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Towards a Push–Pull Theoretical Understanding in the Sociology of Suicide: Revisiting What We Know and What We Can Explore

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The increasing prevalence of suicide in the Philippines necessitates the utilization of various disciplines to understand the phenomenon. This article attempts to contribute to this endeavor from a sociological perspective. The paper starts with a review of the wealth of theories that Sociology has to offer in explaining suicide from centuries past to the present, covering pre-Durkheimian theories all the way to Durkheim's contemporaries and those coming from the Interpretivist paradigm. The paper then proceeds to propose a new framework with which to explain the phenomenon borne from the synthesis of two theories not of suicide but rather of criminology: Agnew's General Strain theory and Hirschi's Social Bonds theory.

Keywords: Suicide, Sociology, Self-harm, Deviance, Suicidology

INTRODUCTION

The idea of death has long been a recurring fascination of people. Regarded as the one constant of human life, people's preoccupation with death has been expressed through several human constructs. Various art forms such as the painting Deathbed by Edvard Munch, the poem Thanatopsis by William Cullen Bryant, the musical piece Four Last Songs by Richard Strauss, and the film The Seventh Seal by Ingmar Bergman are just a few of the famous creative works dedicated to the idea of human mortality. The plethora of religious ideologies dating back to premodern societies to those

that have survived to this day's modernized reality all propose a perspective on death, the sanctity of life, and its aftermath such as Hinduism's death and reincarnation and Christianity's concept of heaven and hell as people's destinations after one's life on Earth.

Perhaps of greater practical importance than art and religion is the massive effort exerted by human societies all throughout history in trying to stem the advance of death. Various technologies have been developed in the past centuries in order to keep death by starvation, sickness, accidents, and interpersonal violence at bay. Various medical procedures and drugs have been developed to extend human life. One cannot help but marvel at the great death-defying technologies under development in recent years such as stem cell treatment and artificial organs ranging from limbs to vital organs such as kidneys and the human heart.

This obsession with keeping one's self far away from death's door makes the phenomenon of suicide, or the deliberate attempt at cessation of one's life, all the more interesting as a subject of inquiry. Society's perception towards death by suicide is not constant temporally and spatially. There are periods in a society's history when suicide is tolerated. Two examples of this tolerance towards suicide is the Ancient Chinese culture's approval of suicide as a form of revenge with the expectation that it shall cause embarrassment for the object of the suicidal act and Ancient Japan's regard of harakiri as an honorable practice. Nevertheless, societal attitudes towards suicide are generally negative (Clinnard & Meier, 2011). This may be due in part to the dominance of Abrahamic religions – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – with doctrines that espouse the sanctity of life and the view of the cessation of human life as something which only their respective supreme beings can decide to do. This belief in the so-called "sanctity of life," after all, can be argued to have originated from human society's long struggle for survival in an often harsh environment that directly threatens either human life or humanity's means of subsistence. For example, in a typical ancient hunting and gathering society, only one or two children are expected to survive despite the average fertility rate of seven children per woman. The high death rate made it necessary for societies to adopt a value for life in order to avoid extinction (Weeks, 2012). As centuries went by, technology has allowed a reduction in death rates. Nevertheless, the cultural valuation of life remained.

SUICIDE IN THE PHILIPPINES IN RECENT YEARS

From the onset of the new millennium up to the present, the Philippines has had its share of high-profile cases of suicide. For example, in 2001, former television actress and beauty queen Ma. Teresa Carlson allegedly leaped from the 23rd floor of the Platinum 2000 apartment building in Greenhills, San Juan down to her demise. The event gained national attention after rumors spread that, prior to the alleged suicidal act, Carlson attempted to have an informal meeting with the then-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who is godmother to one of Carlson's children. Stories were abuzz of Carlson's fall from a happy life to misery after being married to her husband, former Ilocos Norte Rep. Rodolfo Farinas and being a battered wife (Lo, 2001).

In 2003, the spotlight was shifted away from Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago's political and intellectual prowess to her parenting capabilities when her youngest son, Alexander Robert "AR" Santiago, was found dead with a gunshot wound to the head in an apparent act of suicide (Mendez & Adraneda, 2003). Described by his own mother during his burial to have "suffered in silence," Senator Defensor-Santiago attributed AR's decision to commit suicide as a result of bullying — a routine interview required for applicants to UP Law was used by the UP Faculty to attack Miriam through her son, with questions such as "What is your reaction to the charge that your mother is insane?".

In 2005, the last president of the now defunct Urban Bank, Mr. Teodoro C. Borlongan, was found dead with a gunshot to the left temple of the head in front of the graves of his parents at the Loyola Memorial Park in Marikina City (Alquitran & Torres, 2005). It is believed that the reason for his suicide is a recent loss in a legal battle. Aside from being unable to clear the legal charges filed against him in court, Mr. Borlongan was said to have been in dire financial straits during the time, to the point that his residence at Green Meadows, Quezon City was under forfeiture, and he found himself unable to pay the tuition of his children at Ateneo de Manila University.

Probably one of the more controversial suicides of the decade, Roger Lawrence "Rod" Strunk ended his life by jumping from the 2nd floor balcony of his hotel in Tracy, California in 2007. This was more than half a decade after Strunk was one of the two suspects accused of the murder of renowned Filipina actress, Nida Blanca, who was stabbed to death in 2001. The fall from the hotel's balcony was declared as a case of suicide after authorities

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found no evidence that anyone else was with Strunk at the time of his demise (GMANewsTV, 2007).

In 2009, the attention of news reporters was focused on fellow news broadcaster Mario Teodoro Failon Etong or commonly regarded as Ted Failon after his wife, Trinidad Arteche "Trina" Etong, succumbed to a head wound obtained from a gun shooting incident believed to be an attempt at suicide, though suspicions of foul play were in the air after the evidence from the scene had been cleaned up by the household help (Meruenas, 2009).

In 2011, the senate investigation into allegations of graft and corruption in the Armed Forces of the Philippines was rocked by the shocking news that, during the span of the senate inquiry, the former Chief of Staff who eventually became the secretary of the Department of Defense, DILG, DENR, and Department of Energy (Evangelista, 2011) killed himself. Similar to the aforementioned case of Mr. Borlongan, Reyes shot himself while in front of the grave of his parents. The reason for the suicide is believed to be the pressure and dishonor brought about by the senate inquiry involving him as one of the potential offenders.

Probably one of the most recent and very controversial cases of suicide with an impact on school policies was UP student Kristel Tejada's suicide by drinking silver cleaner at her home in Tondo (Punay, 2013). Fellow students, especially those from her school system, University of the Philippines, were in outrage after learning that the apparent reason why Tejada committed suicide is because of being denied the chance to continue her pursuit of a bachelor's degree from the university due to not being able to pay the matriculation, which started a dramatic increase in 2007. A similar case of suicide, this time by a 16-year-old student named Rosanna Sanfuego, happened two years later (Dullana, 2015).

Finally, in 2015, news broke out when 18-year-old Liam Madamba committed suicide by jumping from the 6th floor of the Dela Rosa carpark in Legazpi Village, Makati City after the lad was accused in the school where he was enrolled of plagiarism — an offense greatly frowned upon at the school (Brizuela, 2015). In this same year, a case of mass suicide was reported in Manila wherein a Filipino–Taiwanese family of five including the husband, wife, two sons, and one daughter were found dead – all by poison – in their respective rooms in the household. The cause, according to a suicide note left at the scene, was the failure of the family's business (Alquitran, 2015).

Most recently, the death of the daughter of acclaimed artist Nonie

Buencamino became headline news in the country after she was found dead inside the Buencamino household in what appeared to be suicide by hanging (Corrales, 2015). An alleged suicide note in the form of an entry in the popular social networking site, Tumblr, which was claimed to have been left by the suicide victim circulated around the World Wide Web days after her demise. Among other things, the alleged suicide note made references to sentiments allegedly felt by the victim about gender identity and the country's "queerphobic" culture (Bonoan, 2015).

The abovementioned cases comprise only a small number of the total number of suicide incidents that has happened over the years. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified suicide as a major social problem that claims a life every 40 seconds. It is the 15th leading cause of death for 2012 all over the world, accounting for around 800,000 deaths worldwide yearly, with South East Asian regions comprising a third of the annual rate, and the 2nd if the cohort in focus is the youth population aged 15 to 29 (Vila, 2014).

THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE: LAY THEORIES, STIGMA, AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Yet what do we really know of suicide? Typically, the appearance of a new high profile case of suicide is followed by scrutiny of the suicide victim's personal life and family. People from various sectors of society will give their unsolicited analysis as to why the victim attempted to take his or her own life. The rise of social media usage in recent years has increased the quantity and spread of these "lay theories" of suicide. These so-called lay theories are comprised of assumptions about suicide such as the following statements (Caruso, n.d.; Knight, Furnham, & Lester, 2000):

1. Those who express an interest in committing suicide do so to garner attention.
2. Those who express the intent to die through suicide are unlikely to kill themselves.
3. Suicide is an event that occurs without any warning signs.
4. There is nothing that can be done once a person has decided to commit suicide.
5. Suicidal tendencies are a sign of mental illness or craziness

6. Those who attempt suicide are weak people.
7. Those who plan to commit suicide do so to blackmail or manipulate other people.
8. The youth rarely think of committing suicide because they still have their whole life ahead of them.
9. Those who attempt suicide are people who are lonely or depressed.
10. Most people who commit suicide do not believe in a god.
11. The increase in suicide today is due to the lessened influence of religion.
12. People who talk about suicide do not really go through with suicide.

The most recent case of high profile suicide mentioned in this paper also provided a glimpse of how people make attributions about why the victim committed the act. In Julia Buencamino's suicide, several netizens tried to pore over every various detail they could find about the victim. One of the things given considerable interest is the artworks of the victim which some described as "dark." A friend of the author even opined in a social networking site that she thinks that, because the victim likes to draw artworks with predominantly black colors and "dark" designs, she must have been possessed by a demon which resulted in her suicide.

Although these lay theories do not always oppose actual scientific knowledge about suicide, many of these analyses often feature popular misconceptions about the phenomenon as well. These misconceptions serve only to give the general populace a distorted understanding of what pushes people into acts of deliberate self-harm that ultimately lead to their death.

The challenge of understanding suicide also extends to difficulties of gauging its prevalence. The incidence rate of suicide could even be greater than it is reported to be. The problem is not all suicide-related deaths are identified properly. This is because of its nature as a highly stigmatized cause of death. In the Philippines, for instance, the dominance of Christian ideology can be held as the reason for the stigma associated with suicide. This has been cited by Michael Tan (2007) as one of the major impediments to getting a clearer picture of suicide in the country. There are potential sanctions not only for the person who committed suicide. In Roman Catholicism, for example, victims of suicide are traditionally refused their last sacramental rites inside the church before being buried. This is because the act is considered to be a highly offensive practice for the Roman Catholics

— following a line of thought that dictates that only the supreme deity has the power to grant life and therefore the only one who has the right to end it. Furthermore, the stigma of the act is associated with the family of the victim. The family unit is blamed, in whole or in part, for the victim's decision to end his or her life. For reasons such as this, incidences of suicide are denied and reported instead as accidental deaths or even deaths by asphyxia or cardiac arrest. This has resulted in a lack of definitive knowledge on how prevalent deaths by suicide are in the country.

The barrier to an actual understanding of suicide as a phenomenon is not limited to religion. Perhaps as a product of an age of political correctness, there have been concerns within the academe of "triggering" the students. Triggering is the setting off of people's memories that remind them of the events of their original traumatic experience. These "triggers" could come in the form of any stimulus received through sight, smell, touch, hearing, or taste. The fear of inadvertently triggering the students and causing them "undue distress" has resulted in some schools omitting the discussion of suicide from their respective syllabi even in Sociology classes (Selvarajah, 2015). This curricular development is all the more surprising when one considers that Sociology used Durkheim's study of suicide as a social phenomenon as one of its foundations as a formal discipline.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that death by suicide is indeed happening and there is a need to understand the phenomenon. The challenge to explain the causes of the phenomenon of suicide and predict its occurrence has been taken on by scholars from different fields. Though the phenomenon is often considered as a topic under the domain of Psychology – perhaps because of many cases of suicide oftentimes being associated with depression – there have been several efforts to theorize about suicide in the disciplines of Biology, Anthropology, Economics, and Sociology. Suicide is a phenomenon of great historical importance to Sociology. As previously mentioned, it was in a classical study of suicide that Emile Durkheim argued to the scientific community that what was perceived to be a social problem answerable only by Psychology can be explained by the then-proposed discipline of Sociology.

Sociological theories on suicide have approached the phenomenon in two ways: a positivistic approach and an interpretivist approach. The positivist theories, comprised primarily of ideas inspired by the Durkheimian perspective, form the bulk of sociological theories on the phenomenon, with

there being at least a dozen different theories proposed over the span of more than a century. These theories attempt to identify the social factors that are correlated with suicidal risks. These are discussed in this paper.

TARDE'S AND MASARYK'S THEORIES OF SUICIDE

The earliest known social theory of suicide is that of Gabriel Tarde in 1880 — almost a decade earlier than Emile Durkheim's supposed groundbreaking study on the phenomenon. Tarde's theory of imitation had been a rival to Durkheim's own theory as well as the Lombrosian biological theories of deviance during the last years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century (Hayward, Maruna, & Mooney, 2009). However, though he was allied with Durkheim in criticizing the biological theories of the Italian school of Cesare Lombroso, Durkheim proceeded to criticize Tarde's imitation theory as well. The end result is a Tardian theory buried in unpopularity and discussed in a most seldom manner. Even when it is discussed, it is often in passing while the focus still rests on Durkheimian theory.

In Tarde's theory, he proposed that suicide could be explained by his imitation hypothesis (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2014). He suggested that cases of suicide would cluster together in an area as a result of people being exposed to suicidal behavior and would consequently be more predisposed to suicide. In particular, people who are suffering from personal distress would be more likely to commit suicidal acts if exposed to others who have succeeded or, at least, tried committing suicide.

Another precursor to Durkheim is a Czech-Slovakian by the name of Thomas G. Masaryk. His theory has been given very minimal attention in the past century just like Tarde's because of the popularity of Durkheim's theory. In his own theory back in 1881, Masaryk recognized the importance of religion as the main basis of morality for the members of a society (Lester, 1997). He noted that the loss or decrease in the centrality of religion in societal life has resulted in a loss of societal regulation, social disorganization, and a feeling of unhappiness in people leading to mental illness and abnormal acts, including suicide. As such, he argued that the decrease or total loss of religiosity in people is to be blamed for an increase in suicide rates. In addition to this, Masaryk held a negative view of modern education. He claimed that modern education destroys people's religious beliefs without offering a replacement to the ethical gifts of religion and its ability to provide

a satisfactory perspective in life. This consequently leads to a higher tendency for suicide.

Unlike Gabriel Tarde's theory, Thomas Masaryk's emphasis on the weakening of the regulative functions of a social structure – in this case, religion – bears a significant similarity with Durkheim's own arguments on how the state of social structures can induce people into suicidal behavior.

DURKHEIMIAN THEORIES OF SUICIDE

Durkheim's theory of suicide in 1897 is arguably the best known of all sociological theories regarding the phenomenon, with much of the succeeding theories inspired by this classical theory. In his discussion of the social facts that influence people into committing suicidal acts, Durkheim identified four types of suicide which differ in their degrees of (a) social integration, which binds people into society through the social norms and values of the group, and (b) social regulation, which restricts people's behavior by prescribing specific goals and the means to attain these goals (Pickering, 2001; Ritzer, 2010). These four types of suicide according to Durkheim are as follows:

Egoistic suicide. This kind of suicide is brought about by insufficient social integration among the members of society. People feel isolated and become predisposed to suicide.

Anomic suicide. This kind of suicide is brought about by a lack of social regulation in society due to rapid changes with which people are hard-pressed to adapt to. In their confusion, people find it hard to make rigid distinctions between prescribed and proscribed behaviors.

Fatalistic suicide. This kind of suicide is brought about by high social regulation in society, leading to a person's perception of being trapped without any form of escape except through suicide.

Altruistic suicide. This kind of suicide is brought about by high social integration in society which convinces people that there is nothing wrong with dying if it means the betterment of society.

What is noteworthy about Durkheim's theory is the emphasis on the point that too much or too little social integration and social regulation is dangerous and could lead to greater risks of suicide. In other words, the relationship between integration, regulation, and suicide is U-shaped. The key, therefore, is finding a degree of moderate integration and regulation for people.

Durkheim's theory became the basis for the sociological understanding of suicide after its publication, beating out other social theories which were proposed during those years as a response to the increase in suicide rates following the industrial revolution. In fact, it took more than three decades before a new social theory on the phenomenon of suicide was proposed.

Regarded as a student of the Durkheimian tradition, Maurice Halbwachs' thesis in 1930 regarded suicide as an indicator of the moral health of society (Travis, 1990). He posited that the reason for the increase in suicide rates is brought about by urbanization which weakens social ties among the people because of urbanization's tendency to attract people from different cultures. The lack of a strong unifying collective consciousness, if Durkheim's concept is to be used, brings about a feeling of social isolation which, in turn, predisposes people to acts of suicide. This argument that an element of modernization is bringing about an increase of suicide is not entirely new. It has been a premise utilized by Thomas Masaryk before. However, there is a notable difference in what particular element of modernization is to blame. Whereas Masaryk blamed the rise in modern education and the subsequent loss of religious regulation, Halbwachs focused his attention on urbanization and its effect on the relationships of society's population.

Almost three decades after Halbwachs, Henry and Short proposed their own theory in 1954 which has been described by Douglas (2015) as one of the most ambitious theories of suicide. The "ambitious" description is because of its attempt to explain two aggressive human behaviors instead of just one: suicide and homicide. In other words, Henry and Short's theory centers on the discussion of people's aggressive behavior and its tendency to be manifested towards other people (homicide) or towards one's self (suicide). People's aggressive behavior, as Henry and Short posited, is influenced by their frustration which, in turn, is suggested to be economically-based. In Henry and Short's theory, increases in frustration would lead to an increase in aggression. The object of this aggression or whether it would be towards other people (homicide) or towards one's self (suicide) is dependent on whom the person attributes the cause of the frustration to. Henry and Short further posited that the direction of this attribution is dependent on the person's social status (Wray, Colen, & Pescosolido, 2011). People with low social status are more likely to attribute their frustrations to the external environment and would, therefore, lash outwards through homicide. People with high social status, on the other hand, are more likely to attribute their frustrations

to their own failures and would, therefore, direct their aggression inwards through suicide. It is necessary, however, to note that these manifestations of aggressive behavior could be mediated by the strength of the person's social relations — with the effect that people with strong social relations would not have high risks of aggression despite their frustration.

Another theorist criticized Henry and Short's theory on homicide and suicide for being inaccurate. In 1958, Gold argued that, though Henry and Short are correct that frustration can indeed lead to aggression, it is not the frustrated individual's status that is most important to consider. Instead, Gold argued that the social status of the individual's parents is more important. This is because the way by which one deals with frustration, including the way and direction by which this frustration is expressed, is a by-product of the socialization that a person receives from his or her parents, the socializing agents of the person's formative years (Douglas, 2015). People from families with high social status are more often socialized to express their frustrations inwards, whereas people from families with lower social status are more often socialized to express their frustrations outwards.

During the same period, three other theories were proposed that could potentially explain the phenomenon of suicide. In 1960, Gibbs and Potterfield proposed their Status Change theory (Douglas, 2015). This theory started with a critique of Durkheim's work, with the two theorists arguing that Durkheim was ambiguous in his discussion of social integration. Gibbs and Potterfield looked into the potential relationship between social mobility and suicide. They proposed that change in social mobility, be it an upward or downward mobility, is related to an increase in suicide risk because of the change in the person's social milieu which he or she now has to contend with — with downward mobility resulting in a greater increase in suicide risk than upward mobility. This theory seems to appear as nothing more than a rephrasing of some of the basic premises of Henry and Short's theory. However, aside from the element of social mobility, another element that is emphasized in Gibbs and Potterfield's theory is social ties. The connection of these two elements is as follows: the change in a person's social mobility, be it upward or downward, may cause a weakening of the person's social ties. Even if it does not, the change will nonetheless cause a feeling of frustration (if mobility is downward) or tension (if mobility is upward) that predisposes the person to commit suicide. The only deterrent to this would be the person's social ties which could regulate the person's behavior. However, since these

social ties have been weakened or are already weak from the start, these social ties are incapable of regulating the person's actions and keeping the person from committing suicide.

Shortly after proposing the Status Change theory, Gibbs partnered with Martin to propose another way of explaining suicide in 1964. Instead of putting the focus on social mobility, Gibbs and Martin focused on changes in the social roles of the individuals instead. Gibbs and Martin argued that people's tendency for suicidal behavior is a result of the statuses they hold and the consequent difficulties encountered in fulfilling the various social roles which they are expected to fulfill as part of their status, especially when the roles have incompatible expectations (Fernquist, 2009). In other words, the risk of suicide is influenced by the role conflict which people experience. For example, an individual could have an occupational status with role expectations which he or she is expected to devote time and effort to fulfill. However, aside from this occupational status are other statuses with varying role expectations such as being a son or daughter and/or wife or husband and/or father or mother which the individual must also perform. As the individual encounters greater difficulty in fulfilling his or her accumulated role expectations, the risk of suicide becomes greater for the individual. Gibbs and Martin also posited that possession of statuses which are uncommon or considered outside the norm of society is likely to increase the risk of suicide. Examples of these are the statuses of being teenage mothers or fathers, being both the father and mother of a household, or being the sole breadwinner at a very early age.

SOCIOLOGY OF SUICIDE AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY AND THE START OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Dr. Steven Stack, a social scientist who dabbles with the sociology of deviance with suicide as a core focus, proposed two new ways in understanding suicide in the 1980s. Stack proposed a new way of looking at the connection between religion and suicide — a connection which had previously been discussed by theorists such as Masaryk. Stack's Religious Commitment theory differs from the other theories that emphasize the capability of religion in deterring suicidal behavior by suggesting that it is not religiosity that deters the religious individual from committing suicide. Instead, the real deterrent lies on specific aspects of a religious

belief (Stack, 1983). For example, the Christian beliefs that Jesus walked on water, Jesus turned water into wine, Jesus can heal the sick, and Jesus was resurrected on the third day after dying on the cross are argued to have no deterring capabilities against suicidal behavior whereas a belief in heaven and hell – the latter of which is regarded as the place where those who would die by committing suicide would be placed for all eternity – would have an effective deterring capability against suicidal acts.

Stack proposed another factor that influences suicide during the same period. Following the importance given to social ties by the earlier theories, Stack argued that one of the important factors that predispose people into suicidal behavior is migration. Specifically, migrants are more likely to commit suicide than the natives. The rationale behind this premise is that those who recently migrated would likely have to leave their close relatives and friends behind in their area of origin. These relatives and friends serve a dual function: they serve as a support network for the individual while serving a regulatory function for the behavior of the individual as well. The loss of these networks in the migrant's area of destination makes them more susceptible to suicidal thoughts and behaviors especially when met with difficult circumstances in their new community of residence (Stack, 1980).

In 1989, Pescosolido joined the throng of social theorists who made a connection between religion and suicidal behavior. Similar to many of the sociological theories on suicide, Pescosolido's network theory of suicide gave importance to religion's relationship with suicidal behavior. However, unlike Masaryk who focused on religiosity itself as the deterrent for suicide or Stack who focused on particular religious beliefs, Pescosolido took the position that the focus should be on the networks or bonds of friendship that were borne from religion. The importance of religion, therefore, is not on the doctrines that espouse the sanctity of life and evil of suicide or its moral claims as a whole but rather on its capability to provide a venue for fellow religious persons to come together and form bonds of friendship (Lester, 2000). Pescosolido also suggested that this relationship between religious networks and low suicide rate is more defined in areas which have been historical hubs of religion or the areas where the religion first started or spread because these areas have religiously-embedded structures like schools, hospitals, and social clubs which would help enable coreligionists to come together outside of their religious services.

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The next theory in this review is not strictly a sociological theory but, rather, a social psychological theory of suicide. Nevertheless, some of its elements bear similarities to the other theories, albeit with a different appreciation of how these elements are interrelated with each other and how they can predispose people to suicidal behavior.

Joiner's Interpersonal theory of Suicidal Behavior in 2005 is one of the most recent theories which attempt to predict the phenomenon. Though this theory is presented more as a psychological theory, its utilization of social factors as one of its main elements rather than a focus on internal mental processes makes it more in line with the subfield of social psychology rather than strictly psychology. According to O'Connor and Nock (2014), Joiner's theory is distinct from the psychological theories on suicide because while earlier psychological theories attempt to explain why suicidal motivations or thoughts of suicide occur in people, these theories are limited in explaining why these thoughts are translated into actual suicidal behavior.

In the Interpersonal theory of Suicidal Behavior, Joiner posits that suicidal behavior is a function of three factors: (1) thwarted belongingness, (2) perceived burdensomeness, and (3) a sense of fearlessness.

Thwarted belongingness is Joiner's concept to describe an individual's perception or feeling of being alienated from others. This is usually characterized by statements such as "I feel alone", "I don't feel that I belong", and "I feel like I am not important to others" and is brought about by the person's lack of strong social ties. Perceived burdensomeness, on the other hand, is an individual's perception that one is more of a burden than a being of any importance to one's family and friends and that one's loss would be more beneficial to these significant others. Joiner posits that, as these two factors increase, the individual's desire to commit suicide also increases. However, this alone would not be able to compel the individual to actual suicidal behavior. This is where the importance of the third factor, a sense of fearlessness, comes in. This element is characterized by an individual's ability to overcome the instinct for self-preservation or, in other words, fearlessness in the face of death which translates into an acquired capability for suicidal behavior. This capability, Joiner stated, is developed through higher pain tolerance due to involvement in traumatic and/or painful experiences such as verbal and physical abuse.

SYNTHESIS OF THE POSITIVIST THEORIES OF SUICIDE

From the theories discussed, the following assumptions about the social phenomenon of suicide can be derived:

The family unit and peers are important because attachment to these social ties provides an integrative function which may curb the threat of suicide among individuals. The individual's relationships with his or her relatives and peers are important support networks against suicide ideation and attempts. It must be noted that, aside from the integrative function, the family unit also serves a regulatory function on an individual's behavior. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that regulation is a double-edged sword: too little regulation and too much regulation on the individual's behavior could both predispose individuals to greater chances of suicide. Furthermore, it is not necessary for these social ties to be actually weak. The mere perception of individuals that their ties to these people are weak or, in other words, they do not always feel a strong sense of belongingness is enough to significantly contribute to their suicidal tendencies.

Just like the family and peer social structures, the religious social structure also serves as a protective factor against suicide. However, it varies among theorists whether this protection is brought about by the moral restraints of religiosity itself, belief in certain religious ideas, or because of the social networks built during religious gatherings that serve as support for the individual. Further analysis of Masaryk's anxiety with the loss of religiosity shows that his perceived problem actually lies with the loss of people's subscription to the normative values of society, with which the religious structure is supposed to reinforce in people's consciousness. Therefore, the loss or weakening of people's hold on normative values is a predisposing factor for suicide as well. It should be noted that the fear of modern education as a factor to suicide appears to be grounded on the fear that secular education will be devoid of normative beliefs in the sanctity of life. The fear of the secular was, after all, one of the streams of thought in reaction to the twin revolutions of the 19th century which was the backdrop of the theory's formulation. Perhaps, it was unable to account for the fact that modern education would be supplied in part by religious institutions.

Meanwhile, whereas the traditional structures of family and religion are protective against suicide, the so-called structures and processes of modernity in the form of modern education and urbanization are thought

to predispose people to suicide. For modern education, this is because of its capability to diminish a person's religiosity without substituting any moral restraints to people's behavior on its own. Meanwhile, urbanization is feared to weaken the social ties of people in society. Modern education, therefore, weakens the regulation of people's behavior while urbanization weakens the integrative functions.

The issue of societal integration is not limited to family, peers, and religion. Rather, societal integration into the general community is theorized to be a protective factor against suicide. As Stack would contend, greater length of time staying with one's community – and the longer temporal opportunity it provides to build relationships with other members of the neighborhood – is a protective factor against suicide. Social status is also believed to have a bearing on people's predisposition for suicide. People who are in relatively high standing in society or are raised by a family who are relatively well-off are said to be more likely to commit suicide, especially in times of economic troubles and weakened social ties. There is also another perspective that believes that suicidal tendencies are not necessarily more associated with high status. Rather, the real trigger of suicidal behavior is the conflict between the various roles that people are expected to fulfill in society, especially when the roles are not commonly expected to be fulfilled by the cohort from which the individual comes from. For example, teenage mothers or youth who are forced to work even when they should be in school are more likely to feel the stress of having to fulfill several roles, thereby making them more susceptible to suicidal thoughts and possibly suicidal acts.

A recurring element that can be observed in most of the theories is the importance of integration or social ties. This is perhaps understandable given that many of the theories used the Durkheimian theory as their foundation. Even Masaryk, who predated the Durkheimian theory, sang a similar tune to the Durkheimian and what may be described as neo-Durkheimian theories — including, even, the social psychological theory of suicide posited by Joiner. It is notable that the only theory which can be described as an outlier to all of these is that of Durkheim's old rival, Gabriel Tarde. Whereas Durkheim emphasized integration and regulation, Tarde hypothesized that the main point lies in the process of imitation — with people being predisposed to suicide if the people they frequently interact with attempts the act. This disagreement is not surprising, given that the two

theorists disagreed during their time, and it is precisely this disagreement on what a science of society should focus on – Tarde's focus on components of social interaction versus Durkheim's focus on social structures – that marked the dimming of Tarde's career and fame as a social scientist.

A summary of the sociological theories of suicide discussed in this chapter is provided in Table 1 along with a summary of their main idea(s).

Table 1. Summary of sociological theories of suicide and their main idea(s).

THEORY	MAIN IDEA(S)
Tarde's Imitation Theory	People can be influenced into committing suicide through imitation.
Masaryk's Theory of Suicide	Suicide is a by-product of the decline of religion in society which leads to loss of moral restraints and meaning of life.
Durkheim's Classic Theory of Suicide	Suicide is brought about by extremely high or low levels of social integration and social regulation.
Halbwachs' Theory of Suicide	Suicide is a by-product of urbanization which leads to feelings of social isolation.
Henry and Short's Theory on homicide and Suicide	In times of economic instability, individuals with high and low status both experience frustration, with the individuals with high status expressing their frustration-induced aggression against themselves for failing and individuals with low status directing their aggression towards other people because of a perception that society was unjust to them.
Gold's Theory on Homicide and Suicide	Similar to Henry and Short's; but with the premise that the social status of the person's parents who socialized the person on how to handle one's frustration as being more influential than the individual's own social status.
Gibbs and Potterfield's Status Change Theory	Change in people's status in society due to social mobility results in feelings of either frustration or tension, making people more susceptible to committing suicide.
Gibbs and Martin's Status Integration Theory	Role conflict which is experienced as a result of having several, oftentimes conflicting, social status leads to suicide.
Stack's Religious Commitment Theory	Only a select few aspects of religious belief are deterrents of suicide. In particular, only those who deal with the supernatural sanctions of committing suicide and the suggested result of this act in one's welfare in the afterlife.
Stack's Theory on Migration and Suicide	Migrants, especially those who migrated only recently, have weaker social ties in their area of destination. This lack of a strong network that can serve as social support and regulator predisposes them to a greater threat of suicide.
Pescosolido's Network Theory of Suicide	It is neither the religious beliefs nor religiosity itself that deters suicide but the potential existence of networks of friendship which were created among the coreligionists.

Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide	Experiences of social isolation or thwarted belongingness, perceptions of being a burden to others, and a sense of fearlessness brought about by one's traumatic experiences while interacting with other members of society lead to suicide.

THE INTERPRETIVIST THEORIES OF SUICIDE

As mentioned previously, sociological theories on suicide could also operate from the interpretivist paradigm of Sociology. The interpretivist theories criticize the positivistic theories for their preoccupation with causalities of suicide. Instead, the interpretivist theories attempt to understand the meanings or reasons which people attach to the act. The interpretivist paradigm's contributions in the discussion of suicide are of equal importance with the positivistic theories discussed in this paper. This is because they are based on a different set of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions which allow them to discuss a different aspect of the phenomenon. The positivistic theories' focus on the identification of causal relationships of suicide limited their view of the phenomenon to an etic perspective — in other words, the contribution to the understanding of suicide as a phenomenon is limited to that of a detached outsider trying to see what led people to deliberately cause the termination of their lives. These interpretivist theories, on the other hand, offer a chance for an emic perspective — or a view on suicide coming from those who actually tried to commit the act. These theories would shed light on the reasons for suicide identified by the suicidal persons themselves, regardless of whether these reasons would hold true in an objective reality.

Just as the positivist approach to suicide was due in large part of Durkheim's classic study of suicide, the interpretivist approach started out with Douglas' criticism of Durkheimian theory because, as Douglas claimed, the usage of vital registries and statistics in the understanding of suicide – which is the primary method of choice of positivistic sociological suicidology – only allows a researcher to know suicide rates but leaves him completely uninformed with the actual reasons for the suicidal act (Douglas, 1966). Even when theorists would propose a relationship between various social variables and suicide, this is an imposition of the researcher's own assumptions on why suicides happen without giving any voice to the person who committed suicide. Therefore, he proposed that the focus should not be on the statistics of suicide as cross-tabulated with various socioeconomic variables from which

theorizing will then be founded on. Rather, the inquiry should dwell on the suicide notes where people's reasons, founded on their appreciation of their own social reality, are often written. After meticulously poring over suicide notes, Douglas was able to identify four themes of the social meanings people ascribe to their acts of suicide:

Suicide as transformation of the self — repentance suicide. This theme pertains to reasons given by people for their acts of suicide that imply an act of repentance for having done something wrong.

Suicide as transformation of the soul — escape suicide. This theme pertains to reasons given by people for their acts of suicide which suggest that their current circumstances in life have left them a feeling of being trapped with no other recourse but death.

Revenge suicide. This theme covers reasons left in suicide notes which imply that the act of suicide was committed with the expectation that one's death would hurt other people and, in doing so, the person would attain vindication. This line of reasoning is very similar to the old Chinese practice of committing suicide to leave a feeling of guilt and/or shame to another person.

Sympathy suicide. This is often found in attempted suicide. This theme pertains to messages that imply a cry for help, very much akin to the typical lay theory that suicidal acts are actually meant to signal a person's need for emotional help.

Baechler's work in 1980 was inspired by Douglas' initiative to approach the study of suicide in a manner different from the Durkheimian tradition. He proposed his own typology of social meanings of suicide which greatly resemble that of Douglas' but has an additional type which was unaccounted for by the latter. Baechler's typology is as follows:

Escapist suicides. Baechler considered this theme as comprising of suicide notes which give three kinds of reasons for suicide: a) flight from an intolerable situation, b) response to a grief/loss, and/or c) self-punishment. This is very similar to Douglas' Repentance and Escapist suicides.

Aggressive suicides. This pertains to reasons for suicide which suggest that the act was done as a) a form of vengeance with the goal of ascribing guilt and/or shame to someone, b) crime suicides or those with the intent to take other people as collateral damage in the suicidal act, c) blackmail suicides with the aim of compelling someone to give in to one's demands or to compel someone or others to treat the person better, and d) appeal suicides or suicidal acts as appeals to sympathy. This theme covers Douglas' Revenge and

Sympathy suicides.

Aside from these two themes which already cover Douglas', Baechler proposed two more themes:

Oblative suicides. This type pertains to acts of suicide which are explained as acts aiming to achieve a particular purpose, be it an act of altruism to save or benefit others or achieve a more desirable state such as reuniting with loved ones who have already passed away.

Ludic suicides. These are suicides committed that are not always aimed at a successful cessation of life. This pertains to suicides undertaken just to test and showcase one's courage as a form of a game, such as in Russian Roulette.

Following Douglas' and Baechler's typologies of suicide, Taylor's typology of suicide in 1982 was constructed with the idea that meanings of suicide are based on two elements: (1) the degree of certainty/uncertainty that people have about themselves and others and (2) the intended subject of the suicidal act (Gunn & Lester, 2014).

Submissive suicide. These are characterized by an inner-directedness (in other words, the intended subject is the person himself) and a certainty in what one is doing. These are suicides which suggest that the person committing the act has given up on life because of problems beyond the help of other people, usually because of terminal illnesses.

Thanatation suicide. These are characterized by inner-directedness but without a certainty of what one wants to do with one's life. Suicides which suggest that the person is not certain about whether or not they should live but they nevertheless attempt suicide.

Sacrifice suicide. These are characterized by outer-directedness and a certainty of what they are doing. The person who commits the suicidal act intends to put the focus of the suicide towards another person as a form of vengeance.

Appeal Suicide. Similar to Sacrifice suicide, the person intends to put the focus of the suicide towards another person, but the person is not certain if he or she should push through with deliberately ending his or her life. This is exemplified by suicides marked with a message where the person wonders if people would miss him or her once he or she is gone.

A tabular summary of these three typologies would allow for an easier way to identify the differences and overlapping themes of these three theories. This is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the interpretivist theories of suicide.

DOUGLAS' TYPOLOGY	BAECHLER'S TYPOLOGY	TAYLOR'S TYPOLOGY
Repentance Suicide	Escapist Suicide	
Escape Suicide		Submissive Suicide
Revenge Suicide	Aggressive Suicide	Sacrifice Suicide
Sympathy Suicide		Appeal Suicide
	Oblative Suicide	
	Ludic Suicide	
		Thanatation Suicide

SYNTHESIS OF THE CURRENT SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF SUICIDE

From the quantity of theories presented, it can be deduced that sociological interest in suicide as a phenomenon was maintained over the centuries, though there are periods when the interest waned. Furthermore, the wealth of theories is focused predominantly on the positivist, Durkheimian approach. This may suggest two things about the Sociology of suicide: first, despite the fact that a century has already passed since its publication, sociologists still cannot get past the classical theorist when it comes to explaining this particular social reality. Furthermore, the lack of interpretivist theories relative to the number of positivist theories speaks of the predominant nature of Sociology in general and of the subfield of Sociology of suicide in particular. This may also be partly due to the methodological burden of interpretivist approach to suicide that often entails the analysis of suicide notes — an artifact that is only available to approximate one in every three suicides (Coffey, 2012).

It is also noteworthy that, while the positivistic and interpretivist theories of suicide differ in their philosophical underpinnings and are even critical of each other, the main ideas of the positivistic and interpretivist theories of suicide have overlaps. It is already previously noted that the three interpretivist typologies of suicide have overlaps with each other, but the types of suicide identified in these interpretivist theories also bear notable similarities with the positivistic theories. Douglas' Repentance suicide and Baechler's Oblative suicide bear similarities with the Durkheimian Altruistic suicide. Furthermore, Douglas' Sympathy suicide and Taylor's Appeal suicide are similar to Durkheim's Egoistic suicide. Even Baechler's

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Aggressive suicide has some elements found in Durkheim's Egoistic suicide. In addition to these, Douglas' Escape suicide and Baechler's Escapist suicide have similar elements of Durkheim's Fatalistic suicide. Finally, Baechler's Ludic suicide and Taylor's Thanation suicide have overlaps with Durkheim's Anomic suicide. This means that the remaining types of suicide from the interpretivist theories which are difficult to reconcile with the positivistic theories are Douglas' Revenge suicide and Taylor's Submissive and Sacrifice suicides.

BEYOND THE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF SUICIDE: A LOOK AT THE GREATER REALM OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF CRIME AND DEVIANCE

The previous parts of this article have already made manifest the wealth of sociological theories on suicide. It might still be prudent, however, to visit the sociological theories which deal not specifically with suicide but with crime and deviance in general, of which suicide would also fall under.

Robert Merton proposed a theory in 1957 that considers suicide as just one of the potential deviant actions which people may do as a response to the frustrations encountered in society. Merton's Social Strain theory posits that, for every society, there is a set of culturally legitimate goals and a corresponding set of culturally legitimate means to attaining these goals (Ritzer, 2010). While members of society will recognize the culturally legitimate goals and will try to achieve these, they often encounter "strains" as a result of the frustrations and injustices experienced due to the institutionalized inequalities in the opportunities to attain these. Using these elements of culturally legitimate goals and means as the basis, Merton proposed that people in society could be classified into five types based on their adherence to the culturally-legitimate goals and their access to the legitimate means and their responses. These five types are the following: (1) Conformists, (2) Innovators, (3) Ritualists, (4) Retreatists, and (5) Rebels.

The Conformists are those who continue to believe in the culturally legitimate goals of society and try to attain these goals through the culturally legitimate means. Innovators are those who have rejected the culturally legitimate means and have adopted alternative methods in order to attain the culturally legitimate goals of society. The Ritualists are those who perform the culturally legitimate means of society as if it is part of their daily ritual.

They do this even though they do not really believe that they will successfully attain the culturally legitimate goals of society or even aim to attain them. The Retreatists are people who reject altogether the culturally legitimate means and goals and seek instead to withdraw themselves from society. Finally, the Rebels are those who reject the culturally legitimate means and goals of society and actively try to propose, or impose, a new set of goals and means for society to subscribe to.

While Robert Merton's Social Strain theory is not specifically designed to explain suicidal behavior, it does account for the phenomenon as an example of what a Retreatist would do in response to being unable to achieve the culturally-legitimate goals of society. It is also noteworthy that one of the most important goals in society is socioeconomic success, and in Merton's view, one potential response to a person's failure to attain this goal is retreatism through suicide. This premise bears similarities with the theories of Henry and Short and of Gold.

In the last decade of the 20th century, Robert Agnew made a new strain theory to explain deviant behavior. This theory is not specifically formulated to explain suicidal behavior like the original Mertonian Social Strain theory; instead, Agnew's General Strain theory (1992) attempts to explain the predisposing factors for deviant behavior in general. Even though Merton's Social Strain theory is well regarded as the contemporary appreciation of the Durkheimian tradition, Agnew criticized Merton's Social Strain theory. In Agnew's argument, he recognized that Merton's Social Strain was able to identify one of the main sources of strain in a person's life but it is unable to account for all the possible sources of strain which may push a person into committing acts of deviance. As such, he proposed a General Strain theory which was designed to account for the perceived weakness of Merton's own Strain theory.

According to Agnew, there are three types of strain which might predispose people into deviant behavior (1992). These three are as follows:

Failure to achieve positively-valued goods. This pertains to the traditional Merton concept of social strain wherein the person is unable to achieve the culturally-legitimate goals, resulting in a disparity between achievement and aspirations. This is made even more strenuous when the person arrives at the realization that his or her aspirations are not only unreachable at the present but are instead never within his or her capability to achieve. An example of strain under this typology is the failure to achieve

high monetary rewards in one's life or failure to finish one's aspired level of education.

Removal of positively-valued stimuli. This second type of strain is brought about by experiences of loss in a person's life. This, Agnew argued, is most pronounced during the earlier half of the person's life. Included in this typology are strains brought about by a loss of loved ones and dissolution of valued relationships such as break-ups and divorce.

Confrontation with negative stimuli. The third type of strain is also regarded by Agnew as most pronounced during the earlier part of a person's life. Exposure to negative experiences is viewed to have a powerful impact on the future of a person. Examples of strains in this type are experiences of child abuse and bullying, be it verbal or physical in nature.

Another theory during this period that is worth discussing is Travis Hirschi's Social Bonds theory (1969). Travis Hirschi's Social Bond or Social Control theory is a theory in Criminology. One of the notable arguments of Hirschi's theory is that several of the theories in criminology are flawed by their fundamental premise — while other theories assume that it is necessary for criminal motivation to first be created in the person before he commits a crime and that the focus of inquiry should be on identifying the factors which contribute to the creation of this criminal motivation, Hirschi argued that this could be approached conversely. Instead of looking at what pushes people into becoming criminals, studies can look into what keeps people from becoming criminals. In other words, instead of trying to ascertain what factors make people deviant, one can assume that people are capable of being deviant from the start and look into what keeps them within the boundaries of societal norms. He then argued that what keeps people from becoming criminals are the control mechanisms or social bonds in society.

For Hirschi, people's decision to commit criminal behavior is influenced by four factors that keep people living in accordance with societal norms. These four are, in Hirschi's words, (1) attachment, (2) commitment, (3) involvement, and (4) beliefs. While criminal behavior may allow the person to achieve the desired benefit, he or she refrains from doing so because it might entail sacrificing or losing the four factors — all of which are assumed to be ascribed importance to by the person.

Attachment to significant others. For Hirschi, the emotional closeness of people to the other members of society, particularly the family and, to a lesser degree, other agents in society such as peers and the school, limits the

tendency of people to commit crime because doing so would risk jeopardizing these interpersonal relationships. The greater the emotional closeness the person has to his or her family and friends, the lesser the likelihood that the person would be willing to sacrifice losing these attachments. As such, these attachments to significant others serve as a form of indirect control on people's behavior. People would think twice about committing socially unacceptable acts in fear of disapproval and of potentially disappointing their significant others.

Commitment to traditional types of action and goals. As a person continues to live as part of a society, he or she becomes increasingly committed to the achievement of conventional goals of that society. Examples of these goals are the attainment of higher education, getting married and having one's own family of procreation, and getting a job. For Hirschi, as the person achieves more of the conventional goals or becomes closer to achieving them, he or she will not risk losing or jeopardizing them all by becoming a criminal. Out of the four bonds, this is the element that serves as the most rational social bond. It operates under the social psychology of sunk cost.

Involvement in traditional activities. There are several socially-prescribed activities which a person can be involved with in every society. As the person becomes more involved with these prescribed activities, they would have fewer chances of planning and executing criminal behavior because of sheer lack of time. It operates under the old adage, "idle hands are the devil's playground".

Subscription to normative beliefs of society. This element operates under the sociopsychological premise that people's attitudes are influential in people's behavior. Belief in the values prescribed by society makes one less likely to commit behaviors that contradict these normative values. When these normative beliefs are weakened, people's tendency for deviant behavior increases.

Hirschi's assumption is that criminal offenders and delinquents lack these four interrelated bonds of society, whereas those who are noncriminals are in possession of these and are not willing to risk losing or breaking these bonds.

Though Agnew's and Hirschi's theories were formulated for and applied in crime and delinquency, it may be possible to utilize the elements and assumptions of these theories to the understanding of the phenomenon of suicide.

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK ON SUICIDE BORNE OUT OF STRAIN AND BONDS

Agnew's and Hirschi's theories, when combined, produce an interesting push–pull theory that can be applied to the understanding of suicide. A conceptual framework borne out of the combination of these two theories is presented in Figure 1.

This framework will have two main independent variables: the strains which push people into suicide and the social bonds which pull people from suicide. The "strains" in this framework include the three types of strain which Agnew argued might predispose people into deviant behavior (1992): (1) Failure to achieve positively-valued goods, (2) removal of positively-valued stimuli, and (3) confrontation with negative stimuli. In addition to the types of strain identified in Agnew's theory, negative internal state is also included as part of the factors that increase the chances of suicide. Negative internal state here pertains primarily to two things: a negative or low evaluation of one's self-worth (self-esteem) and symptoms of depression — both of which have been noted in previous studies to be associated with suicide but are not clearly accounted for in Agnew's existing formulation of his theory. These strains and the negative internal state are expected to push people into the direction of suicide ideation and, eventually, suicide attempt. Meanwhile, the other element of the framework, the "social bonds", is expected to reduce people's chances of suicide. These social bonds are borrowed from Hirschi's theory: (1) Attachment to other members of society, (2) Belief in the normative values of society, (3) Commitment to the traditional actions and goals of society, and (4) Involvement in traditional societal activities.

The idea here is that, while the strains increase people's chances of committing suicide, the social bonds lessen people's suicidal tendencies. The presence of strains will increase people's chances of suicide ideation and, if the strains are very powerful, even of suicide attempt. The presence of social bonds, on the other hand, reduces people's tendency for suicide ideation and suicide attempts. It is possible that, in the presence of both strains and social bonds in a person's life, these two elements will interact: the strains will increase people's tendency for suicide while the social bonds will keep them from suicide. However, when the social bonds are insufficient to deter the strength of the strains, then the person starts to contemplate about suicide. Hence, the element of suicide ideation is produced. This suicide ideation is

expected to eventually progress to the stage of being actual suicide attempts when the strains felt by the person become increasingly stronger while the social bonds that keep the person's behavior in check become increasingly weaker. It must be noted that these strains and social bonds serve more as proximate factors to suicide. In light of this, the person's environment is also included in the framework to account for the distal factors that can indirectly lead to suicide. This includes the person's socioeconomic environment (accounting for factors such as economic boom and bust, urbanization, and globalization), cultural environment (accounting for factors such as bigotry and intolerance towards members of minority and deviant groups as well as collectivism or individualism among cultures), natural environment (accounting for factors which may be aversive to persons such as disasters and catastrophes), and institutional environment (such as laws that can impede or accelerate people's acquisition of desired goals).
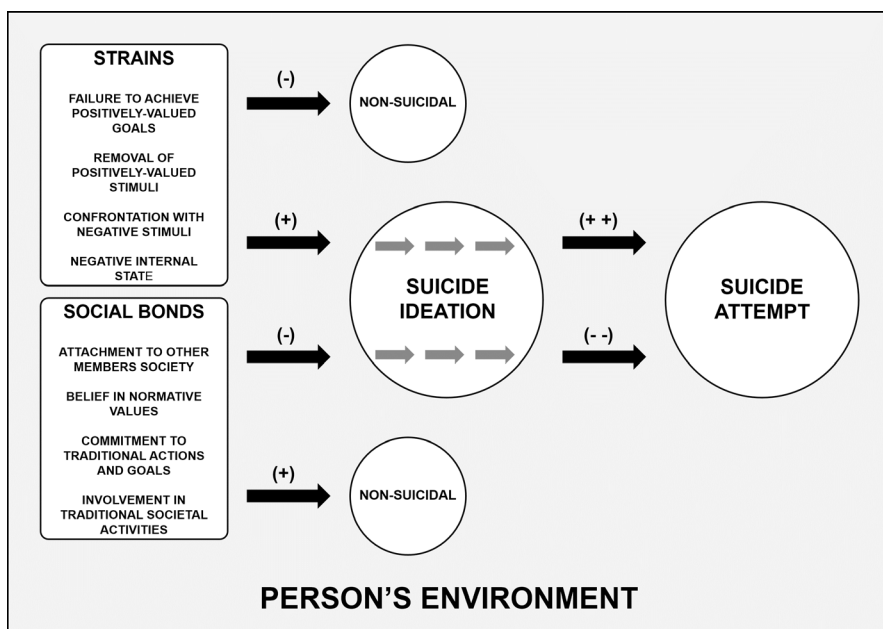

Figure 1. Theoretical framework produced from the combination of elements from Agnew's General Strain theory and Hirschi's Social Bonds theory as applied to suicide.

This new framework is noteworthy because it will be able to accommodate many of the ideas of the previously discussed sociological theories of suicide. The existing sociological theories of suicide gave attention to aversive

factors such as "frustrations", "tensions", and role strains. These can all be accounted for in the strains of the proposed framework. Even the reasons of sickness, loss, and feelings of being in intolerable situations are accounted for in the strains of the framework. Furthermore, these strains could serve as the catalyst to the sense of fearlessness identified as a necessity in Joiner's theory. On the other hand, the element of attachment to other members of society accounts for the salience of social ties in Durkheim's, Gold's, Stack's, Joiner's, and Pescosolido's theories. Masaryk's, Durkheim's, and Stack's theories are also accounted for in the element of belief in normative values. The elements of commitment and involvement lend greater nuance to the appreciation of the societal integration and regulation given importance to by the Durkheimian theories. Even Halbwach's urbanization (which, given today's society, might more accurately be regarded as globalization) and the economic instability salient in theories such as that of Henry and Short are also accounted for in the person's environment.

CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the preexisting sociological theories of suicide from both the positivist and interpretivist perspectives as well as the general sociological theories of crime and deviance. From this review, it was able to synthesize many of the ideas of the previous theories and propose a new push–pull theoretical framework with which to understand the phenomenon of suicide. The necessity now is for empirical studies to be conducted to test the merits of this framework.

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