figures who roam the Internet in search, it has been claimed, of the emotionally vulnerable. The 'Bebo Internet death cult' has gained increasing currency, despite counter-arguments from people such as Darren Matthews, who runs the local Samaritans group and who points out: 'You could probably link loads of youngsters through the Internet.' Could the Internet have killed the young people of Bridgend? Is suicide catching? (Appendix VIII).

The article sums up the feeling throughout the Bridgend coverage that the Internet played a key role in the suicides of these people. After the first story ran with the Internet link in late January, 2008, the Welsh police announced that there was no suicide cult, club or Internet link between the deaths. As previously stated in this section, the only link was that some of the suiciders knew each other, and that intervention was not given to help them deal with their grief, meaning that they became a predictable statistic based on the fact that those that are affected by suicide are more likely to kill themselves in the months following the initial death (Gould et al., 2003).

Despite the police stating that no Internet link was present, journalists continued to construct a discursive fear and panic around the Internet, claiming that it played a sinister role

in the suicides of those who died in Bridgend. Darren Matthews, Bridgend branch Director for the Samaritans explained why he thought the Internet became its own particularized category:

AL: Right. So you know the police then came out in January, you know right after that and said there is no Internet suicide cult, but yet it continued, and it didn't matter how much you said it or the police said it, that it wasn't true, it just continued

DM: Yep

AL: Why do you think that was?

DM: Because I think it, you know, suicide is um, it's an event that, there have always been suicides, but I think to keep a story going then there has to be a different side to it and the different side that makes it different from all the other suicides that occur in the UK every day was this possible link, to, to, to the Internet and perhaps to some criminal activity, you know, was somebody driving these people to do it? Was there somebody on the Internet sort of, uh, enticing them and all this sort of thing so there's lots of conspiracy type theories then that came out of it so that then really fuelled the newspapers even more I think. Um, and, of course, then the police were saying there's no link between any of these deaths, but then every sort of other day there would be a picture with um, one of the people who's died and one of the early ones and so it was really coming down to your definition of a link then, so if you're saying that you know the actual deaths themselves are linked, but then are you saying that people knew each other, then clearly some of them did, um well quite a few of them did

What is interesting to take from this, is that journalists could have easily reported the story as its own category based on the established link that many of the suiciders knew each other as friends, but newspapers further particularized this issue, taking the categorized prototype (that suiciders knew each other) and creating a particularized category based on the alleged Internet link. This is an important point to note, as journalists constructed not just an 'othering' of the issue of suicide in this instance, but also created an additional stigma to suicide, as well as a moral panic around the Internet, all as part of a grand gesture to maintain the typified, acceptable discourses in society: that suicide is not an acceptable way to die. When interviewed over the phone, Bob Satchwell, Executive Director for the Society of News Editors, said that journalists did not believe that there was no link between the suicides. He explains his position here:

AL: No, no, definitely, I agree with you there, um, but the police did come out at one point and say that there was no Internet suicide pact, there was no link, yet, that discourse actually continued on throughout 2008, really

BS: No. The police said that at a very early stage, I think. And just because the police say that, all that means is that the police have found no link, it doesn't mean, you know, I'm sorry. I'm a great admirer of the British police and the Welsh police, but it doesn't mean to say that you have to accept everything that they say as fact, and the point is just because there is no pact, what on earth was going on that was leading so many young people to commit suicide? The police were saying, there was no pact, therefore, there is nothing to investigate, and perhaps for the police there was nothing to investigate, after all, suicide is not a crime any longer,

AL: Yea, no that's true

BS: That doesn't mean to say that the other authorities shouldn't have been looking at it, and I think the purpose of what the argument was of the media and the points that I made was eventually, and not soon enough in my view, when the publicity was getting so powerful that the authorities did do something about it

Satchwell highlights a frustration that many face when dealing with suicide, 'what on earth was going on that was leading so many young people to commit suicide?' The question is a difficult one to answer. The theories this dissertation draws upon to help frame the answers are based in psychological and sociological research, as defined in Chapters Three and Five; Shneidman's theory of psychache, as pain in the mind; and the theory around survivors bereaved by suicide, who are dealing with a grief so profound that they are more likely to kill themselves in the months following the death than those who lose a loved one to a disease like cancer. The British Press, however, appeared content to blame the Internet and a phantom 'suicide cult' for the deaths, rather than address the possible issues that experts like Darren Matthews of the Samaritans were raising. In a role that requires them to be socially responsible in their reporting to the democracy, journalists largely failed in the reporting of these suicides. This failure came about because journalists did not attempt to construct alternate discourses around the issue of suicide; they limited debate through their constructions of interpretative

repertoires and categories and they created a moral panic around suicide and the role of the Internet.

In mid-February, 2008, the police did announce a link between the suicides, but it was not the Internet. Instead, in their view, it was that the continuation of media reporting was fuelling further suicides. Despite this second announcement by the Welsh police that the Internet was not involved, newspapers throughout the UK continued to discuss the role that the Internet played in the suicides, thus creating a moral panic, which ultimately signaled that suicide was a threat to the 'moral order of society' (Allan, 2003: VI). Chris Frost, Chair of the Ethics Committee with the National Union of Journalists, attempted to answer why there was a moral panic around the Internet:

CF: That's a really interesting question, I don't know, it's um, it's because it, it's segregated I think, because it allows us access to a whole range of, um, things that are quite difficult to control, um, from grooming, from pornography, to suicide sites and some others, terrorism and so on, and um, it feeds into all the um, main fears that we have these days but I mean, of course in the West we're not scared of hunger any more, we're not scared of losing jobs particularly, we're not scared of all sorts of things which were the normal things to be scared of until fairly recently, we've had to find a whole new host of things to be scared about and most of those are underpinned by, by the Internet, so, I mean, that's pretty vague, I've not seen any better theories from any, anywhere else though, but um, it certainly ties into a number of the key moral panics, and helps drive them, I mean the perfect medium for driving moral panics

The panic around the Internet and the role it allegedly played in the Bridgend suicides highlights how fragile democratic societies actually are. Stability is at the core of maintaining a functional democracy; when that stability is threatened, panic can easily follow. In the case of the Bridgend suicides, not only did the suicides threaten the status quo, but the fact that the Internet, an unregulated world of information, ideas, suggestions and persuasion, could have been involved as well was enough to shock journalists into reconciling the situation in the best way they knew how: framing how readers should think.

6.4 Social Representations as Frames

The last section of this chapter explored the various different categories that emerged from analysis of the data: reaction to the death by those left behind, reason for death, description of the deceased, infantilization, and suicide and Internet usage. This chapter was broken down in a way that would allow a close look at the key interpretative repertoires and categories that emerged, while at the same time building up to the two most important frames that emerged from the research: why suicide happens, and childhood. These two frames were at the foundation of the reporting of the Bridgend suicides across the six-month period in the select sample of newspapers which I examined. Both frames are also key to the argument of this dissertation that journalists have a duty within a democracy to report social issues responsibly; in this case, to report suicide in a sensitive, accurate and non-threatening manner. Additionally, journalists should encourage open and accessible debate around social issues, without creating a moral panic. These two frames have been socially constructed by journalists to help explain the issue of suicide in a stigmatized way.

Hypotheses around why suicide happens are usually just best guesses on the part of the journalist. However, the issue of suicide comes into conflict with how journalists report stories. From personal experience, journalists are drilled on the 5Ws: who, what, when, where and why; this is how journalists are trained to report stories. The most important role for journalists is to explain why things happen; it provides context to a story and also gives readers a sense of understanding of their world, and, perhaps without realizing it, journalists play a role in re-stabilizing society after the shock of a suicide. To better understand this claim, I offer an example outside the reporting of suicide. In the case of 9/11, when the World Trade Center Towers fell, after the initial shock wore off, reports made on the evening of the attacks and over the following three days quickly started to provide context as to why they occurred. This

allowed Americans to feel their grief, but also to understand that there were particular reasons (albeit heavily circumscribed and often problematic) as to why the US had been targeted for terrorist activity. This consequently returned a sense of calm to the situation and allowed for understanding that this situation could only occur under specific circumstances. In the case of suicide, however, this can never happen. Up until Angie Fuller's death on February 4th, 2008, journalists were trying to make sense of the suicidal deaths in the Bridgend area. It was her death, arguably that was the point at which journalists realized this could not and would not happen. To combat this, journalists constructed two frames to represent suicide in a more accessible way to readers. Potter (1996) explains:

The central idea of social representations theory is that people come to understand their social world by way of images or social representations which are shared by members of a social group. These act like a map which makes a novel and baffling terrain familiar and passable, and in the process of making the terrain familiar, also provides evaluations which indicate which area is good and which bad (1996: 121).

The map, in this case, as Potter pointed out, are the two frames that became apparent from my data collection. The first frame, and the most dominant to emerge, not unexpectedly based on what has already been discussed around interpretative repertoires and the various categories that have been explored, is that of why suicide happens. Why do people take their own lives? This section will tie together what has already been found in this research in Chapter Five, and incorporate what has already been discussed here in Chapter Six. The second frame to be discussed here is a little more subtle, but reference has been made to it in this chapter already and it has been referenced throughout this dissertation; it deals with the ideologies and social constructions around childhood that are attributed to the issue of suicide. This section on childhood will tie together the childhood suicides originally examined in this dissertation,

before using the Bridgend suicides as a case study, and will also show how adult suicides are constructed with childhood conceptions in mind, in an attempt to 'deviant' the act of suicide.

6.4 (a) Why?

As stated several times throughout this dissertation, the issue of suicide is a complicated matter. There is no single reason as to why suicide occurs, yet newspapers attempted on a regular basis to pinpoint one key issue that could explain the deaths. Newspapers, as discussed extensively in Chapter Five, blamed unemployment, relationship breakdowns, websites that encouraged people to take their own lives, social networking sites, mental illness, drugs and alcohol, the region of Bridgend, growing up, knowledge of others' or another's death and media reporting. A complication of a suicidal death arguably, is the role of the coroner. In the UK, it is the coroner who decides whether a death is a suicide or not. Intent to kill oneself must be evident, or the death is left as an open or narrative verdict. In March, 2008, coroner Phillip Walters, who oversaw the Bridgend suicides, examined five of the suicides in one day. Two out of the five suicides were deemed 'actual suicides', while the other three were recorded as 'narrative verdicts', meaning that there was not enough evidence to imply intent. I take issue with this based on the fact that labeling a death—which at its core fulfills the definition of the word suicide, 'self-murder'—as a non-suicide muddies the definition of what actually occurred, not only for family members left behind, but also for the press that then reports it.

As previously mentioned in the last section of this chapter, the reaction to a suicidal death is enormous and also quite stigmatized. While a narrative verdict might lessen that stigma around the death of a particular person, it does not help in lessening the stigma around the act of suicide itself. If a person chooses to hang themselves, be they of sound mind, or in an altered state because of alcohol or drugs, and they die, then societal convention based on the definition of suicide tells us that the that death is indeed a suicide, or a self-murder. When a

coroner, an authoritative figure of government, well-respected within a democracy, then goes on to say that in fact the death is *not* a suicide, but just a regular death, this causes problems. First, the press does not know what to do with that information. In this qualitative sample, the deaths of those who were legally deemed non-suicides were often still referenced as suicides. This was done because there is no other word in our vocabulary to describe a non-suicide in the UK. By not having a strong enough lexical choice to describe 'suicide', journalists are forced to repeat misinformation, which arguably, contributes to social uncertainty. This in turn encourages journalists to 'other' the act of suicide more and 'other' those that have died more, all in an attempt to regain some balance and explanation.

As explained in Chapter Five, a new word is needed to describe the act of 'suicide' and to help answer why suicide happens. Shneidman (1996), as previously pointed out in Chapters Three, Five and Six, believes that a psychological pain, or psychache, is at the root of all suicidal deaths: 'Psychache stems from thwarted or distorted psychological needs. In other words, suicide is chiefly a drama of the mind' (1996: 4-5). Even Durkheim's (1897) work on suicide, which has created a sociological framework on how to define suicide, describes it as a 'strength or weakness of control' (Berman and Jobes, 1991: 37). With these theorists in mind, and based upon my own analysis of newspaper reporting of the Bridgend suicides, I suggest that the word 'illicide' might offer a clearer definition and understanding of the act of killing oneself. The etymology of the word 'ill' comes from the word 'illustration', based on the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the usage of the word illustrate in the 1580s, which was 'to make clear in the mind' (<http://www.oxfordreference.com> [Accessed July 12th, 2009]). The 'i' in 'illicide' references the self, as in the first person, 'I choose to die'. The last part of the word, 'cide', means to kill or murder. The definition of 'illicide' would then be 'self murder in order to make clear my mind'. This definition would incorporate both Shneidman's and Durkheim's well-respected

and well-researched views on suicide, while at the same time providing an explanation for not only journalists, but also for the wider public on the reasons for an unnatural death. The usage of such a word would remove the stigmas attached with the current-termed 'suicide'. The word suicide is not helpful because there is so much mystery around the actual act. There is no understanding in society as to why someone would take their own life; and the word itself is deeply rooted in stereotypical and stigmatized viewpoints in both religious cultures and the criminal system. Changing the term used to describe that act of self-murder could help alleviate the mystery of why suicide happens and it would be automatically understood within the society that the person who chose to kill themselves was trying to clear their mind of a psychological pain. The mystery, then, of suicide would be addressed, wherein these deaths would be understood as an expression of mental illness, the degrees to which could then be determined by those who treat mentally ill people, no matter if their mind was altered by substances or not. This, too, would take away the excitement of reporting a suicidal death, and would force journalists to look at the societal problems that can lead to mental illness, thus changing the story from why did this person die, to what societal problem are we ignoring that ultimately led to this person's death?

The frame of 'why?' in the reporting of suicide is quite prominent. Take for example a headline that ran in *The Sun* in February, 2008: '17 hangings, 13 months, 1 town, 1 question, Why?' (Appendix XVII). This headline captured the mood throughout the six-month period, despite the fact that it ran at the beginning of the sequence of deaths. What kept changing, however, was the number of hangings and the timeline. Having a societally-understood definition for self-murder is imperative. Not only will it naturally maintain balance in a society, but it will also provide an answer for curious human minds. Not understanding something, or not having an answer to a question, leaves us feeling uneasy; we are not sure what to expect.

Our social constructions about what it means to live and die are ways of making a citizenry feel at ease within its society. Suicide turns all of that on its head and, instead, makes a citizenry question *why?*

6.4(b) Childhood

The better part of the last two chapters have explored the discourses and societal conceptions around suicide and how journalists discursively construct this issue so that the citizenry can understand it. I have examined how journalists report suicide, exploring quantitatively in Chapter Five production, discursive elements and framing, while here in Chapter Six, I have qualitatively examined the discourses and constructed categories that emerged from a select number of newspaper articles. I have discussed how journalists describe the act of suicide, the person who took their own life and the reactions the bereaved experience. I have looked at the role that social class plays in the reporting of suicide, as well as explored how journalists created a moral panic around suicide and the Internet in an attempt to further particularize the issue. Yet, behind all of this examination, has been the frame of childhood, which ultimately has been helping journalists to construct and further stigmatize the issue of suicide, all in an attempt to dissuade the citizenry from ever taking their own lives.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the life stage of childhood is socially constructed to reinforce a hierarchy between adults and children. It can be argued that suicide, and the stigma attached to it, are also socially constructed to reinforce a hierarchy between what is socially accepted as 'normal' and what is not. My research shows that, in the reporting of the Bridgend suicides, journalists treated those who had killed themselves as children. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the deaths across the six-month sample ranged in age between fifteen and 29. Adults, who had deviated from the socially acceptable way of living and dying, were 'othered' to a category of child; they were infantilized. However, suicide in childhood is also

unacceptable, which is why there is a socially accepted category of the 'deviant child'. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the deviant child category is mostly retained for children who go outside the acceptable discourse of what children should be. Such an example is the case of James Bulger in 1993, or more recently, the death of Rhys Jones⁵¹ in 2007. However, other examples of this can be seen in the three childhood suicides mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis. The deaths of Laura Rhodes, Ben Vodden and Jonathan Reynolds were all reported as outside of the norms of childhood. The press did this by creating identifiable, yet not, stories about each of these children. Like with Angie Fuller, Nathaniel Pritchard, Kelly Stephenson and Sean Rees, these three children were also reduced to stigmatized characters: Laura Rhodes was the techno-savvy, overweight girl; Ben Vodden, the sensitive little boy; and Jonathan Reynolds, the gay boy trying to find an identity—all can be identified with, yet, at the same time, they were all particularized to a category of deviant. Death in a person under the age of 30 makes a society feel uneasy; instability is inevitable because it highlights possible problems in the structure of the democracy. Mike Dodd, spokesman for the Press Association, spoke at length in a telephone interview with me about the conceptions of childhood that were present in the reporting of the Bridgend suicides:

AL: And the story, actually what I noticed, was the story also focused, you know, on young people, um, it became 15-29, um, but there were suicides going on at the time of men and women in their 40's and 50's. Why do you think that, you know, the media focused so much, and the press focused so much...

MD: Because, because suicide among men of 40 and 50 or even women of 40 and 50, is not actually that uh, it is unusual, but it's not that rare. That, that's the age at which people will become depressed, that's the age at which they start believing that there's no redemption, that there's, you know, there is no sunny up-land, that they're ever going to reach, that they're in the, you know, they may be suffering from very severe depression, for example, um, so those are reasonably common...

⁵¹ Rhys Jones was murdered by two rival gangs in Liverpool in 2007. He was shot in a car park on his way home. His killer thought he was part of the rival gang, and consequently fired three shots because he thought Jones was on his 'turf'.

AL: But why do you think the cut off was, like, 29? You know, why...

MD: Because after 29, you're not a young person really, I mean even up to 29 you might say you're pushing the point a bit, when I was a kid you were an adult at the age of 21 and that was it

AL: Yeah

MD: Um, well you have to look at what's happened to the school leaving age, that's been pushed up and they want to put it up to 18, you know what they're trying to do is extend childhood, if they can put adulthood off, it means they don't have to count them among the unemployed, which is one concern.

AL: Right, ok

MD: But then what do you do when you've got a large population of young people and in South Wales, I mean this is something of a problem, you've got a large population of quite young people, many of whom are what they call 'NEETS' I think, which is 'not in education, employment, training or studying.' You know, so you've got a, if they've got no income, if they're living off, maybe living off benefits or scraping by on whatever they can get, I think it's a fairly um, a fairly depressing life and it may well be that it's just their own social circumstances which lead them to. But saying that the newspaper story, doesn't, it's not going to sell the papers, and of course it's not actually going to explain, um, explain the death of the individual

AL: Yeah. But isn't there, you know, don't newspapers have some sort of responsibility though to, you know, report those things, or is just everything so driven by money now? You know...

MD: Well, I mean I've heard this phrase responsible journalism, right, um, who are the people that mostly use the phrase responsible journalism? Those who want, those who what? Yes, those who want to exercise control.

AL: Right

MD: It's always them. Now, I'm not saying that journalists get it right all the time, I mean (laughs) you know a, a, a good look at the newspapers up and down the country would demonstrate that that is not the case, especially if you look at a paper like *The Daily Star*, and certain things will happen for all sorts of reasons, if you look at the coverage of Express newspapers for example, the coverage they gave to the disappearance of Madeleine McCann, uh, there are all sorts of questions which can be asked over that, but generally speaking I don't think that journalists aren't anywhere near as irresponsible than those who cry out for responsible journalism would like to claim. Or would like to allege at any rate.

Dodd raises two important issues here: unemployment and power. He refers to government officials who are in charge of running our democracy as trying to manipulate the created life stage of childhood in order to fudge unemployment figures. The citizenry's role in a capitalist democracy is to work, buy and spend. The accepted discourse amongst the citizenry is that, by doing this, one will lead a satisfactory, comfortable life. As Dodd mentions, however,

not all members in our society have jobs, therefore the democracy is failing to provide for its citizens. While the research into Bridgend did not find that unemployment was a significant reason reported by journalists for the suicides to occur, that in itself is an interesting finding. It is commonly known that Bridgend is a working-class borough in the Welsh Valleys. The question that begs to be asked is why, then, was not more emphasis placed upon the socio-economic status of the region in helping to explain why suicide rates in that area might be slightly elevated in comparison to those of the rest of the UK? Mike Dodd answered that himself in his quote above. He argues that those who lobby for responsible journalism are merely trying to exercise control over the press. What emerges from this is his fear that journalists might lose control and the power to decide what is socially acceptable and what is not. Currently, to maintain control over the issue of suicide, and to maintain stability, journalists fall back on socially acceptable discourses of 'other', such as the deviant child. This is a discourse that is known, understood and agreed upon, for, as stated in Chapter Three, our conceptions of childhood are that children are sweet, innocent, weak and naïve beings. By maintaining this discourse, and replicating it, and othering those who do not fit into it, journalists retain power and control over what is deemed acceptable for a democracy and what is not. It is the British Press, then, that ultimately holds control over what we believe to be right and wrong about the issue of suicide and it is blindly-accepted by the citizenry based on our reliance upon the press, whose discourses of credible and trustworthy are at the heart of its manipulation.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from a close-reading discourse analysis based on Wetherell and Potter's (1987) method of analysis using interpretative repertoires, categories (in terms of both prototypes and particularization) and social representation. Twelve newspaper articles

that covered the suicidal deaths of Angie Fuller, Nathaniel Pritchard, Kelly Stephenson and Sean Rees between January 2008 and June 2008 were examined. These articles were examined in terms of interpretative repertoires, or discourses that emerged across the original 46-article sample, whittling the close reading down to twelve, so I could examine in more depth the five categories that were constructed by journalists to help explain the issue of suicide. Those categories were: reaction to death, reason for death, description of the deceased, infantilization and suicide and Internet usage. The chapter continued to build upon itself until the final analysis section on social representations as frames. It is here that I delved into the two predominant frames that enveloped the Bridgend suicide story throughout its coverage: why the suicides happened and adult suicides being described in terms of childhood. This chapter highlighted the fact that journalists reinforce stigmatization around suicide through the five constructed categories, but the frame of childhood is the ultimate stigma associated with this issue. Those who kill themselves are ultimately reduced to the category of child, and their deaths are described in terms of the conceptions society holds of childhood, as discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation. As suicide is even less acceptable in childhood, however, as evidenced by the original three childhood suicide cases examined in Chapter One of this dissertation, adults are further relegated to the category of deviant child.

What these findings suggest is that journalists attempt to maintain balance and stability in a democracy through the use of everyday discourses around childhood and suicide. By focusing on these discourses, journalists limit discussion around the 'real' issues that are affecting society and prevent discussion—daring only to ask why a suicide happens, but not really examining a society to determine why its members feel so compelled to take their own lives.

My concluding remarks in Chapter Seven will recap the key findings of the thesis, including strengths and weaknesses, while also pointing to future research that needs to be done in the area of media reporting and suicide.

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine how British Newspapers report suicide and how it socially constructs discourses to explain what this social issue is all about. In a liberal democracy, I believe that journalists have a responsibility to report the issue of suicide in an appropriate manner, so that citizens are informed about its complexities. The key responsibility of the newspapers, when covering suicide, is to engage with readers so that an open and honest discussion can occur around this issue. Suicide itself, as evidenced throughout this dissertation, can be a potentially destabilizing issue, not only because of the mystery that surrounds it, but also because of the stigma that has followed it down through the ages, stemming from both religious and legal cultures. The job of the British Press, then, is to maintain balance, and report suicide couched in socially-accepted discourses, in essence mirroring back what is already thought about suicide in society and not allowing alternative discourses to emerge.

The research in this dissertation found that in the case of reporting the Bridgend suicides, journalists did maintain that social stability by infantilizing the young people who killed themselves by reinforcing stigmas that were already present. I found that the young people tended to be described in ways that linked them in conceptual terms to childhood. Children, as discussed in Chapter Three, are routinely considered to be weak, naïve, impressionable, and in need of protection. Similarly, then, these same discourses also emerged in newspaper reporting of the Bridgend suicides. Additionally, the young adults who died were treated as if taking their own life was not an adult choice; they were discursively constructed as having committed a childish act. To further this argument, it also became clear, based on the three original child suicide deaths that I examined (Laura Rhodes, Ben Vodden and Jonathan Reynolds), that childhood suicide is even less acceptable in society, therefore these children are

'othered' into a category of the 'deviant non-child'. It is here that young adult suicide is also placed. The key frame to emerge is that young adult suicide is discursively described as the action of a deviant child.

In this dissertation I also argue that while journalists have a responsible role to play in the reporting of suicide, they must also do this without causing panic within the society, as this too can be destabilizing. As seen in Chapters Five and Six, however, journalists reporting the Bridgend suicides did not live up to this responsibility, as a moral panic was created about the role the Internet played in the continuation of these suicidal deaths; it was reported that an Internet suicide cult was to blame for the deaths, discarding any other potential reasons for why a suicide could occur, such as the loss of a friend who had already died by suicide.

This thesis began in Chapter Two by examining in more depth the academic literature on the role of the press in liberal democratic societies such as the UK, exploring academic thinking on the press's social responsibility to report the news. I did so by drawing on research investigating news values, reporting and moral panics, ideology, framing, and othering. The main ideas that emerged from these discussions is that the news is socially constructed through the help of news values and framed in a specific way to maintain solidarity amongst a citizenry in a democracy. Newspapers and journalists alike have a set of inherent ideologies with which they construct the news, which can add to or detract from their reporting, and, in worst cases, as seen here in the Bridgend suicides, can create a moral panic based on fears surrounding the Internet.

In Chapter Three I highlighted that research into suicide and the media is currently under-developed. What little research there is primarily tends to engage with issues around the causes and effects of media reporting of suicide on society. The focus of this dissertation is not to defend or prove the findings from the copycat theory, or the Werther Effect theory – that the

more a suicide is reported, the more likely it is that suicides will occur – but simply to introduce this body of research, and illustrate the role it plays in how suicide is reported in British Newspapers. However, there are serious gaps in looking at how newspapers and the media at large report suicide. I believe that my study, then, at least in the UK, helps to address what some of those gaps are. From my research, there is now some quantitative evidence about how journalists portray suicide on news pages, in terms of space allocated; how stories are produced; and even how stories are sourced. Qualitatively, this study has shown what key figures in the upper echelons of the journalism field think about the issue of reporting suicide, but I have also analyzed the key stigmatized categories that journalists construct to better describe the issue of suicide. I also found the two main frames into which most all of the suicides in my sample fell: why suicide occurs and childhood. Later this chapter will discuss where future research can go from here, focusing more on the online reporting of suicide, as that seems to be the current trend in the field of journalism.

In theoretical terms, the research for this dissertation drew mainly from the ideas of French sociologist Emile Durkheim's framework of suicide, where he identifies four categories that a completed suicide would fit into based on the individual's relationship to society: egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic⁵². In short, he found that a strong community where a person was integrated and had support from family, the neighbourhood and possibly a religious group would be a way to prevent suicide. His work helped to bring suicide into public discourse (Sainsbury et al, 1979: 43). I also drew significantly from suicidologist Edwin Shneidman's work around 'psychache', which states that suicide occurs because of a person's

⁵² Egoistic suicides are not connected with, or dependent on, their community, according to Durkheim. The person who is overly integrated into a group and feels no sacrifice is too great for the good of the larger group would be considered an altruistic suicide. Anomic suicides occur when the victim is not capable of dealing with a crisis rationally, or when his relationship with society is suddenly changed. Suicide is the solution to a problem in this form. The last category, fatalistic suicide, is thought to be caused by excessive societal regulation that restricts the victim's freedom; this person sees no viable future for himself (Sainsbury et al, 1979: 43).

psychological pain experienced mentally; he called suicide 'chiefly a drama of the mind' (1996: 3-4). In Chapter Three, I discussed at length the academic literature that examines the conceptions held by society around childhood which state that childhood is a constructed life stage that adults in society believe is a time of innocence, dependence, incompetence, vulnerability and should be safe and protected. In terms of childhood suicide, as explained in Chapter Three, journalists use these conceptions of childhood to create a discourse of bullying to explain why a child might take his or her own life. The discourse of bullying then becomes a category of 'deviancy', into which the three childhood suicides I mentioned earlier in this chapter were placed.

In Chapter Four, I set up the study methodologically. This dissertation used two main methods of analysis, with one subsidiary method to supplement the main two. I chose to use quantitative content analysis to gauge the breadth of the suicide reporting, in order to see how the coverage was covered more generally. To engage in more depth with the articles that were written, I also decided to examine them using the qualitative method, discourse analysis, from a predominantly social psychology perspective so that I could uncover broader meanings and discourses. I also used in-depth interviews to enhance the findings from the content analysis and the discourse analysis. While the interview data I collected was not a main method of analysis, I decided to conduct interviews so that I could understand the discourses about suicide that journalists had in their own heads when reporting the story. I felt that this would add an extra perspective to the findings from both the content analysis and the discourse analysis.

This thesis had two findings chapters, the first of which explored areas of production of texts, discursive phrasing and features and framing. In terms of production of texts, I presented findings regarding how the Bridgend sample was reported, while taking an in-depth look at

what sources journalists chose to interview and quote from in their articles. I also reported my findings on the discursive phrasing that emerged around phrases such as 'suicide' and 'commit suicide', which showed that journalists are further stigmatizing the issue of suicide, despite making a half-hearted attempt to focus on those that are left behind. I also explored discursive features of the texts such as method and visuals. Based on WHO reporting guidelines on suicide, journalists should not explicitly mention the method a person uses to kill themselves, nor should there be excessive use of pictures with articles. My findings showed that, while British Newspapers have complied with some of these requests, there is still room for improvement. It was also in Chapter Five of this dissertation that I made clear when journalists were being responsible and irresponsible in their reporting of suicide. Key results that emerged from the content analysis and will be discussed later in this chapter were the dominant frames that were quantitatively measured around causation, method, the borough of Bridgend itself, the Internet and why the suicides happened. These findings signalled the key issues that journalists faced in reporting suicides to a citizenry that already had pre-existing ideas about suicide, and these results highlighted the categories of description that were developed further in the analysis of my discourse analysis.

In Chapter Six, I looked at the discourses that emerged from a small sample of twelve articles based around four deaths within the Bridgend sample: Angie Fuller, Nathaniel Pritchard, Kelly Stephenson and Sean Rees. I chose to look at their deaths because they carried the sample throughout the entire six-month time frame studied. Additionally, each death was ideologically rich, flagging issues of homophobia, social class, racism, mental illness and childhood that existed throughout the sample. I also decided to examine one article in depth, as it was one of the most poignant stories in the sample, both visually and textually. Additionally, the journalist who wrote the story agreed to an interview with me, so his unique perspective

was also present in this analysis. The chapter looked at interpretative repertoires, providing more general insight into the coverage of the Bridgend suicides. I also explored the five descriptive categories that journalists use to explain the issue of suicide, which turned out to 'other', or particularize suicide each step of the way. Lastly, I explored the social representations of suicide, which became clear through the two frames of 'why' and 'childhood'. Based on my findings, it became clear that journalists do play a significant role in replicating discourses in society, mirroring back what is already accepted. This dissertation was trying to ascertain what those discourses actually were, while also trying to see how they are reported back to citizens within a democracy. I also wanted to determine if journalists strictly adhere to reporting what is already acceptable, or if they deviate from that, and try to go beyond what is currently accepted and attempt to construct and educate the public about this potential destabilizing issue. Unfortunately, journalists simply maintained the status quo, thereby reinforcing stigmatization of suicide and also infantilized those who took their own lives.

7.2 Review of Findings

This thesis studied the suicidal deaths that happened in the Bridgend borough of South Wales between January, 2008 through to the end of June, 2008. A selection of newspapers were chosen based on their political leanings as well as their proximity to the coverage, which included both Welsh newspapers and national UK newspapers: *The Times/The Times on Sunday* and *The Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday*, were chosen from the political right, while on the political left, I looked at *The Guardian/The Observer* and *The Daily Mirror/The Sunday Mirror*. Additionally, I also examined *The Sun* for a more middle-of-the-road representation. I should mention here, however, that *The Sun*, for the first time since 1997, backed the Conservative Party (who consequently won) in the national elections in 2010. It is now debatable whether this shift will return the newspaper to its more Conservative ideologies of the past. The regional newspapers

looked at were the *South Wales Echo* and the *Western Mail*. These newspapers were chosen based on their availability to the majority of people living in South Wales, but also because those newspapers were covering the Bridgend suicides long before the London-based newspapers started to cover the story. I conducted a content analysis on 322 articles that appeared within the six-month sample period. From there, I chose the deaths of Angie Fuller, Nathaniel Pritchard, Kelly Stephenson and Sean Rees to examine discursively, as mentioned previously, which whittled my sample down to 46 articles. From there, I chose twelve articles, which became representative of the overarching 46. Additionally, I also interviewed journalists, editors, charity directors and media representatives to gain a little more perspective into how British Newspapers report suicide and the discourses they think exist around the issue of suicide.

The findings of this research show that journalists rely quite heavily on the academic research of the Werther Effect, basically a behavioural effects theory which tends to rely on a fairly basic understanding of cause-and-effect and assumes that all media audiences are passive. This theory purports that the more suicide is reported, the more likely suicides will occur. I can only hypothesize that the reason why this research is relied upon by journalists is because there is little alternative research that journalists can turn to when reporting a suicide. In the case of the Bridgend suicides, I showed that no suicides in the Bridgend area were reported in either the Welsh or national newspapers in 2007; the Werther Effect states that suicide reporting be compared year-on-year. Based on my limited sample, it was impossible to determine with absolute certainty that the media did not have an impact on the suicides; however, based on the theory, the evidence shows with near certainty it did not.

Journalists who reported the Bridgend suicides also described people in terms of the 'other'. As Hall (1997) states, 'otherness' is applied to '... people who are in any way

significantly different from the majority 'them' rather than 'us' – these people are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed polarized binary extremes' (226). In my discourse analysis, I employed the phrasing particularization, which is often used in social psychology along with categorization. Categories are social groupings based on similar things; prototypes of those categories then mean that something is 'normal' and accepted by society. Particularization, on the other hand, is the opposite. It means placing the category outside of the norm, or creating a category of 'other' (Wetherell and Potter, 1987). By othering the act of suicide, journalists are reinforcing existing social stigma. An example of such a finding came in Chapter Five, when my content analysis uncovered the fact that journalists created distance between the act of suicide and where it was happening. While 5000 people take their lives in England each year (WHO, 2008), journalists reporting the Bridgend suicides, made it clear that these specific suicides were a Welsh problem.

Another finding from Chapter Five was that, overall, journalists quoted family members, the police and politicians the most when sourcing stories. All three, rather than dealing with the underlying issue of suicide, instead implied various different reasons for the deaths, from relationship breakdowns and usage of the Internet to mental illness and the problems facing the borough of Bridgend itself.

One of the key findings, however, that appeared in both Chapters Five and Six, was the fact that journalists do indeed play a significant role in maintaining stability and balance in society, keeping it from going off kilter by such a destabilizing issue such as suicide. It has already been established in Chapters Two and Three that one of the key indicators that a democracy is healthy is that its citizens are happy, functioning, alive, and have a good quality of life (Koch and Smith, 2006: 2). However, when members of a citizenry take their own lives, this

points to potential underlying issues in the democracy that need to be addressed. The socially-accepted discourse around death is that it must be natural; to take one's own life, therefore, goes against a fundamental understanding of what it means to live and die; suicide destabilizes a democracy especially when it is a young person who is only just beginning to live.

When the suicides in Bridgend occurred, it was only 'natural' then for newspapers to try and regain stability and control of the situation. Instead of dealing with possible underlying issues of the society not being able to provide for its citizenry, journalists demonized those who killed themselves and ultimately infantilized them. Our conceptions of childhood in society deem that children are weak, innocent, gullible beings in need of protection—so too are those who die by suicide or attempt suicide, it seems, even when they are adults. This infantilizing is much easier to implement when they are also young adults. Moreover, since Western notions of childhood tend to construct children as either being 'normal' or 'deviant' to coincide with certain expectations around childhood as a time of life where children are innocent and naïve, those who kill themselves may be labelled as 'deviant'. As suicide is even less accepted in childhood, those children and young adults who killed themselves in Bridgend were very easily slotted into the discursive category of 'deviant child'. To further reinstate balance, journalists shifted this demonization to another area: the Internet. A moral panic emerged through the reporting of the Bridgend suicides, as journalists pointed to 'it' as the primary culprit for why the suicides continued to happen. All of those who died were members of social networking sites such as Facebook, Bebo and MySpace. As many of them were 'friends' with each other on these sites, journalists jumped to the conclusion that the deaths must have been linked, despite evidence to the contrary. It can be seen, then, that journalists often did not report the suicides in a responsible, non-panic inducing way.

Suicide has not been a crime in England and Wales since the early 1960s, yet stigma and stereotypes still revolve around this important social issue. I suggest in both Chapters Five and Six that a way to potentially change the discussion around suicide, shift the discourses, and destigmatize the issue, might be to simply change the word, so that the act of 'suicide' can be better understood. I offered the word 'illicide' to better encapsulate a self-imposed death to mean 'self-murder in order to make clear my mind'. In doing this, a self-imposed death would be understood to be a death because of illness in the mind, and it might better align with the current definition of what a suicidal death looks like in British law, which states that there must be 'clear intention' that a person wanted to die. Not all 'suicides', as seen in Chapter Six, are actually reported as acts of self-murder.

At the heart of this research is the role British Newspapers play in reporting suicide. I argue that journalists have a social responsibility to report suicide in a manner that does not create panic amongst the population. Additionally, journalists play a crucial role in maintaining stability in society. While looking at the issue of suicide, what has emerged, as explored in Chapter Six, is a fear that the press is losing its control over dictating what discourses are acceptable and what are not. This becomes clearer when looking at the issue of suicide, as it is one of the most stigmatized, destabilizing issues that affects our society. Journalists must maintain control and power over our democracy, so that the status quo can be reinforced. Suicide is the ultimate threat to that status quo. Therefore, journalists must create alternate discourses in which to keep the citizenry in line, and therefore when looking at suicide reporting, one is actually reading the warning that the press is giving to society.

7.3 Reflection

Upon reflection on the project, there are three things to which I would wish to return in future research. The first is expanding the project to include online newspaper articles. As stated in

Chapter Four, I made a decision to examine only print newspaper articles as it was quite difficult to verify that I had all copies of online stories, as they changed so frequently during the 'spate' of suicides. Methodologies available to examine online content are also quite weak, and this would have hindered this particular project significantly, especially when dealing with a content analysis as coding would need to be broken down into pages and links to other websites, and that was something I did not have time to develop. Studying online content is important, but I felt that it was also important to conduct the research and finish it as soon as possible to ensure that it was current and so that it might start aiding in the destigmatization and the prevention of further suicides.

The second aspect of this project that I would expand upon would be to include all national newspapers in the sample. This would result in a larger content analysis, but it would also include some more detailed results that would be more generalizable across British Newspapers in regard to how they report suicide. I think including these extra newspapers would also enhance the findings of this dissertation, and provide more specific and perhaps more strongly generalizable results.

Finally, in future studies, it would be important to undertake more extensive interviews with journalists. I had a difficult time getting journalists to commit to speaking with me, especially because of the blame many journalists faced from both the local Bridgend community and the South Wales police when reporting this story. On reflection, perhaps, more might have been done to interview journalists about the story as it was unfolding, thereby obtaining a more comprehensive look at how journalists went about reporting it. I think had I been interviewing journalists as the story developed, I might have earned more trust with them, before they were taken to task and blamed for their reporting of the suicides.

As with any research, there are of course limits to what one can do, and, upon reflection, most certainly things one might wish to have done differently. In my case, I would not have spent as much time reading and analyzing for the discourse of bullying. Based on the childhood cases I was originally looking at prior to the start of the Bridgend suicides, I had assumed that bullying would also be a discourse that would emerge in adult suicide. I was wrong. Bullying as a causation for suicide seems to be rooted firmly in childhood suicide, and is definitely a case for future study.

I also found discourse analysis to be a complex method that constituted a challenge, not because it was difficult, but because I initially believed that I needed to conduct my research within the traditional confines of 'doing journalism studies discourse analysis', which tends to fall into the categories of Foucauldian discourse analysis, Fairclough's method of critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and rhetoric analysis, to name just a few. My theoretical framework for study, however, had all along been firmly rooted in both the fields of psychology and sociology, and trying to reconcile those fields with Foucault or Fairclough did not sit well with me, or my research. I eventually found my way to Wetherell and Potter's discursive method within social psychology, which allowed me to reconcile myself and my research, and meet those challenges head on and come up with some interesting and sound results, as shown in Chapter Six.

7.4 Future Research

Two weeks before submitting this PhD, I lost yet another person in my life to suicide. Joey Davis was a 23-year-old gay man who I had watched struggle with both his sexuality and his mental illness—bipolar disorder—for the better part of a decade. At various times throughout this project, my reasons for doing this research have shifted. Initially, as stated in Chapter One, losing my partner of nearly three years and the grief that engulfed me after his suicide was

what started me down this path. Mid-way through the project, however, it was the suicides in Bridgend and the utter helplessness that I felt that continued to drive me forward, especially at those times when the subject matter was just a little bit too much. Over the last year, however, as I have become closer and closer to finishing, I have found myself wondering if there were research paths 'outside' of suicide for me. It is a difficult topic with which to grapple day-in and day-out, and, I'll admit, the idea of researching something 'happier' in the future was quite appealing. I never wanted to stop researching suicide completely, but did wonder if I could find it within myself to take a year or two away from it and find a new research path. Then Joey died. I found myself in what can only be described as a remarkable position. I was finishing up a PhD on suicide, grieving suicide yet again myself, supporting friends and Joey's family who had never experienced suicide before, and I was noticing new and potential avenues for research based on his death.

This study is groundbreaking in that it takes a close look at how British Newspapers report suicide, and it provides new data and analysis for the field of suicidology from which future research can be based. Yet there is still much to be done in terms of what role the 'media' play in reporting/representation of a suicide. Based on this thesis, there are four projects that could be established.

The first would be to look at the online representation of the Bridgend suicides, as I have already suggested. The key issue with online reporting is that news pages are being constantly updated. Not only is there more space online to print photos and text, but there is the capability to link stories to previous stories, helpful websites, not-so-helpful websites, etc. It would be interesting then to see if what is produced online is comparable to what is produced in hard copy editions of the same newspapers. I would hypothesize that, while the core frames and discourses that emerged in this research would be broadly similar, the story would be much

more visual and sensationalized online than in the actual newspaper, due to the extra space available, and the links that can be inserted to send a reader to another website.

A second project might examine all UK newspapers in order to ascertain if there is a difference between tabloid newspapers and broadsheet newspapers. This would be an interesting study from which to gauge readership and the prominent discourses that are replicated about suicide in society. I would venture to guess, based on what I have read and seen of the coverage before I chose my final selection of newspapers for this study, that *The Daily Star* and *The Express* might be much more demonizing of those who die by suicide, than the newspapers in this sample. While I would like to state here that the suicides in the Bridgend borough have ceased, unfortunately that is not the case; several occurred in 2009 and 2010. While the media has not reported these deaths in the same, sensationalized way it did in 2008, the national newspapers are now reporting the story, where once, as in 2007, they did not. Suicide in Wales has now become a 'sexy' story. The area of Bridgend has been tainted as a 'suicide capital', the location of the 'suicide death cult'; it is where the anxiety began about the Internet's role in perpetuating suicide; the area, in a sense, has become a permanent 'newsworthy' target, that the media itself constructed, and therefore will probably continue to report.

A third project that would be interesting to examine would be a comparative analysis between suicide reporting in 2008 and 2010, and then again in 2013. Based on the Bridgend suicides, the Welsh Assembly Government created a five-year suicide prevention plan for all of Wales, with phases of implementation in each one of those years. The goal is to reduce suicides nationwide by 20% by 2013. I would be interested to see how reporting of suicide might or might not change over that time period. Anecdotally, I have not noticed much difference, and

there is a continued presence of discourses around childhood being used to frame many of the stories I have seen published in 2009 and 2010.

The fourth project based on this dissertation that could be explored is that of 'responsible journalism' in the reporting of suicide. While there have been several studies, mostly literature reviews, about the reporting guidelines for suicide, I believe that it would be informative to investigate the way in which these guidelines are actually used in newsrooms around the UK. This research would be best completed with the aid of journalists and editors, possibly through an ethnographic study in newsrooms, but most certainly should include focus groups and/or in-depth interviews with newsmakers.

The fifth study for research that I would propose is mostly based on my experiences in the last two weeks around my friend Joey's suicide, but also on something that was loosely mentioned throughout the reporting of the Bridgend suicides, but that did not prove to be of any significance in my analysis and did not feature prominently in my findings: the use of social networking sites as a way to cope with the aftermath of a suicide. As mentioned in Chapter Three, there have been some studies conducted around how young people use social networking sites to discuss their grief after a death. When reported in the Bridgend coverage, the term 'memorial sites' was featured, but not elaborated on. It was interesting to me that I learned of Joey's death on Facebook. A mutual 'friend' posted on the 'memorial site' that had been set up in Joey's honour, which was flagged up to me via my newsfeed on Facebook. When I 'joined' the memorial site group, there were 23 people, mostly family and close family friends, who were members. Within an hour, the group had grown to over 100 people, and within twelve hours, it had reached over 360 members. All members of the group knew Joey Davis. The outstanding outpouring of grief took place in a public space, but it was also very private grief. People consoled each other, spoke of the 'good times' and shared stories. It became an

avenue to finalize plans for memorial services, remembrance gatherings, and an opportunity to post pictures, all of which the family was involved in. What occurred to me was that I was witnessing what once would have been called a 'wake'; this was its modern-day version. As stated several times in this dissertation on the reporting of the Bridgend suicides, suicide bereavement can be excruciatingly painful to go through. I believe that there is a strong research project to be developed around the function of social networking sites to help people with this grief, and potentially play quite a significant role in the de-stigmatization and re-education of a democracy's citizenry around the issue of suicide through this media platform.

7.5 Conclusion

British Newspapers, as shown throughout this dissertation, are not reporting suicide responsibly. The field of journalism is changing. No longer are newspapers and television the sole outlets the citizenry turns to when information is needed. Declining news budgets, which in turn lead to fewer journalists, and smaller news holes, mean 'sexier' news stories that are completed faster, and sensationalized in an effort to draw readers in. Chasing 'sexy' stories, or creating them, as was the case in the Bridgend suicides, is an exercise in newspapers trying to maintain control over societal discourses. In the case of Bridgend, this control was exerted by framing the act of suicide through infantilization and stigmatization, which did nothing but create more fear and confusion around this complex societal issue.

To change the perceptions of suicide in our society, journalists must fulfil their social responsibility to report suicide in a way that educates and informs the citizenry, by opening up the discussion, allowing new discourses to be created and allowing old, stigmatized discourses to die. Only then can a democracy truly declare itself to be open and deliberative.

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Appendix I: Wales News Service Release

WITH PICS

A teenage suicide cult is sweeping through a town with seven young people killing themselves in copycat deaths.

Police have warned parents to keep watch on their children - and fear Internet websites may be to blame for the chain of young deaths over the last year.

The latest victim was a girl of 17 in a trail of tragedies where six young men have died along with a spate of other attempted suicides.

Natasha Randall was found hanged at her family home and within 24 hours two of her friends had tried to kill themselves.

One - a girl of 15 - was on a life support machine yesterday after her family found her in the nick of time.

The other, also 15, survived after cutting her wrists but she was back with her parents yesterday after being discharged from hospital.

Police say the girls were part of a group of about 20 teenage friends in and around the town of Bridgend, South Wales - described as the suicide capital of Britain.

Officers have visited the parents of each of the girls warning them to keep an eye on their daughters.

They have also seized Natasha's home computer to investigate an Internet website link between the tragedies.

Natasha's death is the latest in seven young suicides in Bridgend since January of last year.

Many of the victims had a site on the social networking Internet site Bebo where young people set up their own pages.

And since their deaths friends have set up memorial sites where they can post messages and buy a "virtual brick" in a remembrance wall.

The bricks for Natasha's site say things like "RIP chick", "Sleep Tight Princess" and "Sweetdreams Angel".

Police are concerned that teenagers may think it is "cool" to have an Internet memorial site and are killing themselves to achieve prestige and even hero worship among their peer group.

Detectives confirmed they are investigating a possible suicide chain - the victims are linked although they did not all know each other.

On Natasha's Internet website there is a chilling message to Liam Clarke, 20, who was found hanging in a Bridgend Park on December 27.

It states: Tasha Randall says: "R.I.P Clarky boy!! gonna miss ya! always remember the gd times! love ya" "Me too!"

Liam was a friend of Thomas Davies who hanged himself in woods near Bridgend. He was just 20.

Thomas had bought himself a new suit just two days earlier to attend the funeral of his friend David Dilling, 19, who also hung himself.

Police are also linking the deaths of Dale Crole, 18, of nearby Porthcawl, and Zachary Barnes, 17, of Bridgend, with the spate of suicides.

And just two weeks ago Gareth Morgan, 27, was found hanged in his bedroom at his home in Bridgend.

Natasha is the first girl to die in the tragic toll of suicides.

Police and paramedics were called to her home in Blaengarw, Bridgend, at 6pm last Thursday night, but she was already dead.

Natasha spent hours every day on her computer using the name "Wildchild".

Appendix I: Wales News Service Release

Stepmother Katrina said: "The police have been and taken Natasha's computer away to help with their investigation.

"This has come as a shock to all of us. We're just too upset to speak about it, her dad especially."

A South Wales Police spokeswoman said: "We can confirm the sudden death of a 17-year-old woman at around 6pm last Thursday.

"There are no suspicious circumstances and the coroner has been informed."

Superintendent Tim Jones, divisional commander of police in Bridgend, said: "We are keen to play a part in the drive to stop people taking their own lives.

"We have concerns about every death of this nature."

Natasha was in her first year on a Care and Childhood Studies course at Bridgend College where her friends were weeping in the common room yesterday.

A college spokesman said: "We are deeply saddened to hear of the news relating to the death of Natasha Randall.

"Natasha was a well respected and popular student.

"Both staff and students within the department have spoken very highly of her commitment and dedication to her course and future career aspirations.

"Natasha's outgoing and lively spirit were demonstrated in her enjoyment of the course and student life.

"Our sincere thoughts are with her family at this difficult time."

Two girls - who police say were known to Natasha - tried to commit suicide the following day,

One of the girls had spent the evening in her bedroom with a friend telling her that she felt suicidal and saw no point in going on.

When he friend left she tried to hang herself and was found close to death when her parents went to check on her.

She spent two days on a life support machine but there were signs of an improvement yesterday.

Police said another 15-year-old girl made a less serious attempt to take her own life on the same evening.

The Bridgend MP Madeleine Moon has met with senior police officers to discuss the town's alarmingly high suicide rate which she believes is currently the highest in the country.

She said: "I don't know why it has reached this point but I do know we can't ignore it.

"Nobody can take sole responsibility for this but everyone has to work together to address it.

"The important thing is that the message goes out to young people that there is someone for them to talk to."

The Bridgend and Glamorgan Valleys Coroner Phillip Walters has also raised his concerns about the suicides among young people.

A special "task force" has now been set up in the town to investigate the growing list of suicide among young people.

The group - which includes police, the Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust, schools and Bridgend Council - is nearing the completion of a strategy document aimed at trying to stem the tragic trend.

Consultant psychiatrist Tegwyn Williams, director of mental health services for the NHS Trust, said: "Unfortunately there's a culture where men don't tend to talk about how they feel.

"It comes to the point where they can't see any way out.

"The key is to break down the stigma attached to suicide in the community so that people aren't afraid to talk to someone of they feel depressed.

"It is also about educating people so that they know where to get help for themselves or someone they know.

"Unfortunately people often just don't know what to do about it. We need to educate them about what's out there."

Appendix I: Wales News Service Release

*** Grieving mother Melanie Davies yesterday(tues) told how her son hung himself - just like two of his close friends.

Melanie, 38, said: "It's like a craze - a stupid sort of fad. They all seem to be copying each other by wanting to die."

Her son Thomas, 20, committed suicide just two days before he was due to go to the funeral of his close friend who died in the same way.

His friend Dai Dilling, 19, died just weeks after another former schoolfriend Dale Crole, 18, was also found hanged.

Melanie said: "He had bought a suit for Dai's funeral and was ready to go. He didn't go to Dale's but he was determined to be at Dai's.

"He didn't speak much about it other than to say he couldn't believe it because he had been with Dai just a few days before.

"I knew he was upset by it but had no idea how much it was playing on his mind.

"The next thing I knew was that the police were knocking on my door saying Thomas had been found hanged.

"It is very worrying that we have had so many other young deaths around here

"I think the problem is they do not know how to speak like adults about serious issues like this.

"They can speak to each other on the computer but do not know how to express their emotions in other ways.

"Thomas would spend about three hours a night on the computer, talking to his friends. The thing is that most parents don't understand what they are doing or what they are talking about.

"He did go on Bebo and apparently he had a page on there. He must have discussed his other friends dying on there because it had upset him.

"Like most parents, I have no idea how to get on these sites or what other kids are talking about.

"But I would warn other parents to beware and to keep a close eye on their children. My other son Nathan is 19 also uses the computer but mainly to speak to his girlfriend.

"I do my best to speak to him face-to-face about things and not let them bottle them up.

"Children need to speak to people not just spend hours on the computer. I think they have lost the habit of just talking - whether it's to parents, family, church, Samaritans or whoever to sort out their worries.

"I have lost my son and I know what all these other parents are going through - it is the worst nightmare any parent can go through.

"One of his friends told me that they feel that these kids seem to be copying each other. They said that so many of them are hanging themselves which is one of the worst ways to go."

Thomas, of North Cornelly, Bridgend, was found hanged from a tree in February.

His mother said: "When he was found hanged I thought someone must have spiked his drink or given him drugs - but there was nothing like that in his system.

"I have my son's ashes in my home. I had no inkling what was on his mind but to me he's still here. I say good night to him every day.

"I wouldn't want any other mother to go through what I have been through."

ends

Appendix II: Papyrus News Release

Suicide Prevention Charity Calls for End to Media Coverage of Bridgend Suicide

February 2008 - With reports today of another young death in the Bridgend area being attributed as a possible suicide, PAPYRUS, the national charity for prevention of young suicide, is calling on media to resist further coverage surrounding the recent tragic suicides in Bridgend. Although this latest death is not yet confirmed as suicide, the charity reiterates its concern regarding copycat instances. It is well known that insensitive media reporting of suicide can prompt copycat cases, says the charity.

"Media coverage must stop," said Anne Parry, chair, PAPYRUS. "We believe there is nothing further to be gained. We are seriously concerned that any more coverage would be counter-productive and exacerbate the current state of affairs, with disastrous results. At worst it could lead to further suicide attempts. We are asking media please do not draw further attention to this situation. We are also calling on other charities to support our initiative."

ends -

About PAPYRUS

PAPYRUS is a national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide, raising awareness that suicide is not necessarily the ultimate result of feeling suicidal. Founded in 1997 by a group of parents who had lost a son or daughter to suicide, it aims to support families friends, carers and anyone else who works with young people in a professional capacity.

The charity's helpline - HOPELineUK 0870 170 4000 - is a confidential telephone service staffed by trained professionals who listen, give practical advice, information and support needed in order to approach and respond to suicidal feelings, with the ultimate aim of preventing young suicide.

Editorial contact for more information: Rosemary Vaux, PAPYRUS press
office tel 020 8943 5343 mobile 07792 72 62 41 e-mail rvaux@ravenstonepr.co.uk

Rosemary Vaux
PAPYRUS Press Office
National Charity for Prevention of Young Suicide
tel: 020 8943 5343
mobile: 07792 72 62 41
www.papyrus-uk.org

HOPELineUK 0870 170 4000 or 01978 367 333 for support and practical advice to anyone concerned that a young person they know may be suicidal

Appendix III: Content Analysis Coding Sheet

Quantitative Analysis of News Accounts of the Bridgend County Suicides

Newspaper

1. The Times; 2. The Guardian; 3. The Daily Mail; 4. The Sun; 5. The Mirror; 6. South Wales Echo; 7. Western Mail; 8. The Times on Sunday; 9. The Observer; 10. The Mail on Sunday; 11. Sunday Mirror; 12. Wales on Sunday

Section

1. Main/News; 2. Weekly News Review; 3. Financial/Money; 4. Supplement 5. Culture/Society; 6. Media/I.T.;
7. Education; 99. Other

Date and Byline of Item

Day _____ Month _____ Year _____ Byline _____

Format

1. News report; 2. Editorial; 3. Column; 4. News Brief; 5. Letter to the Editor; 6. Feature;
7. Weekly News Summary;

Length of item

Words _____ Pg. No. _____ No. of total Pgs _____

Placement of item

1. FP top left; 2. FP top right; 3. FP bottom left; 4. FP bottom right; 5. IP top left; 6. IP top right;
7. IP bottom left; 8. IP bottom right

Production of item

1. Staff reporter (s); 2. Staff Correspondent; 3. Staff editorialist; 4. Staff columnist; 5. News Agency; 6. None listed; 7. Letter Writer; 8. Other

Picture accompanies article?

1. Yes 2. No

Does the picture lead the story and jump to an inside page?

1. Yes 2. No

Is there more than one photo? If yes, how many?

1. Yes _____ 2. No

What does the picture look like?

1. Mugshot; 2. Landscape; 3. Portrait; 4. N/A

Who is in the picture?

1. Deceased alone; 2. Deceased with friends; 3. Deceased with family; 4. Family; 5. Police; 6. Politicians;
7. Funeral; 8. Religious leader; 9. Partners; 10. Academic Expert; 11. Media; 12. Other; 13. N/A

Appendix III: Content Analysis Coding Sheet

Frame of report

1. Crime (violence, drug related); 2. Education; 3. Employment; 4. Mental Health (depression etc);
5. Culture (technology, media, statistics, alcohol etc); 6. Youth; 7. Women; 8. Questioning; 9. No reason for suicide/wrong; 10. Media Reporting

Primary Source in report (First mentioned)

1. Police; 2. Family Member(s); 3. Friend(s); 4. Politician(s); 5. Community Leaders; 6. Coroner;
7. Academic Expert; 8. Anonymous; 9. Other; 10. Unknown/Unclear; 11. Partners; 12. Religious Leader;
13. Non Profit; 14. None

Secondary Source in report (Second mentioned)

1. Police; 2. Family Member(s); 3. Friend(s); 4. Politician(s); 5. Community Leaders; 6. Coroner;
7. Academic Expert; 8. Anonymous; 9. Other; 10. Unknown/Unclear; 11. Partners; 12. Religious Leader;
13. Non Profit; 14. None

Journalistic Commentary

1. Crusading; 2. Argumentative; 3. Descriptive; 4. Summary; 5. Cynical; 6. Warning/helpful;
7. Questioning; 8. N/A

Causation of suicide

1. Unemployment; 2. Relationship breakdown; 3. How to Websites; 4. Social Networking sites;
5. Bullying; 6. Mental Health; 7. Drugs/Alcohol; 8. Bridgend (County/Borough); 9. Other; 10. No cause/trigger mentioned; 11. Growing Up; 12. Knowledge of others'/others' death; 13. Media Reporting; 14. N/A

Number of total suicides mentioned in story

1. Yes; 2. No

Are statistics used in story?

1. Yes; 2. No

Discourse:

a. Use of word 'Suicide' in:

1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
8. Rest of Story

b. Use of phrase 'Commit Suicide' in:

1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
8. Rest of Story

c. Use of specific 'Method' in:

1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
8. Rest of Story

d. Use of descriptive term 'cult, club, pact, victim, copycat, cluster etc' in:

1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
8. Rest of Story

e. Use of 'Religious' undertones in:

1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
8. Rest of Story

Appendix III: Content Analysis Coding Sheet

f. Use of 'Hopeful Living' terms in:

- 1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
- 8. Rest of Story

g. Use of 'Questioning' terms in:

- 1. Headline; 2. Sub-head; 3. Lead; 4. Second paragraph; 5. Pull-quote; 6. Info-box; 7. Not Used;
- 8. Rest of Story

Notes:

Appendix IV: Interview Transcripts

Interview Questions for Journalists

1. How long have you been a journalist?
2. What newspapers have you worked at?
3. What beats do you normally cover?
4. What did you think of the overall coverage of the Bridgend suicides, both at your own newspaper and in the national press?
5. Why do you think the Bridgend suicides became such a big story on the national and international stage?
6. Prior to covering the Bridgend suicide, have you ever had specific training on how to cover a suicide story?
7. What newsroom guidelines do you have on reporting suicide?
8. How were you chosen to cover the Bridgend story?
9. Before the Bridgend story, had you ever covered a suicide before? If so, can you please explain?
10. Can you please explain your process in covering the story?
11. How did you choose your sources?
12. How difficult is it to gain access to sources in a suicide story?
13. Which sources, in your opinion were driving the story, eg: government officials, police, nonprofits, family, friends?
14. How influenced were you by competing coverage?
15. How important was it that you mentioned the Internet link in your stories?
16. Police said in January 2008 that there was no Internet suicide pact. Can you explain why the media continually mentioned it in its coverage after that?
17. Do you think media reporting was causing the deaths?
18. Do you think they were copycat suicides?
19. What has your research shown as to why people take their own lives?
20. How easy was it to access pictures and other visuals for your packages?
21. Did you have a say in how the package was designed: headlines, cutlines, photos, infographs?
22. Which suicide stood out to you the most and why?
23. The story seemed to focus quite a bit on young people who died and missed the other suicides in the area of adults who were in their 40s and 50s. Why do you think this was so?
24. Do you think it is difficult for newspapers to cover a suicide story? Why or why not?
25. There seemed to be a lot of references in the coverage regarding future earning potential of those who died, why do you think this was so?
26. Reporters wrote about suicide in the abstract, as if it was this thing that took lives away. Why do you think that was so?
27. What new things did you learn about suicide or the coverage of it?
28. What newsroom discussions did you have about the suicide coverage?
29. What was the biggest challenge during the coverage?
30. A year on, would you have told the story differently?
31. What unresolved issues around the suicides would you like to go back and cover now?
32. Did you learn any lessons from your coverage?
33. Is there anything you wish you had done differently?
34. Any other comments?

Appendix IV: Interview Transcripts

Interview Questions for Non-Profit/Other

1. What was your experience with the media during the spate of suicides?
2. Who did you speak with more, local or national?
3. Why do you think the story became so big on the national and international stage?
4. What did you think of the overall coverage?
5. The journalists you spoke with, were many of them, in your opinion knowledgeable about reporting guidelines?
6. What do you think was driving the story?
7. What are your thoughts on the continual mentioning of the social networking sites and the Internet death cult?
8. Do you think media reporting was causing the deaths?
9. Do you think they were copycat suicides?
10. Why do people kill themselves?
11. Which coverage of a death stood out to you the most and why?
12. The story seemed to focus quite a bit on young people who died and missed the other suicides in the area of adults who were in their 40s and 50s. Why do you think this was so?
13. Do you think it is difficult for newspapers to cover a suicide story? Why or why not?
14. There seemed to be a lot of references in the coverage regarding future earning potential of those who died. Why do you think this was so?
15. Reporters wrote about suicide in the abstract, as if it were a thing that took lives away. Why do you think this was so?
16. A year on, how do you wish the story had been covered?
17. What unresolved issues do you think still need to be reported about the suicides?
18. How does the Samaritans feel it handled the situation?

Appendix V: Interviews Transcribed

Interview Transcripts

Please see attached CD-ROM for transcription.

South Wales ECHO

3p Wednesday, February 6, 2008 CITY FINAL www.icwales.co.uk

Win a cookery lesson with top TV chef **Antony** PAGE 24



Fiance's final message to latest Bridgend hanging victim

'I love you my baby... and I always will'



'LOVEY' Angie Fuller and fiance Joel Williams. Inset: Floral tributes from neighbours.

THE 18th hanging victim in the Bridgend area today paid tribute to his "kind, sweetest" fiancée.

Angie Fuller, 20, was found by Joel Williams at the home they shared in Nantymmet.

Writing on a website, 24-year-old Joel said: "At last Monday morning he took away from us one of the kindest, sweetest, loving people we could ever have been blessed to know. I love Angie and I always will "I love you baby, xxx"

Today, Angie's friend Sarah Shaw said: "They and Joel were really lovey-dovey. We are all so shocked because they had just got engaged and the future was looking good."

A parliamentary debate takes place tomorrow discussing the wave of young people taking their own lives in Bridgend, and nearby towns and villages.

And on Friday the coroner responsible for investigating the apparent suicides is expected to make a statement when he formally opens the inquest into Angie's death. The Bridgend police have denied that the teenager's death was linked to the spate of young people killing themselves in the borough - which has claimed 14 lives in just over a year.

IN TROUBLE Pages 6-7



PHOTO: Julie Jenkins

Shock for paramedic

PARAMEDIC had a shock when she came on a call - all four young boys inside were deaths of her daughter. Julie Jenkins didn't hesitate but immediately began reading the obituary for the father of her daughter's boyfriend, John Phillips, at his 39-year-old funeral, in town.

John, whose injuries included three inches in a collapsed lung and bleeding into the lung, was brought to hospital and fighting for breath and she had to give him the news of his death.

KILL - GUEST Page 5

Thunder strike at latest vow

THE 11th grand old has been struck by a thunder strike in the latest case. The 11th grand old has been struck by a thunder strike in the latest case. The 11th grand old has been struck by a thunder strike in the latest case.

WARRIOR PROTECT Page 3

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Principality boss moves to ease fears

THE boss of Wales' biggest building society has moved in case fears of a house price crash in South Wales might be eased by the credit crunch. Principality, said that sellers needed to be realistic about the state of their houses. Mr Griffiths, speaking as the Principality today reported pre-tax profits in 2007 marginally up from £20m to £20.5m, said: "The housing market will be tougher, it's all about confidence and confidence is fuelled by what people read in the newspapers."

"But I don't believe people should be ever concerned about a massive house price drop. And our estate agency arm Peter Alan has started to sell quite strongly given that January is not one of the peak months. But there needs to be a sense of realism. Those looking to a hope for a better as people have in recent years are not going to get sales away."

We can learn from England, says MP

WELSH and England should be closer to each other to learn both nations better, a South Wales MP has said. Cardiff West MP Kevin Blaney said "devolution was not there" enough for the countries to learn from each other. He said: "We don't talk enough about the great policy areas that devolution has allowed to happen. I have no doubt we're getting to a point where we can talk about these things without saying 'Everything in England is rubbish'."



Culture on show

A HOUSING association has organised a event for ethnic minority tenants to learn more about Welsh culture. The three-hour Flavour of Wales, organised by Cardiff-based Cadwyn, features tasting of traditional foods and films on local history. It takes place on Thursday, March 29, at St Gwynan's Church Hall, Adamston, Cardiff.

Swastika has gone

SWASTIKA graffiti has been scrubbed off a city club wall - six months after complaints were made. A swastika was painted on the changing rooms at Penyolun RFC in August and, after two complaints, the offensive symbol was scrubbed up. Club chairman Gill Jones said: "We have put up measures to stop people breaking in."

AM's bus worry

LEAD AM Leano Wood has raised concerns with ministers about an attack on a bus travelling to Alkomy. The bus was pelted with stones, breaking windows, in Ferndale. "These types of attacks do nothing to help people's wellbeing," she said.

Another apparent teen suicide in Bridgend area

Fiance's grief for



"I DON'T LIKE MYSELF" Angie Fuller was found dead in the home she shared with her fiance Joel Williams, above right.

Ben Glas

"JUST a note to let you all know that at 11am Monday morning life took away from us one of the brightest, sweetest, loving people we could ever have been blessed to know. I love Angie and I always will. I love you baby xxx"

This is how the fiance of the latest, young apparent suicide victim from Bridgend and surrounding towns and villages wrote the news of her death.

She was 18, was found hanged on Monday, as revealed in later editions of yesterday's *Evening*.

Angie, as she was known to friends and family, was discovered by 21-year-old fiance Joel Williams at the three-bedroom, north-facing home they shared together in Nantymowl, eight miles north of Bridgend. The couple got engaged last year but had delayed their wedding several times, according to friends.

Police, who yesterday refused to confirm publicly that she was the 11th youngster from the county to be found hanged in recent months, say they are not treating her death as suspicious.

Cornwall Philip Walters will open Angie's inquest on Friday and it is thought he will take the opportunity to address the issue of young suicides in Bridgend and the surrounding area. The topic has dominated national media reports with concerns some of the deaths might be linked to internet sites.

A task force has been set up to try to prevent more young people killing themselves and a debate about suicides in the county is due to take place in the House of Commons tomorrow, led by Bridgend MP Mairi McLoughlin.

Today there were floral tributes on the doorstep of Angie and Joel's home in Commercial Street, where she had lived since the summer. Writing on his website on the MySpace social networking site, Joel mourned "my poor but Angie" and described his mood as "lonely" and "crushed".

Angie's friend Sarah Shaw, 39, introduced the couple when Angie moved to South Wales from Shrewsbury two years ago.

Mem-of-war Sarah said Angie, a fan of Goth culture and music who worked at Jagger clothes shop at Bridgend Designer Outlet, Sarn, suffered from depression and had previously slashed her wrists and taken an overdose.

Angie is understood to have killed herself

Long and depressing tale of deaths among young people

- Dale Croft, 18, of Portcawl, found hanged near the Conry Beach hotel on January 8, 2007, after going missing on September 25, 2006
- The best friend David Dilling, of Pyle, hanged himself six weeks later on February 18, 2007, from a tree behind Pyle police station
- David's friend Thomas Davies, of North Cornely, hanged himself in a park on February 25, 2007
- April 2007, Allyn Price, 21, hanged himself in a friend's bedroom in June
- James Knight, 26, found hanged at his home in Cain Calver, near Bridgend, on May 17
- Zachary Barnes, 17, of Wildmill, Bridgend, was



HANGING Dale Croft.

- discovered hanged on August 11, 2007.
- Jason Williams, 21, found hanged at home in North Cornely by his fiancée on August 23, 2007
- Luke Goodridge, 28, found hanged by his mother in Bridgend in November
- Liam Clarke, 20, of Cain Glas, Bridgend, found hanged in a park on December 27, 2007
- Andrew O'Hall, 19, apparently killed his own life at home in Haverhill
- Gereth Morgan, 27, was found hanged in his bedroom in Haverhill Lane, Bridgend, in January this year
- Natasha Randall, 17, found hanged in Blaengarw, near Bridgend, on January 17, 2008
- Angelina Fuller found on Monday



BEDROOM DEATH Natasha Randall.

at a shop assistant found hanged at a night party

'poor, lost Angie'

after the couple held a late-night party. The man went to bed early but Angie continued parting downstairs. He woke hours later and was worried because Angie was not in bed behind him. Sarah said: "Joel found the bedroom door was locked and had to kick his way out, only to find Angie dead on the landing. We're all so shocked because they had just got engaged and the future was looking good." Sarah added: "We know Angie since she was five. She was very pretty."

"Her and Joel were really lovey-dovey. Angie always wanted to commit. They were supposed to get married last July then September."

Local shopkeeper Sam Nash said: "Both of them were very excited at getting engaged. I was so delighted for them that I gave her a bottle of wine and a box of chocolates."

"She was a well presented, well spoken girl who was used to getting her groceries every week. I'm shocked that this has happened to her. She seemed so happy."

Witnesses were yesterday speculating the death might be linked to the in the borough. Alice Jones, 21, who lives in Plumstead, said: "It's ridiculous. I'm worried now for the health of every young person in the Valleys. Most of those that have died are about my age."

A neighbour said: "It's another laughing for the next few weeks. Angie was a pretty little thing and she used to say hello."

"I don't know why they are doing it - and we don't even know because they take all the responsibility to the grave with them."

But Sarah, of Stormy Lane, Pitetown, Ogmore Valley, said Angie had her own problems and denied she knew the other victims from the borough. She added: "There's definitely no link between Angie and these other deaths."

Website dues to teen's feelings of inadequacy

"I DON'T like myself, but hey who does?" This is just one of the comments tragic Angie Fodor posted under the About Me section on her Facebook page.

Like so many other teenagers, Angie, who would have celebrated her 19th birthday on March 6, used the social networking site to communicate with friends, talk about her favourite bands and TV shows and post pictures of herself and friends at parties.

But the comments she has posted offer a valuable insight into why the bright 18-year-old, who was engaged to boyfriend Joel Williams, may have taken her own life.

"I hate religion, I love my boyfriend and I had all my hair cut short and dyed purple yesterday!" she adds.

Angie, who lists her interests on Facebook as music, art, psychology and generally interesting things, also listed The Pursuit of Happiness as one of her favourite films and rock bands Placebo, Alice in Chains and the Smashing Pumpkins among her favourite music.



A picture taken Angie's Facebook page

MP TO LEAD DEATHS DEBATE

BRIDGEND MP Jonathan Morgan is to lead a debate in the House of Commons on the issue of teenage suicides from which he returned in January.

Mrs Morgan said today: "This is a very serious issue, which has caused me to raise the issue in the House of Commons. I will be raising the issue of teenage suicides from which he returned in January."

She said: "Clearly existing services do not appear to be offering an alternative route or support. That is why I've called the adjournment debate in Parliament."

She added: "It's time for Wales to tackle the appalling statistics that show a 35 per cent higher rate of suicides in Wales than there is in England. It's time to act."

Problems? Then talk to someone

HELP is at hand for people experiencing anxiety in Bridgend. Jo Farrar, of Bridgend Local Board and chief Bridgend councillor, is to set up a support group for people with anxiety.

She said: "Anxiety is a common problem, what it is, don't keep it to yourself. Seeking your help to put things in a different light, and is the first step towards finding a solution."

There are 18 drop-in centres throughout the area as well as a youth shop in the centre. All are run by qualified youth workers who provide advice and guidance about issues including suicide prevention.

There are specialists offering help in schools, all GPs will offer advice and there are specific projects to help young offenders, prisoners and people leaving hospital after long periods of care.

Dr Farrar encouraged anyone contemplating suicide to ask for help.

Visit the website www.bridgendscb.org.uk or ring Child Line on 0800 1111, Samaritans on 01656 622333 or Papyrus on 01282 432555.

Passengers are cut free

CAERPHILLY firefighters had to help rescue two teenage passengers from the wreck of a car after the vehicle crashed into a tree.

The driver of the Vauxhall Astra had control of the vehicle just a short distance from the Corbett's Roundabout between Caerphilly and Treccydd at around 11.30pm yesterday.

The male driver and a front seat male passenger managed to escape before emergency crews arrived but two others were trapped in the back seat.

Firefighters used specialist equipment to get the back door open to release the youths.

They were taken to hospital in neck collars with suspected spinal injuries.

Cefn Forest firefighters had to cut the roof off a Citroen C4 which had been involved in a three vehicle pile-up on Monday evening.

The accident happened on the A172 road between Pontllantraith and Wylie at just after 8am.

The female driver and male passenger of the Citroen had to be cut free and was taken to hospital with suspected spinal and head injuries.

The driver and passenger in the other vehicles, a Renault Megane and a box type van, were unharmed.

Social services' joy

A VALLEYS council has earned praise following a joint review of its social services.

The plaintiffs follow the publication of the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales' report.

The inspectors found that the social services available in Merthyr Tydfil provide "good care and help to keep people safe" and that the overall service was "good".

MAJESTIC Themed
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Teenage suicide

Internet death cults? Or is it a humdrum cause closer to home?

Loneliness, depression and even acne are more likely to be driving the young to end it all, say those who have been on the edge

Stephanie Marsh

A 15th young person in Wales takes her own life and the whole of adult Britain is on suicide watch. Why do our young people want to extinguish themselves? The parents, psychologists, MPs, police and teachers have all had their say. But what do the young people themselves really think?

On Monday Angie Fuller, 18, became the latest teenager to have killed herself in the Bridgend area. She was found by her boyfriend hanged at their home. Yesterday, Philip Walter, Councillor for Bridgend and the Glamorgan valleys, said emphatically that he had profound doubts about any "copycat" theory: "I'm of the mind that

there is no commonality between these deaths, and preliminary investigations say the same."

Mr Walter's expertise notwithstanding, public opinion has its own spin. Increasingly specialist vocabulary is being thrown about to explain the deaths, which include those of Natasha Randall, 17, hanged at her home in Blaengarw, Bridgend; Randall's friend, Liam Clarke, 20, found dead in the Cefn Glas area of Bridgend; Dale Croft, 18, who was found hanged in Porthcawl in January last year; and David Dilling, 19, and Thomas Davies, 20, who both died the following month. In August, Zachary Barnes, 17,

of Wiston, Bridgend, was also found hanged.

There is talk of suicide cults and chains and contagion, crisis intervention and clusters. Bridgend is the "teenage suicide capital of Britain" — "death all town" for short, whose "victims" are "groomed" to kill themselves. Another figure who roams the internet in search, it has been claimed, of the emotionally vulnerable.

The so-called internet death cult has gained increasing currency, despite countless arguments from people such as David Matthews, who runs the local Samaritans group and who points out: "You could probably link loads of youngsters through the internet."

Could the internet have killed the young people of Bridgend? Is suicide "catching"? The young people who I talked to had doubts. It "Tom", who latched onto attempts to kill himself in his teens, and "Philip", who tried



Angie Fuller, 18, with Jool Williams, who found her hanged on Monday



WALES on Sunday


February 17, 2008 PRIDE OF THE NATION



BEHIND THE SCENES AT JULIEN MACDONALD'S STAR-STudded SHOW

PICTURE SPECIAL: PAGES 24 & 25

'I LOVE YOU'



Bridgend suicide victim's final text message to lover



TRAGIC Kelly Stephenson was so distraught about the death of her 15-year-old cousin that she may have been pushed to take her own life, it was claimed yesterday.

University student Aimee an Young, who had been her partner for three years, revealed they had spoken together after Kelly's cousin Nathaniel Ditchard hanged himself at his home in Bridgend.

Just hours later, Kelly texted Aimee: "I love you" before killing herself.

The cousins were the 15th and

By CATHERINE EVANS

16th young people to die in a spate of suicides in the Bridgend area since January 2007.

Terrified Aimee said "I must have pushed her into taking her own life."

Sports fanatic Kelly, 20, was found hugging while staying with her mother in Faldstone.

Friend Mark Bennett, 23, said yesterday: "It's like a bomb. It was if people are thinking 'he's done it - I'll have a go'." But last night police were again playing down links between those who have died in the area.

FULL STORY: PAGES 4 & 5



SHANE CAUGHT IN CLUB BUST-UP
EXCLUSIVE PHOTO

LED ZEPPELIN IN CARDIFF TALKS
EXCLUSIVE PHOTO

WIN A TRIP TO IRELAND v WALES
TOKEN COLLECT PAGE 38

UK AND WORLD BRIEF

Murder: Woman held

A WOMAN was remanded in custody yesterday charged with the murder of a man found stabbed at his home.

Felicia Smith, 29, of the Normanton area of Derby, appeared before magistrates in the city accused of killing 51-year-old Peter Szumyk.

Mr Szumyk was found injured at his house in Bedford Street, in the Deartree area of Derby, on Thursday afternoon. He died later in hospital.

Sofa so good for star

OSCAR winner Charlize Theron (right) will ditch the designer dress and red carpet of the Academy awards in favour of watching this year's ceremony at home in her pyjamas.



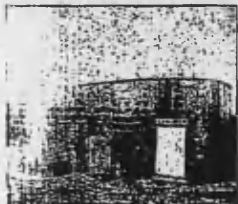
The actress said: "I don't think I can go to those kind of award shows unless you are nominated."

27 die in bomb attack

A SUICIDE bomber has killed 27 people after a bombing of supporters of murdered ex-PM Benazir Bhutto's party, Pakistan's interior ministry said yesterday.

The attack, on the last day of campaigning ahead of general elections tomorrow, also wounded 98.

The place in Parachinar, the main town of the tribal region of Kurram in the north-west of Pakistan.



ROYAL CONCERN: Prince Charles has invoked his infamous 1984 "orbuncle" speech with a damning new attack on modern architecture. He also described the Ivor Crewe lecture theatre at the University of Essex in Colchester (pictured above) as "a dustbin". Last month the prince claimed that the proliferation of "fief" buildings in London was creating a "positive rash" of new "orbuncles".

Prob shoot out probe

THREE men were being quizzed yesterday about a shooting at an up-market city centre restaurant.

The men, aged 25 and 40, were arrested after a fireman was discharged at Love's, in Birmingham's Mailbox, on Friday night.

As he was hurt but the gunfire saw terrified diners flee the venue. The shooting was "not random" but targeted a group of between 10 and 15 people in a public meeting, said police.

China job for teacher

THE British teacher jailed in Sweden for calling a teddy bear Mohammed is going abroad again to teach in China.



William Gibbons, 54, from Ayr with Liverpool, was spared a three-year sentence to 15 days in custody after being convicted of insulting Islam.

Islamophobia protest

BRITISH Muslims protested outside Downing Street yesterday demanding an end of Islamophobia in the media.

About 80 people representing a number of organisations took part under the slogan "Yes to equal citizenship. No to double standards".

The aim was to highlight grievances including the banning of Trading MP Sadiq Khan and the media furore over the Sharia law debate.

WYKELLY



By CATHERINE EVANS

Suicide victim's lover tells

TRAGIC Bridgend suicide Kelly Stephenson sent a "goodbye" text message to her girlfriend just moments before hanging herself, it was revealed yesterday.

University student Aimee saw the text simply saying "I love you" but didn't realise its significance.

Hours later Aimee discovered the name of the man who was dead.

Tearful Aimee said: "I can't believe I can see that the text message Kelly sent saying goodbye. It was the last I heard from her."

"I was in total shock when I saw what she had done - I would never have believed Kelly could ever take her own life."

"She never spoke about it but I know she always said suicide was a selfish thing to do."

"What she did was totally unexpected."

Sparks' fanatic Kelly, 20, was hanging while staying with her mother, Gill Stephens, in Kent.

She and her mother were yesterday maintaining the 16 apparent

suicides - all by hanging - were not linked.

But Aimee confirmed that Kelly knew some of the previous victims and had been to the funeral of at least one of them.

Aimee said: "Kelly went to school with some of the people who died and she knew most of them socially. She was really devastated by their deaths and we talked about it quite a bit."

"Kelly was great friends with Liam Clarke who hung himself in December."

"She went to a funeral of one of her friends only last week - although I didn't know the girl."

"I don't think it was those tragedies that led to her death - Kelly killed herself because of what happened to her cousin."

"It must have really got to her and ended her into taking her own life."

"She had no idea what was on her mind. She told me she had brought me a Valentine's Day present which she was looking forward to giving me when she got back to Bridgend."

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More than 20 young people - many of them complete strangers - have posted RIP messages onto Kelly's Bebo page where she called herself Baby-Girl Kelly.

One said: "RIP Kelly I hope you will be sadly missed by all who now and had the privilege to play foxy against you next time deep night x"

Another, from a friend in Bridgend, said: "Kelly is still not real yet, I can't get my head round it I can't think how a man got and I always will be."

"I was the bestest m8 any I could ask 4... Always there time when I needed a and the most."

"I'm wish I could turn back time and have her m8 4"

Heartbroken Aimee said: "Kelly was really outgoing, spunky and full of fun - she had her whole life ahead of her."

"She was weak and loved making cracks for the customers."

"But she also loved football and had just joined a local ladies team where she was looking to play regularly."

"Kelly was my best friend - she meant

NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS STUNNED BY

FRIENDS of the cousin yesterday told how they were saddened by their deaths.

Mark Bennett, 23, who also has four of the other young people to have recently died, said: "It's like a curse. It's as if people are afraid of their deaths - I'll have a go. It's getting a bit beyond belief."

His friend Barry, 21, who did not want to give his surname, said: "It's sad I really feel for the families."

The men, both from the Celtic town, said they did not believe there was any connection linking all of the deaths, and that they believe there

was a link between the two young

Mr Bennett said: "I think it must be different reasons for different people, but we'll never know. I don't think we're like the Bebo have got anything to do with it."

Barry said: "Nathaniel's death has just come out of the blue. He was a really nice friendly guy and a hard worker. He wasn't a drug user but would have a drink now and again. He was very sociable and had many friends around Bridgend."

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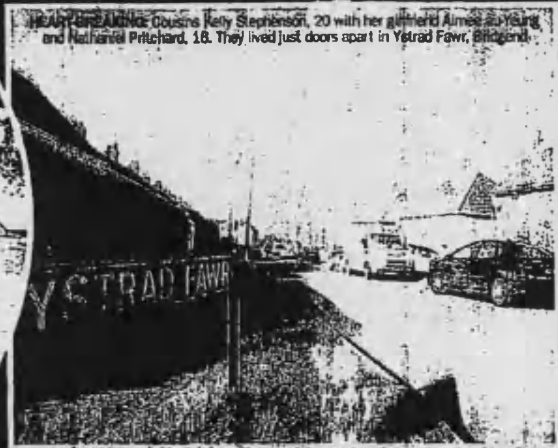
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TORMENT



Healthy young Aimee Stephens, 20, with her girlfriend Kelly Stephenson, 20, and Nathaniel Pritchard, 18. They lived just doors apart in Ystrad Fawr, Bridgend.

Youth fights for life after fleeing cops

A TEENAGER is seriously ill in hospital after running away from police officers.

The youth, 15, is being treated at Alder Hey Hospital, Liverpool, after the incident around 9pm on Friday night in Rhosllanerchrugog, near Wrexham.

The teenager was approached by police but when questioned ran off and was later found a short distance away unconscious on a pavement.

A spokeswoman for North Wales Police said, "It is believed the youth was approached by the police officers but when questioned ran off and was later found a short distance away unconscious on a pavement."

"Due to the fact that the youth ran off when being questioned by police officers, North Wales Police have referred the matter to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) for investigation."

"The IPCC has deployed a senior investigator to gather evidence before deciding how the incident should be investigated further."

North Wales Police did not say whether the injured youngster was male or female and gave no further details about the incident.

Who dares Flynn?

VETERAN politician Paul Flynn has been asked to appear in a TV show in which politicians will be trained by the SAS.

Newport West MP Mr Flynn, 73, received the invite this week.

It reads: "We are developing a series that will involve politicians competing against each other in an environment that will develop mental and physical strength under the tuition of the SAS."

Mr Flynn said on his website that the offer was a "very resistible invitation".

of shock

everything from a complete shock - Kelly's partner, 16, and sister Kevla, 16, were being comforted by family members at their home in Cefn Clys, Bridgend.

Just 15 days later, Nathaniel put out a note and Simon went missing through similar circumstances and the situation when their son was found to die.

Schubert, who was expected to do well in his GCSEs later this year, had a girlfriend and a close, supportive family.

But on Wednesday evening his family found him lying on the stairs of their home.

He was still breathing and taken to hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

But when Kelly's family he would never come back and the tragic news was relayed to Kelly in Bridgend.

She changed her hair - just hours before Nathaniel's death - and was shocked off.

Kelly's brother being brought back to

Bridgend and both families were yesterday making funeral arrangements for their children - the 15th and 16th to die in a series of apparent suicides since January 2007. All of the victims had been found hanged.

A special task force has been set up in Bridgend involving police, social services, health and education officials.

South Wales Police have brought in their summer crime squad to investigate the suicides but claim the deaths are not linked. These reports will be next week. Welsh Assembly members for Bridgend, Cerywyn Jones, said it was not clear to decide whether a further inquiry was needed.

He said: "We're talking about suicides in a country of more than 1,200,000 people - not just the town of Bridgend."

"What we're looking at here is something in the order of unrelated suicides. And it's worth emphasising that Bridgend is not way, way ahead of others."

"It was south in a table of counties at the last count - not something to boast about."

"The county has drawn up a draft suicide prevention strategy and it is now a question of making sure the strategy is looked at and put into place."



TRAGIC LOSS: All these young people were killed by just 100 yards from their homes in Bridgend.

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LATEST TRAGEDIES

named, said: "There were kinds of police and no one there have all right. It has that a young woman had died by suicide."

Nathaniel had two brothers and one sister, and his mother's then eight to ten had a younger brother and sister. Neighbours said the family had lived on the street for more than 15 years.

Police have refused to confirm how Nathaniel and 17-year-old Simon became homeless, but said initial indications were that both deaths was suspicious. Local residents have been informed of the deaths, and inquiries will take place in later days. They have played close links between the young people who have recently died in the area.

The Bridgend branch of Samaritans said there had been a rise in the number of calls from under 25s in the area recently, which could be due to their need assistance of the service.

Heads of service at Bridgend and South Wales, Dawn Matthews, said: "We are concerned that these suicides are still occurring and are continuing to support the community. If there's anyone out there who needs help, we're available 24 hours a day."

The Bridgend Samaritans can be reached on 01626 662333, or email jcs@samaritans.org. Childline can be contacted on 0800 1111 and Poppyline, speciality in preventing young suicide, can be reached on 01282 432555.

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ATTAC: Ploam

'Cuppa's too risky for kids'

By BARRY MORRIS
SCHOOLS should not serve tea to pupils under 16 on health and safety grounds, a watchdog warned yesterday.

The School Food Trust said hot tea and coffee have "minimal nutritional benefits and pose a risk."

The Trust - part of the Government drive to improve the food quality in schools - said it did not want to ban them but will hold a consultation on minimums restriction code.

But Mick Brookes, of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "It's narrowing the net."

And UKIP MEP Godfrey Bloom called the idea "utterly stupid", adding: "Their pettiness knows no bounds."

Children's Minister Kevin Brennan backed the traditional view, saying: "Not a job for 16-year-olds specifically with tea and coffee. There's no intention of banning them."

In a separate statement, the Trust called the issue "a storm in a tea cup", adding: "The Trust's focus is on nutrition."



TEAFF: Fred

Anger as tot's killer gets 3yrs

By ADAM HENNINGHAM
A BABYSITTER who shook a 15-month-old tot to death but was jailed for just three years was branded as "soft" by the tot's furious father.

John Jeacock, then 22, had slammed 19-year-old Harry Jackson on to a bed and allowed him to smother the baby with a rag doll in his baby-sitting on Mother's Day. He admitted manslaughter.

Sentencing him, Judge Gerald Gordon QC said: "I know this will be regarded as grossly inadequate... But I have to pass a sentence according to law."

Family and friends in court reacted angrily at the sentence. Afterwards Harry's dad Bruce Jackson, 23, shook his fist at Jeacock and yelled: "You wait, you bloody cow!"

Jeacock had agreed to look after Harry's with his own child, Harry's mum Maxine Mellor, 23, was sister of his girlfriend and both had parents to spare.

Jeacock, of Mainham, Essex, lost his temper and shook Harry to death when he pulled a rag doll over the baby's face.

TWO COUSINS DIE IN 'BRIDGEND SUICIDES'

By RICHARD SPULL
TWO cousins from a town hit by a wave of young suicides have been found hanged.

Kelly Stephenson, 20, was found dead in a bathroom during a family holiday. Hours earlier she had been told her cousin Nathaniel Pritchard, 15, was fighting for life after being discovered in an attic at his home.

Nathaniel also died yesterday after his life support was switched off. The cousins lived 14 houses apart in Bridgend, Glamorgan.

Their deaths mean 16 young people aged 15 to 27 have died from hanging in the town in little more than a year.

And another nine hangings in the surrounding area are also being investigated.

Keen sportswoman Kelly was on holiday in Folkestone, Kent, when she was found dead.

She was friendly with two of the other victims: Gareth Morgan, 27, and Liam Clark, 20, who hanged themselves last year.

But a relative said: "Whether this had anything to do with what happened we just don't know. We just don't understand what is going on in Bridgend."

"Kelly and Nathaniel were both brilliant kids with good futures. We could never have thought in a million years they were capable of anything like this."

None of this makes sense and both families are devastated at what has happened.

Town's shock as youth toll rises



TRAGEDY: Kelly, right, died after hanging of Nathaniel, left, on holiday

16 Suicides linked to the Bridgend area in one year

"Kelly and Nathaniel were members of the internet social networking sites Bebo and Facebook. But South Wales police and Bridgend coroner Philip Walters have played down any connection with internet."

"It's going crazy in Bridgend and it's not going to stop. No one can understand what is going on."

"I know seven of the people who killed themselves. People are saying it's got something to do with the internet but I don't believe that. But then I can't explain it either."

"Everyone is talking about Kelly's death. It's awful. I saw her a month ago and she was fine, smiling and laughing."

Kelly called herself Baby-Girl-Kelly on Bebo - where she said her biggest fear was "losing the people I love".

She had pictures of Nathaniel on her site, with his nicknames Ginge. On her network page she wrote: "I just love to live life to the full... Always up in a laugh and don't like to takin' things too serious."

"Alcohol is one of my favourite things. I loves to go out and get drunk and have a laugh with mates."

Kelly was a keen footballer and had recently signed for Porthcawl Lightning Strikers.

Manager Tony Morgan said: "She had only played one game for us. I couldn't pick her for this weekend because she was going away on holiday. It is a shock and another tragedy involving a young person. Everyone at the club will be shocked."

South Wales police said: "There is no evidence to suggest this incident is linked to any other incidents or sudden deaths in the area."

"If you feel that you or a person you know needs help, contact the Samaritans on 08457 909090 or samaritans.org or support group Papparae on 0870 120 1000."

Mum fears copycat death



By LYN...
THE parents of a 15-year-old boy found hanged in his bedroom after watching a video of the suicides in Bridgend.

Cameron McWaters, 15, told an inquest that hanging was like without realising it would take less than a minute.

He wouldn't believe he could kill himself. Kelly, from Bridgend, who is disabled and suffering a stroke, said her death came totally out of the blue.

She told the inquest that Cameron liked to wear tight underwear. She added: "It was apparent he was unhappy. He said he was wearing this underwear."

He just liked to wear the underwear. He was confused but he was not a glutton for punishment. He never said he wanted to be a glutton for punishment. He even had a girlfriend and had got a Valentine card ready to give her."

"I loved him no matter what. We have talked about his sexuality but I don't think it troubled him."

She said the family was convinced his dressing up played no part in his death.

The inquest was adjourned.

He had a girlfriend and had got a Valentine card ready to give her."

He had a girlfriend and had got a Valentine card ready to give her."

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Geir: It's over for 5 Spices

GERI Halliwell says the Spice Girls will NOT get back together after their reunion tour ends. When the girls recently announced the global tour would finish early, they hinted at future shows, saying "She knows what will happen next". But now Geri, 35, admits a tour "probably won't happen again". She said the final show - in Toronto, Canada, on February 20 - would be the last one she'll ever get to see the five Spices on the stage as one. The names of one denied reports of in-fighting with Emma Bunton, 32, Mel B, 32, Mel C, 34, and Victoria Beckham, 33. She recalled the tour had simply "gone on longer than planned". Geri said in a US interview she thought we were going to go to the end of it. "After every body had commitments kids had to go back to school so that we had to play out that we would have loved to have gone to."

Tribute to dead son

THE heartbroken mum of a 15-year-old boy killed with a car by a man in a New York City tribute last night. "A wonderful son and a wonderful father," said Andrew Hardie, 48, and his wife Timmins, 47, who were walking back to their hotel during a rain break. "Dad was a mother's boy," said in Plymouth Devon. "We're all devastated."

Britons in rugby riot

FLEW members of a British team on a foreign tour smashed up a hotel in a riot during a dispute over a shop. The riot broke out from a supermarket and held a race down a high street. Now the riot has spread to other towns in the region. Staffordshire, offered to pay for the damage. The riot still face a charge of riotous conduct under Italian law. Police chief Antonio Verhulst said in Lecce. "We had a riot that a riot was but it was a riot."

BRIDGEND TOLL 16 AS COUSINS HANG
Two more young suicides within hours stun town



KELLY, 20
Nathaniel Kelly was still alive when he was discovered



NATHANIEL, 15
Nathaniel Kelly was still alive when he was discovered

THE Bridgend death toll rose to 16 yesterday after two cousins were found hanged.

The town was plunged into new shock and mourning on learning of the deaths of Nathaniel Pritchard, 15, and Kelly Stephenson, 20. Schoolboy Nathaniel, the youngest victim so far, was still alive when he was discovered in an attic room at his home, though his life support machine was turned off yesterday. Hours later Kelly was found hanged from a bath room shower rail 200 miles away in Folkestone, Kent, where she was on a holiday. Friends said she was very close to Nathaniel and had been told there was little chance of him surviving his apparent suicide bid. The cousins lived just 11 doors from each other in Bridgend, South Wales, which has been left reeling from a long series of hangings among young people. Sixteen aged between 15

By **JOHN COLES**

and 27 have now died since January last year. Nathaniel is the 12th male and Kelly the third female. A special police task force has been set up to investigate the deaths amid fears of copycat suicides and net working on the internet. Police said there was an evidence to suggest the latest deaths were linked to any of the others. But many

victims knew each other and tributes to the couple can be seen on social networking websites. Kelly's name was mentioned on Facebook and a woman who was friendly with two of the previous victims. She had pictures of Nathaniel on her site under his nickname "Ginger". Friends in both Kent and South Wales said there was no reason to believe to be any

suspicious circumstances in either death. A friend of Kelly's named Rosie wrote on Debo yesterday "It's going crazy down in Bridgend. No one can understand what is going on." "I know seven of the people who killed themselves. I saw Kelly a month ago and she was fine - smiling and laughing." A relative of the cousins said yesterday "They were both brilliant kids with good futures ahead of them.

We would never have thought in a million years that they were capable of anything like this." Kelly called herself "Baby-Girl-Kelly" on her Debo site, where she said her biggest fear was "Losing the people I love". She added "I just love to live life to the full". A tribute on Nathaniel's site said "What happened to me? Going to miss you."

Inquests

Philip Walters, the coroner for Bridgend and the Glamorgan Valleys, has recorded suicide verdicts on all those on whom he had concluded inquests apart from James Knight, 28. Mr Walters heard James died from hanging but recorded a narrative verdict as he was unsure the young man intended to take his own life. **THE** rate of suicide among young men in England and Wales has fallen to 85 per 100,000, the lowest level since 1974, according to research by the University of Bristol. *coles@the-sun.co.uk*

TELLY 'COPYCAT'



Victim... Cameron

A BOY of ten was found hanged after watching a report on the Bridgend suicides. Cameron, 10, was found hanged about 11.1pm in his bedroom in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. She told the town's coroner's court: "We knew more about it than we did - but we didn't think anything about it." Cameron was known to be unhappy as he wanted to be a girl. The inquest was adjourned.

bedroom in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. She told the town's coroner's court: "We knew more about it than we did - but we didn't think anything about it." Cameron was known to be unhappy as he wanted to be a girl. The inquest was adjourned.

Cousins are found hanged in town hit by a spate of suicides



Dead: Nathaniel Fitchard was found in an attic. Dead: Kelly Stephenson, a keen sportswoman

THE death toll in a small town hit by a spate of suicides rose to 16 yesterday when two young cousins were found hanged.

They died hours apart, leaving the South Wales community of Bridgend reeling from the continuing string of tragedies.

Nathaniel Fitchard, 15, was still alive when he was discovered in an attic room at the family home on Wednesday but died yesterday morning when his life-support machine was turned off.

His cousin Kelly Stephenson, 20, had been told of Nathaniel's suicide while she was on holiday in Folkestone, Kent, and warned there was little hope he would survive.

Kelly - who knew two of the young men who died last year - was found dead shortly after midnight yesterday by a relative.

South Wales police and Bridgend coroner Philip Walter said they did not believe the apparent suicides were linked and played down any connection with internet sites.

A task force involving police, social services, health and education officials has been set up to investigate the series of tragedies and discussions have taken place at government level over the spate of young deaths - all by hanging - which started in January 2007.

Earlier this week it emerged that another nine similar hangings, not all involving young people, had occurred in the last two months in neighbouring valleys.

By Michael Seamark and Luke Salkeld

A relative of the cousins said: 'We just don't know what is going on in Bridgend. Kelly and Nathaniel were both brilliant kids with good futures ahead of them. We would never have thought in a million years that they were capable of anything like this.'

'None of this makes sense and both families are devastated at what has happened.'

Kelly and Nathaniel lived 14 houses apart in Bridgend and friends described the cousins, both members of the Bebo and Facebook social networking sites, as 'very close'.

Nathaniel was found at the family home in Cefn Glas, Bridgend, on Wednesday night and was taken to hospital, where he later died.

'It's going crazy in Bridgend'

By home in Cefn Glas, Bridgend, on Wednesday night and was taken to hospital, where he later died.

South Wales Police said: 'There is no evidence to suggest this incident is linked to any other incidents or sudden deaths in the area.'

Keen sportswoman Kelly, who knew Gareth Morgan, 27, and Liam Clarke, 20, who died last year - told a relative she was going to the bathroom but when she failed to return they went to investigate, and found her dead.

Kent police said: 'Officers are making inquiries but there are not believed to be any suspicious circumstances.'

Kelly, who called herself Bebo Girl Kelly on Bebo, wrote on the site: 'I just love to live life to the full... Always up 4 a laugh and don't like takin things to serious. Alcohol is one of my favourite things. I loves to go out and drink and have a laugh with mates.'

Kelly had pictures of her cousin Nathaniel on her website and one of her Bebo pages their photographs and tribute to three other victims, Liam Clarke, Niallshin Randall and Zane Barnes.

One of Kelly's internet friends said: 'It's going crazy down in Bridgend and it's not going to stop. No one can understand what is going on.'

'I know seven of the people who have killed themselves. People are saying it's got something to do with the internet but I don't believe that. But then I can't explain it either.'

'I saw Kelly a month ago and she was fine - smiling and laughing.'

Bridgend MP Madeleine Bell secured a debate in the House of Commons last week on suicide prevention. Talking about the Bridgend tragedies, she told MPs: 'The media have asked whether the cause is the internet, Bebo, Facebook or other working sites. The answer is no.'

'I believe there is a risk from spending too much time in the alternative reality of computer games and chat rooms.'

Philip Walter, Coroner for Bridgend and the Glamorgan valleys, said earlier this month that he had profound doubts about any 'copycat' theory connecting the series of suicides.

'I'm of the mind that there is no commonality between these deaths, and preliminary investigations say the same', he said.

What parents can do to help

Daily Mail Reporter

CHARITIES have urged parents of teenage children to remain vigilant.

The Samaritans said youngsters most at risk included those who appeared withdrawn or who seemed to be bottling up their problems.

Parents should try to get their children to talk about their concerns at all costs, it said.

The charity Papyrus, which is committed to suicide prevention, said other warning signs in teenagers included being tearful, finding it hard to sleep and suffering from eating problems.

A spokesman for the charity said: 'Potential intuition can be the key to spotting it. A lot of these parents might be thinking: "These are just signs of a typical teenager".'

CONTACT DETAILS

Papyrus:
Tel: 0870 170 4000
www.papyrus-uk.org

Samaritans:
Tel: 08457 909090
email: jo@samaritans.org
www.samaritans.org

'In many cases that may be true, but if you are in any doubt, give us a call for a chat.'

Papyrus encourages parents who are concerned about the mental well-being of a teenage son and daughter to:

- Listen to what they say, don't be judgmental. Say that you love them and care about them, no matter what.
- If they won't talk to you, maybe they would talk to a friend or sibling, or perhaps write down how they feel. Reassure them that this happens to others.
- Encourage them to go to their GP or counselling service if there is one. Offer to go with them.

The charity urges teenagers who are feeling suicidal to tell someone they trust about how they are feeling.

It says: 'This could be someone in your family, your doctor, a teacher, the school nurse, college counsellor, or someone you trust.'

'If you reach a suicidal point where the desire to kill yourself is overwhelming, you must seek someone. Ask them to keep you safe until the feelings pass.'

'I believe there is a risk from spending too much time in the alternative reality of computer games and chat rooms.'

'I saw Kelly a month ago and she was fine - smiling and laughing.'

Bridgend MP Madeleine Bell secured a debate in the House of Commons last week on suicide prevention. Talking about the Bridgend tragedies, she told MPs: 'The media have asked whether the cause is the internet, Bebo, Facebook or other working sites. The answer is no.'

believe that for a vulnerable person who is contemplating suicide, the isolation of communication through words on a screen does not provide the warmth, humanity, compassion and empathy of talking to another person.'

Philip Walter, Coroner for Bridgend

and the Glamorgan valleys, said earlier this month that he had profound doubts about any 'copycat' theory connecting the series of suicides.

'I'm of the mind that there is no commonality between these deaths, and preliminary investigations say the same', he said.



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£2m centre to aid children PAGE 4

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We're mourning the loss of another young life. We just keep on asking why

Community's shock at latest death in Bridgend

Katie Bodinger

TRIBUTES have been pouring in for a popular teenager who was found dead after a night out with friends. Sean Rees is the 19th person to be found hanged in the Bridgend county area since January 2007. The promising 19-year-old, who worked part time at Salsbury's, was found by his family in a lane in Bettws at 7.30am yesterday. Sean's parents Tracy and Byron Rees are being comforted at their home. The couple, who have two other children, were described as "devastated". Sean had a girlfriend, Charlotte Richards, 19, who left flowers at the spot where he died. She wrote: "Going to miss you loads. Love you always, Charlotte XXXX". Sean had been a pupil at the nearby Ynysawdre Comprehensive School, leaving school after completing his A-levels. He had started the job in Salsbury's but was hoping to go to college later this year. The news was still sinking in today at Salsbury's store just off the M1 at Bridgend, where Sean was welcomed. One staff member said: "It's really hit a few people this morning. Not everybody knew about it." The manager of the shop released a statement saying: "Everybody here is shocked and our thoughts are with his family". Family friend Christopher Michaelides, a Bridgend Labour councillor,



TRAGEDY Sean Rees with girlfriend Charlotte and, right, one of the messages left at the scene of his death. **PICTURES** WALTER JONES

WALTER JONES
 SEAN REES UNTIL
 REST IN PEACE
 OUR THOUGHTS ARE WITH
 YOU AND YOUR FAMILY
 AND FRIENDS.
 LOVE ALWAYS
 ERYL & STUART

for Bridgend coroner Philip Walters. There have been 18 other hangings in the Bridgend area since January 2007. Madeleine Moon, MP for Bridgend and a Parliamentary champion for the Samaritans, said: "This is another tragedy for a family and another life cut off - his whole potential has been wasted and left unknown." "There is a desperate need for an increased focus on prevention and improved primary mental health care for all children and young people." The Samaritans can be contacted on 08157 90 90.

Accident victim to be identified

POLICE were today due to formally identify a man who died trapped in the wreckage of his burning car. His black Ford Focus burst into flames after hitting a tree just outside Cardiff. The man had been travelling towards the city along the old A48 dual carriageway. He apparently lost control in the village of Coed-en-new. "We couldn't help because the car was smoking and then it burst into flames in less than a minute," said a woman who had lived opposite the scene near the Pound Hill tunnel for 40 years. The crash happened at 10.20pm on Friday and the road was closed for some time.

Sorry, Cardiff, but you are not so middle class

PEOPLE living in Cardiff are hiding themselves when it comes to their class. A new survey by price comparison website money supermarket.com found 111,000 people living in the city - 25% of the population - call themselves middle class when they are actually working class. That is more than any other city in the UK, including Manchester, Newcastle and Birmingham, despite the fact people living here have the second lowest level of disposable income found in the survey, at an average of £318 a month.

Cardiff-based life coach and holistic therapist Irene Jordan said it was human nature to want more. But she said this becomes an unhealthy desire when people look to replace something missing on the inside by spending money on something external, such as their home or their appearance. "Sometimes people try to feel better about themselves by doing something on the outside. But if they don't with what was going on inside, they would not feel they have to compare themselves to other people."

Lottery winner Margaret Hammett, 63, a great-grandmother from Ffy in Cardiff, agrees, saying despite pocketing a share of £862,202 was the rough a syndicate, it is people not things which make her truly wealthy. "Having my children and my health is what make me truly rich. And having been both breast and kidney cancer, I know what I am talking about," she said. "Money doesn't buy you happiness." Mr Jones added: "There's nothing wrong with being working class."

Choir set for Finnish date

A SOUTH Wales choir's 80th anniversary concert tour will include performing at the Finnish Parliament in Helsinki. The 45-voice Ffordulog Cór Meibion Ffordulog will spend a week in Finland and Estonia at the end of May. Choir members are busy learning Finnish as Finland's national composer Sibelius at the original Finnish in preparation for their recital at the Parliament, where they will be greeted by the Speaker, Sauli Niinistö. The choir will go on to perform a full concert in Helsinki's spectacular Temple in the Rock before moving on to Estonia.

No suicide pact, say police after another teenager is found hanged in Bridgend

Domini Kennedy

A part-time supermarket worker has become the 19th young person from the Welsh town of Bridgend to be found hanged. His body was discovered yesterday after a night out with friends.

One of many floral tributes to Sean Rees, 19, said: "You never failed to make a smile... until today. Rest in Peace, Dad and Stuart."

The industrial town has suffered from a cluster of hangings involving young people aged between 16 and 23 since January last year.

According to one witness, Mr Rees apparently had a row with friends, stomped out and disappeared. His body was found by his family in a lane behind a friend's house on the Bettis estate at 7pm.

His girlfriend, Charlotte Richards, 19, left a bunch of flowers at the spot where he was found with a message reading: "Come to me on your knees. Love you always Charlotte XX"

Like several of those who have died, Mr Rees had a page on the networking website Facebook. He wrote there: "I live for the nights. I will never remember with the friends I will never forget."

Christopher Michaelides, a family friend and local councillor, said: "This is so tragic, but I cannot work out why this happened. He had everything in his life and was always so cheerful."

"He had just passed his driving test, had a job, was working in Sainsbury's and was a very popular young man, but not again here in Bridgend we are mourning the loss of another young life. We keep on asking why these young people are dying, but we are not getting any answers."

"This is a young man who went out with a group of friends on a Saturday night like many other young

people, yet he is dead by Sunday morning. What is going on?"

Emma Bullock, 19, a friend, said: "Sean was always really happy, always smiling. I'm really shocked. He wasn't the sort of person who would do this. He had loads of friends and was really popular."

Mr Rees's parents, Tracey and Baron, who have two other children, were described as devastated.

The dead man went to the local Ynysawdre comprehensive school and left after his A levels. He aspired to go to college later this year.

Another floral tribute read: "Sean... Can't believe what has happened. I will never forget you. You will always be in my thoughts. RIP Kelly." One said: "From all at Sainsbury's"

The spate of hangings has brought unwelcome attention to Bridgend. Commentators have speculated that there may be a connection to tribute sites for dead young people on the internet. But the facts, as they have emerged at inquests, have been less sensational.

Several of the young people clearly knew one another and some appear to have taken their lives unable to cope with the burden of grief. Some had been drinking heavily before hanging themselves.

Police said in January that they were looking for possible links between the deaths, but said that there was no evidence of a suicide pact.

Philip Walters, the Bridgend coroner, described only some of the deaths as suicide. In other cases he gave narrative verdicts accepting that alcohol or drugs could have impaired their judgment.

South Wales Police, who are preparing a report on the latest death for the coroner, said that Mr Rees's death was not being linked to other sudden deaths in Bridgend. Chief Inspector

Simon Belcher, from Bridgend police station, said: "This is a tragic loss of life which will be devastating for the family and friends of the deceased and our thoughts are with them." dkennedy@thetimes.co.uk



The toll rises

Sean Rees, left, is the 19th young suicide victim from Bridgend since January last year.

The others, all found hanged, were: Dale Crole, 18; David Dilling, 19, his friend, Thomas Davies, 20; Alan Price, 21; Anthony Martin, 19; James Knight, 26; Lugh Jenkins, 22; Zachary Barnes, 17; Jason Williams, 21; Andrew O'Neill, 19; Liam Clarke, 20; Gareth Morgan, 27; Natasha Randall, 17; Angelina Fuller, 18; Nathaniel Pritchard, 15; Kelly Stephenson, 20, his cousin; Jenna Parry, 16; Michelle Sheldon, 23.

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Hospital doctor 'is in hiding' after death of newborn baby

Barbara Kester

A doctor is likely to be struck off the medical register after he fled to Bosnia following his arrest on suspicion of killing a baby girl. The Times has learnt.

Vladan Visnjec, who is believed to be still in hiding in Bosnia, was arrested after the death of Hollie Dinning at St Peter's Hospital in Chertsey, Surrey, in July 2002.

A junior doctor at the time, he was arrested on suspicion of manslaughter 10 months after he delivered the baby using forceps. Hollie died of head injuries hours after being delivered.

Dr Visnjec had returned to Bosnia by December that year, telling his employers, Bupa, that his departure was because of family illness.

Surrey Police said it had been trying to locate him but was facing resistance from Bosnian authorities.

Dr Visnjec was suspended by the General Medical Council after his arrest. At a public hearing, becoming a criminal case, the council will investigate claims that he acted irresponsibly and incompetently during the baby's delivery. The hearing,

which will continue in his absence, can ban him from working in Britain.

Hollie's family, who have now lost three members at the same maternity unit, said yesterday that Dr Visnjec's continuing absence was leaving their "lives in limbo".

The baby's father, Jim Dinning, lost his former partner, Caroline Freeman, and their unborn child, Chloe Jade, in 2000 due to failings by the hospital.

Hollie's mother, Tracey Dinning, 40, said at the family home in Chertsey: "There has been no inquest, no death certificate or anything. No one can do or say anything that will bring Hollie back, but this is an open-ended book until justice has been dealt with."

Dr Visnjec, who was 49 at the time of his arrest, was a locum doctor supplied by Healthcare Professionals, a subsidiary of Bupa. He was arrested when Surrey police were asked to investigate after a post-mortem examination. Ashford and St Peter's NHS Trust suspended him, but still wrote to Healthcare Professionals agreeing to support him. It withdrew Dr Visnjec's employment only in December 2002.



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NEWS

Teachers and civil servants to join in strike day

Barth Stjerne

TEACHERS and civil servants in Wales will be joining forces this week in the first co-ordinated strike action organised across different parts of the public sector for 30 years.

On Thursday members of the biggest teaching union, the NUT, and the civil servants' union PCS will strike in protest at the UK Government's policy to cap public sector pay to below inflation. Ominously for Gordon Brown, the last time such co-ordinated action took place in the public sector was during the 1978-79 so-called Winter of Discontent, a major factor in bringing Margaret Thatcher to power.

Across the UK, some 200,000 members of the NUT and 100,000 members of the PCS are expected to strike.

The NUT rejected a 2.45% pay offer, while members of the PCS walking in various government departments have turned down offers averaging 2% or less. Some of the civil servants have been offered 0%, according to the union.

NUT Wales secretary David Evans said: "The Government's imposition of a below-inflation cap on public sector pay awards is patently unfair and has made public sector negotiations utterly futile. No matter how just your case is for higher pay, the shackles of Gordon Brown looms large over the negotiating table. In these circumstances, we feel it is important that public sector workers unite around a common cause."

"On Thursday there will be rallies in Cardiff and Wrexham in protest against the way that teachers and other public sector workers are being treated."

PCS senior national officer for Wales, Jeff Evans, added: "Pay in the Civil Service is among the lowest in the public sector with starting salaries just above the minimum wage and with a prospect of staff earning less than £10,000. With inflation running at 1% staff are angry at the Government imposed pay caps that are resulting in pay freezes and pay cuts in real terms."

"By joining forces with the NUT, our objective is to send Government a clear message."

The following civil service departments and agencies will be on strike on Thursday: the Department for Work and Pensions, Home Office, Department for Transport, Driving Standards Agency, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Highways Agency, Vehicle and Operator Services Agency, Vehicle Certification Agency, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Land Registry will also strike for two hours.

www.walesonline.co.uk

Yet again here in Bridgend we are mourning the loss of another young life. We just keep on asking why

Madeleine Bowley

North Editor

m.bowley@westernmail.co.uk

A 19-YEAR-OLD supermarket worker was yesterday found hanged in Bridgend.

The 19-year-old, named locally as Sean Rees, was described by friends as "happy-go-lucky and always smiling".

But he was found hanged by his family in a lane in Bettws, near Bridgend, at 7.30am yesterday.

Mr Rees, who worked at the Sainsbury's supermarket in Sarn, went missing during a night out with friends in the town.

Family friend Christopher Michaelides, a Bridgend council Labour councillor for Bettws, said: "This is so tragic but I cannot work out why this happened. He had everything to live for and was always so cheerful."

"He had just passed his driving test, had a decent job working in Sainsbury's and was a very popular young man."

"But yet again here in Bridgend we are mourning the loss of another young life. We just keep on asking why..."

Mr Rees was found in a lane at the rear of a friend's house on the Bettws estate. It is understood he had row with friends before he disappeared.

His death follows a series of tragic hangings in the area, all involving young people.

Mr Michaelides added: "We keep on asking why these young people are dying but we are not getting any answers."

"I would like to see everyone involved from family and friends to police and the authorities really working together to see if there is a connection."

"Maybe we will find out there is no link but more needs to be done to stop any more of these tragic losses of young lives."

"This is a young man who went out for a drink with friends on a Saturday night like many other young people, yet he is dead by Sunday morning. What is going on?"

Mr Rees' parents Tracey and Byron Rees were yesterday being comforted at their home. The couple, who have two other children, were described as "devastated".

Mr Rees had a girlfriend Charlotte Richards, 19, who yesterday left a bouquet of flowers at the spot where he died.

She wrote: "Going to miss you loads. Love you always. Charlotte XXX."

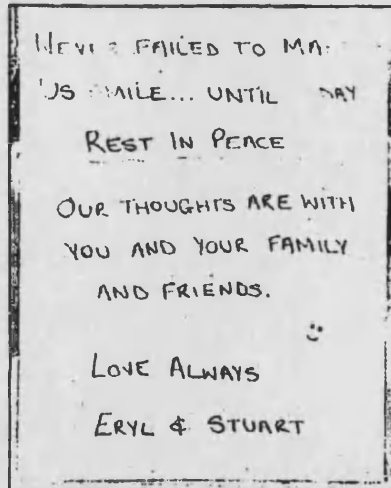
One tribute read: "Sean - can't believe what has happened. I will never forget you. You will always be in my thoughts. RIP Kelly."

And another read: "You never failed to make us smile - until today. Rest in Peace."

A tribute was left by Mr Rees' co-workers, which simply said:



TRAGEDY Above: Sean Rees, 19, who was found hanged near his home in Bettws, Bridgend, pictured with his girlfriend Charlotte and, below, a tribute message from the scene where Sean died



"From all at Sainsbury's"

He was a member of the social networking site Bebo. Writing on his internet profile page, he said: "I live for the nights I will never forget with the friends I will never forget."

Friend Emma Bullcock, 19, said:

"Sean was always really happy, always smiling. I'm really shocked - he wasn't the sort of person who would do this."

"He had loads of friends and was really popular. Everyone is in complete shock because we just can't believe Sean is gone."

Mr Rees left Ynysawdre Comprehensive School after completing his A-levels. He had started a part-time job in Sainsbury's but was hoping to go to college later this year.

South Wales Police yesterday launched an investigation into Mr Rees' death and will compile a report for Bridgend coroner Philip Walters, who has already called for a national suicide strategy to be drawn up. Eighteen other young people have been found hanged in the Bridgend area since January 2007.

Madeleine Mow, MP for Bridgend and a Parliamentary champion for the Samaritans, said: "This is another tragedy for a family and another life cut out. His whole potential has been wasted and left unknown."

"There is a desperate need for an increased focus on prevention and improved primary mental health care for all children and young people."

The funding for this has to come from the Assembly Government and urgently.

A police statement said: "South Wales Police can confirm the sudden death of a 19-year-old man in the Bettws area of Bridgend at about 7.30am on Sunday."

"There do not appear to be any suspicious circumstances and an investigation is under way."

The Samaritans can be contacted on 08457 90 90 90

wales newsbulletin

It's lucky 13th for star Madonna

POP queen Madonna showed no sign of relinquishing her crown as the most successful female solo artist of all time by clocking up a lucky 13th UK number one single yesterday.

Her track, 4 Minutes featuring Justin Timberlake, deposed British hip-hop star Estelle who slipped to number two with American Boy featuring Kanye West after four weeks at number one.

The song, 4 Minutes is taken from Madonna's album Hard Candy, which is released on April 28.

For Madonna, 49, it marks a further milestone in a career which has seen her amass more UK number one singles than any other female solo artist.

S4C and BBC are big hits at festival

S4C and BBC Wales have won awards at the Celtic Media Festival in Galway.

Coral House won the Kieran Heagarty award, a special prize for interactivity. And BBC Wales also won the best arts documentary prize to a programme on poet R. S. Thomas - The Man Who Went Into the West - which was made by Fulmar television and produced by Caitrin Mair. Thomas, Cardiff-based independent production company Fflin won the factual documentary category for its powerful documentary Of Galen. Martin Thomas, which followed one man's battle to conquer a severe stammer.

Wynnebu Newydd, Merthyr Gwalch Dafur - the story of wheelchair rugby player Nicola Bee - won the sport profile category and S4C's Ryfys 1007 won the education category.

The final award for S4C went to Heli Hana (Hana's Helpline) in the animation category. The children's series, which is produced by Cardiff-based Calon, about a helpful duck, is now set for a second series in both Welsh and English.

Snowboarding is pulling in Scouts

SCOUT membership has risen at the fastest rate for 22 years with young people attracted by new activities like snowboarding.

The Scout Association said 15,000 joined up in the last 12 months - a 3.7% increase in youth membership and a 1.7% increase in adult membership. The rise brings the total of children and young people who are Scouts in the UK to more than 465,000 with 100,000 adult volunteers.

In Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, figures show female youth membership grew by 1.6% between 2007 and 2008.

THE Sun



ANOTHER INTERNET TEEN DEATH

17 hangings, 13 months, 1 town, 1 question.. WHY?



By ALEX PEAKE
A TENDAGE girl yesterday became the 17th young person found hanged in one town in the past 13 months.
The body of suicide victim Jenna Fary, 16, was discovered dangling from a tree just outside Bridport, Dorset today.
Michael Swann, 51, who found Jenna yesterday, said: "Why are youngsters around here doing this?"
Full Story - Pages 4 and 5

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