

# Cultural Aspects of Suicide

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# Concepts defined

## ▶ Suicide

- Self-inflicted intentional death. It could be: ideation, planning, an attempt ranging between simple and almost completed, or a completed act. (Abdel-Khalek, 2004)

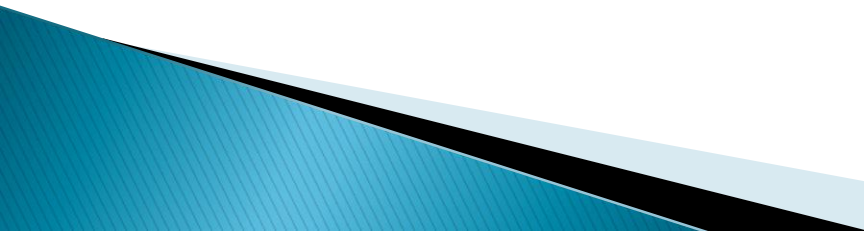
## ▶ Martyrdom

- Can be motivated with a sense of obligation toward the land, the homeland, the city or place he or she is strongly connected to, to the nation, to the divine, or to previous and future generations. (Whitehead and Abufarha, 2008)

## ▶ Culture

- The lenses comprised of our experiences and belief systems by which we see the world and our place in that world.

# The Issue with culture and suicide

- ▶ A western view of suicide has neglected the value of meaning behind the action of suicide; it neglects the intention.
  - ▶ Suicide is a multidimensional malaise (Leenaars, 2004)
  - ▶ Cultural dimensions are key to understanding how suicide acts gain popular support and become potential individual motivations (Whitehead and Abufarha, 2008)
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# Western views of suicide

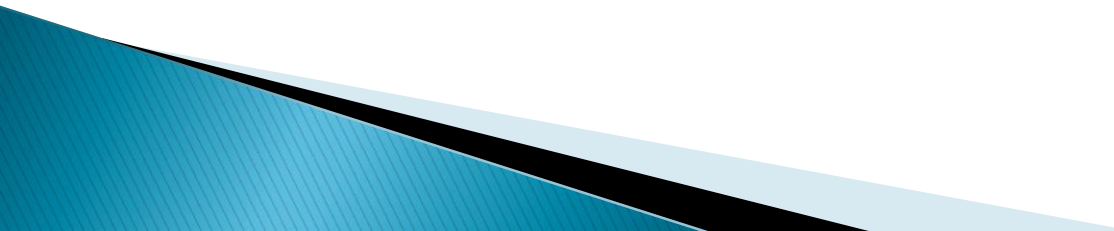
- ▶ The individual is mentally unstable
  - Requires immediate psychiatric interventions
- ▶ Suicide tends to be a taboo subject
  - Some are afraid to ask the question or fear the answer
- ▶ Suicide is never the answer to a problem
  - Or is it?

“This is my commandment, to love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:12–13)

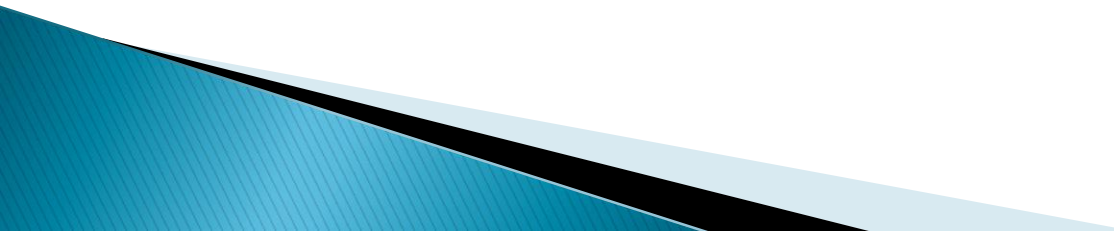
# Mexican view of suicide

- ▶ It is a shame on the family
- ▶ Death is imminent and it is only a matter of time
  - “Al que le toca le toca aunque se quite, y al que no, aunque se ponga”

The dead are always with us



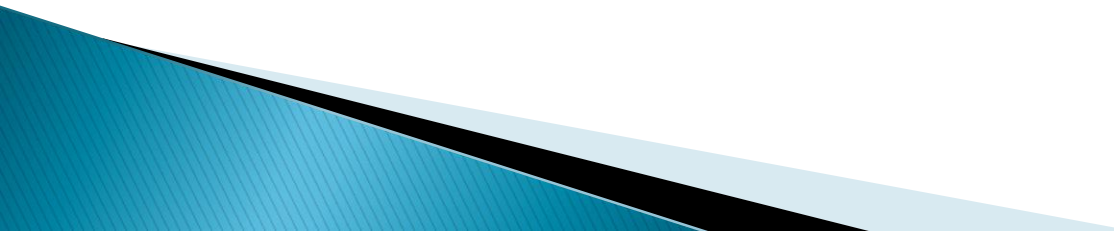
# Japanese view of suicide

- ▶ Founded upon Confucius philosophy
  - ▶ Suicide is an act driven by moral concerns.
  - ▶ It is through self-sacrifice that the individual shows his or her moral worth because he or she recognizes there is something greater than the I, namely the harmony of the group (Young, 2002).
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# The cultural aspects of suicide

- ▶ Durkeim (1951) describes 4 types of suicide:
  - Egoistic
  - Anomic
  - Fatalistic
  - Altruistic

# Egoistic suicide

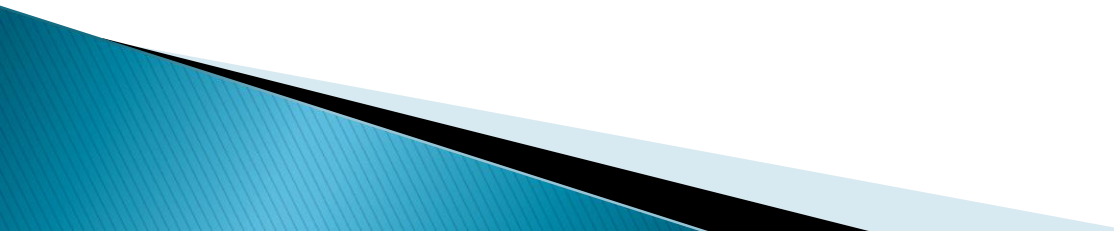
- ▶ Egoistic suicides are those in which the person is unhappy and is not integrated in society. This is perhaps the more common image we have of someone who is suicidal. Usually this individual is experiencing profound emotional trauma where killing oneself seems to be the only escape from the psychic ache.
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# Anomic Suicide

- ▶ Anomie suicides are those in which the person becomes estranged from the greater society, one's society is changed and no longer regulated by the social world. This is the individual who had everything and then loses everything...we have often heard the story of those who jump out of their high rise offices after losing all of their financial holdings. But it is not so much the finances but the status and prestige that provided that sense of identity of elite membership

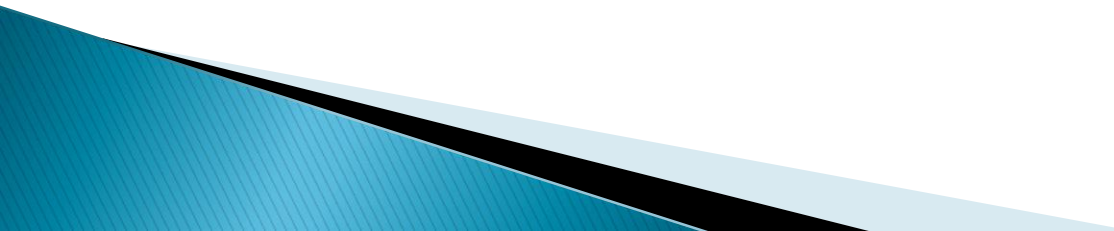
# Fatalistic Suicide

- ▶ Fatalistic is when the person is too regulated, where the future is blocked and the person feels choked by oppressive discipline and isolates them from their social setting. Persons who are incarcerated for long periods or those who spend extensive amounts of time in forced isolation.
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# Altruistic Suicide

- ▶ Altruistic suicides is the person who is too integrated, the person sees the death as a duty or honor. A strong social bond exists with the community and the suicide is committed out of a sense of obligation toward the community and for the good of the community...Martyrdom?
- ▶ Three types of Altruistic Suicide
  - Obligatory
  - Optional
  - Acute

# Altruistic Suicide – Obligatory

- ▶ “Mine is not to ask why, mine is to do or die.”
  - ▶ A strong sense of duty
  - ▶ A transcendental state of thinking in which there is greater value in sacrifice than in living
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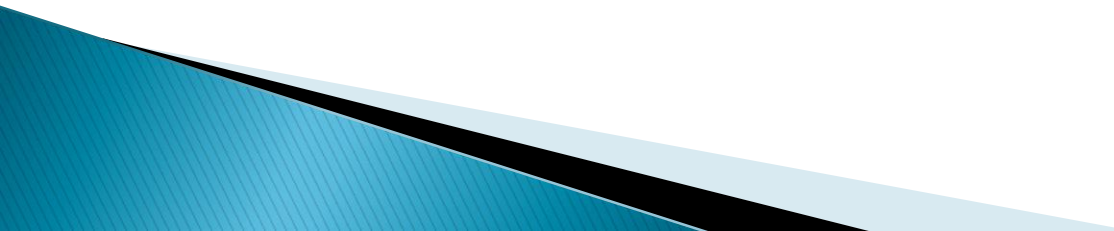
# Altruistic Suicide – Optional

- ▶ Society does not actually require to kill oneself, but it is favorable to the act. (The Japanese warlord that is given the option of an honorable death).

# Altruistic Suicide – Acute

- ▶ Occur with the concurrence of circumstances
- ▶ I was once told that at the base of every flag pole on a military base, there is a gun

# Questions to ponder regarding the cultural aspects of suicide

- ▶ What is the intention?
  - ▶ What value/meaning does the act have for the actor?
  - ▶ Does Altruistic suicide fit in Western ideology?
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# Questions and Answers?

- ▶ The Cultural Aspects of Suicide
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