For my wife Kinuko, the Yamazato, Maehara and Yasuhara families

and to those family members who have deceased from suicide
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

People often asked me why I chose this topic. I always said because it is a contemporary phenomenon and because it is sociologically interesting. There was more than that. I used to hear stories as a young boy about family members who passed away from suicide: one uncle who suffered for his mental competence and who ate himself to death until he died from a heart attack; an uncle who found his mother hanging herself at home, and who later jumped off a ship sailing between Okinawa and Japan and whose body was never found; a young man who killed himself and the reason I still do not know; and a respectful businessman who suddenly died leaving his lovely family behind. I was hurt as young boy and I am still hurt.

After the end of the Pacific theater of World War II, the Japanese workers put so much effort and commitment to redevelop the country, and the middle-age men who had particularly strong commitment are now the leading age group to commit suicide in contemporary Japan which pushed up Japan to become one of the nations with the highest suicide rate among the developed countries. Suicide is not only a problem for Japan, but for nations and regions all around the world whose citizens die from self-harm which has become a significant issue in the global arena today.

The question remains open – Why do people commit suicide? Starting from Emile Durkheim’s study on suicide, nobody has been able to answer that question specifically. There are sociological ways to try to answer the question, but they are not answers, they remain as suggestions. This thesis is a work that provides suggestions to answer the question of why people commit suicide and it is my sincere hope that people would not suffer and die from suicide.

I would like to thank my thesis committee members for the guidance and support throughout my studies in the MA program. First, I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Steinhoff, the chairperson of my thesis committee and the expert on sociology of Japan.
When I threw out the topic of suicide to start this thesis, she immediately provided me the way to sociologically approach the phenomenon on suicide in Japan. She taught me what sorts of data is needed and how to create them, and guided me on analyzing the data. She also gave me extensive comments on the drafts I produce. If it was not for Dr. Steinhoff’s guidance, this thesis would not have been produced in the manner that it is. Thank you so much Dr. Steinhoff, for your extraordinary and outstanding guidance. I would definitely like to thank Dr. Albert Britt Robillard. Dr. Robillard taught me basic ways to see people and society during my studies with him in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis for three years. Without studying with Dr. Robillard, I would not have established myself as a sociologist. Dr. Robillard’s personal and academic support always encouraged me and stimulated my sociological imagination. I will never forget the trip to UCLA and the encounters with Harold Garfinkel, Emanuel Schegloff and John Heritage with who I was able to share my work. I have never seen a scholar like Dr. Robillard who is so relaxed but so productive despite the physical condition. Thank you, Dr. Robillard, for your care, passionate care and guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Nakajima for providing me extensive guidance on the mass media analysis section. There was plenty of data on the mass media reports and Dr. Nakajima guided me through them and pinpointed how I should analyze them and incorporate them into the thesis. Thank you Dr. Nakajima for always welcoming me into your office at all times and for providing plenty of insights.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines contemporary Japanese mass media’s reporting practices on suicide and the construction of suicide problems over certain suicide categories, particularly in terms of moral panic. By analyzing 2263 suicide news articles of the Japanese national newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* from 1998 to 2008, this thesis discovers that unusual suicide methods and reasons, suicide by minor age groups by unusual occupations were over-reported. Among these categories, student bully suicide was constructed into a moral panic through the over-reporting practices of the Japanese mass media. The central problem in the moral panic over student bully suicide was not the act of student suicide itself, but the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the Japanese school and educational system who tried to conceal the existence of bullying. Finally, there were imitation suicides among students during the moral panic which was also encouraged by the Japanese mass media’s over-reporting practices of student bully suicide.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

You will find in the newspapers such as in the police pages many reasons for suicide such as life struggles, health problems and emotional pain. But from my experience, these are not all of the reasons. Not only that, these are only the processes that create motivations for suicide. Most of those who commit suicide do not know why they do so as Rēgnie has described. The motives for suicide are complicated as seen in our everyday actions. However, at least in my case, it is just an ambiguous anxiety. It is just an ambiguous anxiety about my future. – Ryunosuke Akutagawa

This thesis examines contemporary Japanese mass media’s reporting practices of suicide, and the Japanese mass media’s construction of suicide problems particularly in terms of moral panic. This thesis discovers that the Japanese mass media over-reported unusual aspects of suicide including student bully suicide, which was constructed into moral panic through in contemporary Japan. In addition, this thesis discovers that the central problem in the moral panic over student bully suicide was not the act of student bully suicide, but the irresponsible or unacceptable act conducted by the Japanese school and educational system who tried to conceal the existence of bullying in order to avoid being conceived as irresponsible by the Japanese public and experiencing the feelings of failure and shame.

This study is accomplished through use of content analysis of news articles regarding suicide from 1998 to 2008 of the Japanese national newspaper, Asahi Shimbun. I employ Durkheim’s theory on imitation suicide as a foundation, which provides basic understanding of the mass media’s role in society in regards to people’s social behavior. At the same time, I employ Nachman Goode and Erich Ben-Yehuda, and other scholar’s theory on the mass media construction of moral panic as another foundation, to understand the Japanese mass media’s characteristics on the construction of suicide problems particularly in terms of moral panic.
In Chapter 2, I review studies on the mass media’s impact on suicidal behavior, which provides an understanding of the mass media’s role in society particularly in terms of how people react to the mass media reports. I focus on studies that examine changes in social behavior when the mass media’s suicide information is either controlled or uncontrolled by media guidelines. These studies (e.g. Motto 1967 and Fu and Yip 2008) show changes in social behavior when the suicide information is controlled and not, which provides evidence of the mass media’s significant role in society. I then review studies that describe the mass media’s construction of social problems, particularly in terms of moral panic. These studies provide understanding of the mass media’s role in constructing public concern in the form of hostility towards the mass media constructed social problem, and public’s attitudes towards control of the social problem.

Based on the pre-existing studies on the mass media’s role in society, I established three research questions for this study as follow: 1) Do the Japanese mass media articles objectively reflect the social phenomenon of suicide in contemporary Japan? 2) If the answer is no, how do the Japanese mass media distort the social phenomenon of suicide in Japan? 3) What is the central problem in the Japanese mass media construction of moral panic over suicide?

In Chapter 3, I describe the method for analysis, how the newspaper data were collected and coded, and discuss the data’s suitability and reliability for this study. I also describe the group interview I conducted with suicide prevention hotline (inochi no denwa) workers in Japan. There was a total of 2263 Asahi Shimbun coded for
content analysis to examine what sorts of suicide information the Japanese mass media’s reports and the construction of suicide problem in terms of moral panic over student bully suicide.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings on the characteristics of the Asahi Shimbun’s reporting practices on suicide during the four years of 1998, 2000, 2006 and 2008. I examine, in particular, the sorts of suicide information reported by Asahi Shimbun, such as age, gender, occupation and reasons for suicide, to understand the differentials between newspaper reporting and the national suicide statistics. I conclude this chapter with the finding that Asahi Shimbun’s news reports on suicide did not match the national suicide statistics particularly on age, suicide method, occupation, and reasons for suicide. The most significant discovery of this chapter is that student bully suicide was drastically over-reported compared to all the categories of suicide, even though, according to the national suicide statistics student bully suicide only constituted 2 to 3 percent of suicides. Finally, I introduce the suicide prevention hotline workers’ responses to my questions on mass media influences on suicidal behaviors in Japan, which further provides an understanding of the mass media’s role in society through its reporting practices.

In Chapter 5, I expand the findings presented in Chapter 4 to examine the Japanese mass media construction of suicide problem, through the practice of over-reporting the suicide category of student bully suicide and how moral panic over student bully suicide was constructed. At the same time, I examine the Japanese morality that determines the delinquency that is central to the moral panic. This
analysis will be accomplished in reference to Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994) and other scholars’ theory on the media construction of social problems and moral panic. Finally, I examine whether or not there was imitation suicide during the moral panic by referring to Durkheim (1897) which should be constructed by the Japanese mass media reporting practice in contemporary Japan.

In Chapter 6, I conclude the study by summarizing the discoveries of this thesis and lay out that the moral panic over student bully suicide in contemporary Japan centers not on student bully suicide, but on the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the school and educational system. Finally, I provide present a recommendation for future studies the Japanese mass media construction of suicide problem in terms of moral panic.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Sociological Study of Mass Media and Suicidal Behavior

Emile Durkheim was one of the first sociologists to study the social phenomenon of suicide. Durkheim critiqued his preceding scholars by stating that they employ the term suicide without actually defining what suicide is about (Durkheim 1897). Durkheim defines suicide as an act that can be “applied to all cases of deaths resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself which he knows will produce this result” (Durkheim 1897:44). Having established his position, Durkheim (1897) formulated four major types of suicide; egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, anomic suicide, and fatalistic suicide. Egoistic suicide occurs when the individual loses cohesion with society. In egoistic suicide, an individual kills himself when the “state of ego lives its own life and “excessive individualism” takes place (Durkheim 1897:209). Durkheim frames altruistic suicide as a type of suicide that occurs when the ego does not belong to the individual and when it belongs to the group the individual participates in (Durkheim 1898:221). The individual kills himself for the sake of the group and not for himself (Durkheim 1897:221). Durkheim (1897) explains anomic suicide as a type of suicide that occurs when an individual faces excessive moral freedom and when the individual’s hope for future and feeling passion feels excessively regulated. The final type of suicide, fatalistic suicide is framed by Durkheim as a type of suicide that occurs when the individual is exposed to “excessive physical or more despotism” and feels no hope for living (Durkheim 1897:276).
More importantly, in the later part of the chapter where Durkheim (1897) explains the psychological factors of suicide, he proposes that the “final psychological factor” for suicide is “imitation suicide” (123). Durkheim (1897) defines imitation suicide as an “act that takes place immediately after a preceding and representative suicide case, which was previously performed by someone else” (129). Furthermore, Durkheim (1897) writes that “[T]he idea of suicide may undoubtedly be communicated by contagion” (131) proposing that imitation suicide is “contagious.” The contagion of imitation suicide spreads “in only two ways: either the event which serves as a model is spread orally by what we call public report, or the newspaper disseminates it” (Durkheim 1897:139). While Durkheim identifies two forms of how imitation suicide can spread, his work centers on contagion transmitted through newspapers. Durkheim hypothesizes that due to the lack of centralized newspapers and wide distribution of local newspapers, there should be “fewer examples to stimulate imitation [suicide]” in the local areas because there is a diversity of local newspapers whereas places with centralized newspapers have homogenous and immense readers (Durkheim 1897:139).

**Suicidal Behavior under Uncontrolled Mass Media Reports**

A substantial number of similar studies on mass media constructed suicidal behavior in relation to Durkheim’s study have been conducted in Europe and in the U.S (e.g. Motto (1967), Phillips (1982), Wasserman (1984), etc.). The studies reviewed focus on suicidal behavior in scenarios where the content of the mass media reports on suicide are controlled by media guidelines and when the content of the
suicide news reports are not controlled by media guidelines. Both types of studies provide an understanding of the mass media’s role in society.

Jerome A. Motto (1967) examined the number of suicides that occurred during a newspaper blackout in seven US cities. The cities examined were Baltimore, New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Portland, Seattle and Honolulu. He found that, overall, during newspaper strikes there was a decrease in the number of individuals committing suicide (Motto 1967). Five cities (Baltimore, New York, Cleveland, Portland and Seattle) had a decrease in the numbers of suicides; however, the suicide rates increased in Detroit and Honolulu during newspaper strikes (Motto 1967:254). Motto surmises that the increase in Honolulu “may reflect a significant difference in the characteristics [of citizens] in the Hawaiian population” while Detroit is not accountable (Motto 1967:254).

David P. Phillips studied whether or not nonfictional newspaper stories on suicide increased subsequent numbers of suicide in the U.S. (Phillips 1982:1342). The findings from Phillips’ body of research show that newspaper suicide stories did trigger imitative suicides over the years studied (Phillips 1982:1342). Phillips then conducted the same study on fictional television suicide stories in soap operas from 1947 to 1968, focusing specifically on televised motorcycle crash suicides (Phillips 1982). In addition, Phillips (1982) obtained U.S. computerized death certificate suicide records and those for motorcycle deaths during 1977 (1343). His results showed that the number of suicides increased from the usual level on the third day after a nonfictional suicide story was televised and relatively little occurred on the
other days during the week examined (Phillips 1982:1344). At the same time, Phillips (1982) concentrated on “white” suicides in this study because “the vast majority of soap opera characters are white, and it seems plausible that white viewers should be particularly likely to identify with the characters they see” (1343-44). Phillips’s results showed that “television soap opera’s suicide stories triggered increases in U.S. white suicides” (Phillips 1982:1349). Phillips further found that whether it is fictional or nonfictional, the media’s presentation of information on suicide does influence its viewers.

Building on Phillips’ previous studies, Ira M. Wasserman developed a study that examined whether or not the number suicides increased after reports of a celebrity committing suicide appeared in the New York Times. Wasserman (1984) conducted his study on the time period of 1968 to 1977. The results revealed that the number of suicides increased from the usual level following the publication of celebrity suicide news stories (Wasserman 1984).

A recent version of Phillips’ (1982) and Wasserman’s (1984) research was conducted by Keith Hawton, Sue Simkin, Jonathan J. Deeks, Susan O’Connor, Alison Keen, Douglas G. Altman, Greg Philo, and Christopher Bulstroede (1999) in England. Hawton et al. (1999) examined whether or not an overdose of the drug paracetamol in a television program influenced the choice of drug of patients rushed to hospitals for deliberate self poisoning within three weeks following the broadcast. The results revealed that “self poisoning rates were 17% higher in the first week after the broadcast, 9% higher in the second week and returned to the baseline level in the third
week” (Hawton et al. 1999:973). To further establish the link between the attempted suicide and the mass media, patients were asked about their knowledge of the television episode that depicted overdoses of paracetamol. When hospitals provided questionnaires to the patients on whether or not they watched the episode, 17% of the patients watched the episode (Hawton et al. 1999:973). Only a few patients among the overall rushed to the hospital reported that their choice of drug for self poisoning was influenced by television programs (Hawton et al. 1999:974). Yet, the television program viewers entering the hospital after the episode were more likely to state that the episode influenced their choice of drug (Hawton et al. 1999:974).

Suicidal Behavior under Controlled Mass Media Reports

There are studies that provide further understanding of the mass media’s role in society particularly in terms of how social behaviors are influenced by the reports (e.g. Fu and Yip 2008). The studies below focuses on suicidal behavior before and after media guidelines were implemented and they report decreases suicide after the guidelines came into effect. Such changes provide clearer understanding that the mass media has a significant role in society. These studies (e.g. Fu and Yip 2008) provides a further understanding of the mass media’s influence on social behaviors regardless of whether or not the information on suicide is controlled or uncontrolled by media guidelines.

Fu and Yip (2008) conducted content analysis of Hong Kong newspapers after the WHO Resources for Media Professionals were introduced to the media agencies and journalists in Hong Kong. The WHO Resources for Media Professionals provide
twelve guidelines on ways of reporting suicide news stories and therefore control the news agencies on what information is to be and what is not to be reported. While other countries had local versions of such media guidelines (e.g. American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, 2002; Center for Suicide Research and Prevention, 2004; Department of Health and Aging, 2004; New Zealand Ministry of Health, 1999; Samaritans, 2002), Hong Kong did not have any guidelines of its own and just used the WHO Resources for Media Professionals directly (Fu and Yip 2008:632). Furthermore, “Hong Kong had an exceptionally high density of suicide news stories, as 47% of all suicide cases were covered by the mass media in 2007” (Au, Fu and Yip 2004; Fu and Yip 2008:632).

Fu and Yip’s study first examined the period from January 1, 2004 to November 8, 2006, before and after the introduction of the WHO guidelines took place in Hong Kong from the year 2004. Five major Hong Kong newspapers “(Oriental Daily News, Apple Daily, The Sun, Ming Pao Daily News, and Sing Tao Daily News)” were examined before and after the WHO guidelines were introduced (Fu and Yip 2008:632). The keywords for content analysis were “suicide,” “jumping off from height,” “hanging,” or “charcoal burning” (Fu and Yip 2008:633). Coding categories included publication date, names of the newspaper, type of suicide (completed or attempted), placement (on the front page or not), location within Hong Kong, gender, age group, suicide method(s), headline information (age, gender, method, problem mentioned or not), whether or not the article contained accurate information, the number of Chinese characters, and whether or not the article contained a pictorial or
graphical presentation of the suicide (Fu and Yip 2008:632).

The results were then compared with a study conducted in 2000 by Au et al. (Fu and Yip 2008:633). Fu and Yip (2008) found a “significant decrease in the proportion of suicide news stories on the front page and stories with graphical locations” of where the suicides took place compared to Au et al.’s study (633). The number of “news articles with pictorial representations was found to increase slightly, yet no significant changes in the content of the headlines were found” (Fu and Yip 2008:633). The results reveal that introductions of the WHO guidelines can “change certain reporting styles regarding suicide news” (Fu and Yip 2008:634). Hong Kong’s suicide rate “declined in 2004 from its historical high in 2003” (Fu and Yip 2008:635).

**Mass Media and Suicide in Japan**

The studies (e.g. Stack 1996) reviewed below provide understanding on the Japanese mass media’s role in Japanese society particularly in regards to suicidal behavior. Steven Stack’s study on the mass media’s influence on Japanese suicidal behavior is the only study to examine this relationship between suicide rates and the mass media in Japan. Although there are serious methodological problems with the study, the study provides some evidence that suicidal behavior is influenced by mass media reports.

Steven Stack (1996) studied what types of media information affect suicidal acts in Japan from 1955 to 1985. Stack (1996) states that suicide in Japan is considered “good” and “accepted” behavior (133). The great methodological weakness of the study is that he does not examine Japanese language media, which Japanese
people were more likely to read. Instead he examines the relationship between incidents of suicide reported in English media to the general suicide rates in Japan, which were obtained from the Japan Statistics Bureau (Stack 1996:135). At the same time, he obtained publicized news stories from the New York Times Index, Japan Times Weekly, and Facts on File, which were written in English (Stack 1996:135-36). Stack created two categories of suicides to examine what might have had mass media effects on suicide in Japan: 1) Suicides of American and international celebrities, and 2) Japanese suicides by both celebrities and ordinary people (Stack 1996:135). The results showed that news stories of foreigners’ suicides had no negative effects on Japanese suicide and the main mass media effects on Japanese suicide were limited to those committed by the Japanese nationals (Stack 1996:139). Stack concludes that the mass media effect on suicide in Japan was at the same level to the U.S. (Stack 1996:140). Stack’s study reveals that the Japanese population’s suicidal behavior is only influenced by domestic suicide news stories and therefore the Japanese mass media has a significant role in the Japanese society.

**Mass Media Reports and Moral Panic**

The studies reviewed in the previous sections on mass media’s role in society when the suicide information are both controlled and uncontrolled provide an understanding of the impact on the micro level social arena of suicide behavior. That being the case, one could also hypothesize that the mass media may have an impact on the macro level arena. The macro level mass media influenced should represent some sort of influence on substantial number of members in society in regards to
social behavior including suicide. A good example of this is what is called a “moral panic.”

The idea of moral panic was created by Stanley Cohen (1973) based on the Mods and Rocker case in the U.K. in 1972, in which the public responded sensationally to gang activities which then correlated with an escalation of sensationalism in both the public responses and the gang activities. Cohen (1973) theorized that it was the mass media that constructed the sensationalism in the U.K. in the public and the public’s escalation of fear and threat. Nachman Goode and Erich Ben-Yehuda (1994) further inquired into the factors contributing to moral panics, and attitudes of members of the society during a period of moral panic. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) state that during moral panic, the evildoers (deviant behaviors) pose as a threat to society and to the moral order, and the fear toward the disaster perceived at hand is exhibited by a substantial number of people in society (31). At the same time, there is an attitude that is established among members of society that deviants and threatening social phenomena should be controlled, through new rules and laws, and more law enforcement and governmental involvement (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:31).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) state that there are five indicators of moral panic which will be central to the analysis of moral panic in this thesis: public concern, social consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. There is a rise in the level of *public concern* over certain deviant behavior and resulting hostility against those deviant behaviors and the damages created in the public (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).
The collective concern and emotions in the public over the deviant behavior creates *social consensus* among a substantial number of members in society to *control* the deviant behaviors and damages (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:33). However, the public’s belief about the number and damage involved in the deviant behavior is *disproportionate* or exaggerated by the mass media (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:36). Finally, in most cases, the moral panic appears suddenly and disappears after a short while, and therefore is *volatile* (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994:38).

Focusing on the symbolic meanings of social problems that are constructed into moral panics, Philip Jenkins (1994) studied the social meaning of serial murder in the U.S. Jenkins takes an analytical approach to untangle moral panics over serial murder. He found a correlation in the increases in actual serial murder cases with the degree of escalation of sensation in major U.S. newspapers reporting practices from the early 1900s to the 1990s (Jenkins 1994:31). In such situations, while the local newspapers were covering serial murder cases for local marketing purposes in the 1960s, the coverage expanded to major national newspapers in the 1980s, leading to a national level fear about serial murder (Jenkins 1994:31).

Despite the escalation of sensationalism in the mass media reports and the spread of the public concern to the national level, serial murders are actually quite rare. Almost 60 percent of homicides in the U.S. were committed by people who were relatively close to the victim, such as spouses, family or acquaintances; this percentage outnumbered homicides committed by strangers (Jenkins 1994:46). In addition, about 40 percent of homicides resulted from intimate conflicts such as
triangle love affairs, and for this reason approximately half of homicides were committed because of relationship issues and not because people were committing random murders (Jenkins 1994:46). A the same time, the journalistic practices during the ‘80s in the U.S. were marked by a trendy escalation of sensationalism, which was evidenced by higher numbers of tabloid type news reports, and therefore the public expectation was that more and more crime reports would appear (Jenkins 1994:31).

The consequence of the sensational mass media reporting practices over serial murders was the mass media construction of the symbol, serial murder, as a major social problem while in reality the problem was minor. At the same time, through escalating sensational reports, the mass media created social fear towards serial murder and constructed a moral panic over serial murder in the U.S. Having established these findings, Jenkins addresses the important question, “why such a relatively minor issue [serial murder] attracts so much interest, so much fear, and is presented as such an overwhelmingly threatening social problem?” (Jenkins 1994:47). According to Jenkins (1994), it is necessary to “understand the wide range of symbolic meanings [over serial murder] that have been attached to the phenomenon [sensationalism over serial murder], and how these meanings have been manipulated for the purpose of a number of interest groups and bureaucratic structures” (47). Joel Best (1990) studied the rise of public concern and outbursts of a moral panic over missing children in the U.S. In Best’s study, “children” were symbols of preciousness and vulnerability which are to be protected by society from evildoers. At the same time, Best’s study reveals how a moral panic constructed by the mass media can
mobilize a substantial number of members in society and governmental institutions to establish public attitudes toward controlling the constructed social problem (Best 1990). Both Jenkins and Best’s case study provides us good evidence that a moral panic constructed by the mass media reporting practices can have an influence on macro-level or collective social behavior in the same manner in which micro level behaviors can be influenced by mass media reporting practices.

The Social Construction of Moral Panic

Phillip Jenkins (1994) and Joel Best (1990) further explain why and how moral panics are constructed in society by explaining the dynamics of the “outsider” and “insider” influences on policymakers and selections of news reports of the mass media. Based on his study on child abduction in the U.S., Jenkins (1994) explains that the construction of moral panic takes place when deviant events are placed in a context that is familiar to the assumed audience (5). In the case of Best’s study, he states that protecting children is central to social life in order for adults to insure that enough children survive, and that they learn the way of their people (Best 1990:3). Therefore, children are a symbol of social protection for the large body of adults in society. This explanation can be applied to this thesis as the present study concerns moral panic over student bully suicide in Japan where “students” who are a minor age group involved in bullying and suicide. Best (1990) writes that “insider” and “outside” claim-makers usually have ownerships of well-established social problems where the insiders are in the policymaking processes (13). The insiders are “ordinarily parts of the polity, the set of groups that can routinely influence government decisions
and can ensure that their interests are normally recognized in the decision-making process” (Best 1990:13). These claimants achieve ownership of the issues and recognition both for their social problem and for themselves (Best 1990:13-14). On the other hand, the outsiders have limited access to and little influence on policymakers and they find it much harder to change policy because there are on the outside of the policymaking processes (Bets 1990:14). The mass media, therefore, becomes important for the outsider claim-makers so that the outsiders can attract mass media’s attention as they may cohere a social movements both because people learn about the movement via the media and join the movements, and the mass media coverage may provide the movement more credibility, generating enthusiasm among potential members (Best 1990:14). The coverage of the social movements might also pressure policymakers to respond to mass media coverage, and the policymakers may be pressured by the movements or the general public (Best 1990:14). In general, however, the advantage belongs to the insiders who own the well-established social problems with ready access to policymakers and the mass media (Best 1990:15).

**Student Suicide and Moral Panic in Japan**

There is a precise case where moral panic was constructed over a specific category in Japanese society. The specific category that has been a trend in reporting is student suicide which entails a public concern for “protection” as Best (1990) described in reference to how children are perceived in society. A seminal study was conducted by Thomas P. Rohlen (1983) who studied student suicide in the 1980s in Japan. Rohlen (1983) discovered that every year when the entrance examination
season approached, Japanese newspapers and magazines reported about middle class boys committing suicide because despair and failure at the exams. The public received an impression that there were a substantial number of student suicides in relation to entrance exams (Rohlen 1983:327). However, Rohlen (1983) discovered that the rest of the year had almost no reports on student suicide relating to entrance exams, and in fact student suicides in Japan centered instead on those who did the least well in schools, dropouts, and those of low status jobs and lower incomes (333). He concluded that the number of suicides by young people who are not attending school is higher than those who do attend, and there was no correlation between the pressure of entrance examinations and the student suicide rate, and the “trends of inquiry into youth suicide was constructed by the media” (Rohlen 1983:327-28). Not only was the “middle class boys” a social symbol that encouraged a sense of protection, there was also a public demand to the mass media to report on the middle-class boy’s suicide when the entrance season came. Rohlen’s study tells us that both the social arena and mass media constructed a moral panic seasonally through a correlated escalation of attention given to the middle-class boy’s suicide by both the public and the mass media.

Japanese Morality on Suicide

Studies on Japanese suicide initially centered on Japanese cultural accounts which looked at *hara-kiri* or *seppuku* (i.e. Jack Seward 1968), and most scholars have stated that the Japanese hold positive attitudes towards suicide and use it as a favored obligatory impulse in particular social and psychological situations. Durkheim (1897)
also explains that suicide in Japan is conducted in order to avoid stigma or insult of being captured by the enemy and to win self-esteem (222). Durkheim’s attempt in this statement is to explain that Japanese commit suicide to prove loyalty to the group he belongs to rather than compromising to the enemy, and therefore, Durkheim frames Japanese suicide as altruistic suicide. Durkheim’s proposition on Japanese altruistic suicide explains the Japanese sense of groupism where the group is considered more important than the individual.

In more recent years, Mamoru Iga has included fatalistic suicide in addition to altruistic suicide as a type of suicide that characterizes Japanese suicide. Iga (1986) argues that both altruistic suicide from the sense of responsibility and fatalistic suicide from the sense of helplessness have characterized Japanese suicide since the beginning of the nation’s history (154). It is important to draw attention to the term Iga uses – responsibility – in his framing of Japanese altruistic suicide. Iga (1986) writes that Japanese responsibility is directed towards “social superiors or to social groups and that while Westerners stress performance, Japanese emphasize qualities – integrity and sincerity, or selfless devotion” (151). Concluding with this remark, Iga (1986) states that “[w]hen a Japanese cannot satisfy his superior’s expectations he may show his sincerity by ‘selfless devotion to his group’” and commit suicide (151).

Furthermore, Iga (1986) explains the Japanese fatalistic suicide and the sense of helplessness by drawing on romantic plays written by the Japanese playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon in the 18th century (154). Chikamatsu’s plays featured suicide by lovers whose relationships were unacceptable in the Japanese society. What
Iga tells us about lover’s suicide in ancient Japan by referring to Chikamatsu is that there is great amount of the social pressure in Japanese society where if one cannot comply with an expected social behavior, or if one conducted an unacceptable social behavior, one is pressured to commit suicide to take responsibility for his own conduct and to manage the disruption to the moral order caused by her/his own conduct; therefore, we can say that Japanese fatalistic suicide in addition to altruistic suicide entails the sense of responsibility.

A more contemporary study on Japanese suicide that supports Durkheim and Iga’s idea on the Japanese morality for suicide – taking responsibility – were conducted by Mark West (2005). Attracted to the sudden increase in the number of suicides in a period of economic recession in contemporary Japan, West (2005) conducted a study by looking into relations between the state of indebtedness of Japanese citizens and the roles of the legal institutions and insolvency law for debtors. West’s study initially centered on the external factors of Japanese suicide – indebtedness, bankruptcy files and governmental consultations – and his study uncovered a peculiar Japanese sense of helplessness and altruism in the same context as Durkheim and Iga, although he rejects Iga’s characterization of the Japanese sense of responsibility.

West (2005) found that Japan’s economic recession was indeed a cause for the high number of suicides in Japan, but suggested that conditions of indebtedness and debtors’ consultations with governmental and civil institutions were the triggering factors for suicide in contemporary Japan. West (2005) states that Japanese today
commit suicide after becoming indebted, when they consider filing for bankruptcy and when they are provided debt counseling from governmental and civilian institutions. Therefore, West (2005) proposes that both being in the condition of indebtedness and the stigma attached to that state might lead to stress, depression and social alienation, and these psychological states in turn are major causes of suicide (217).

At the same time, West (2005) argues that Iga’s explanation of the Japanese sense of “responsibility” in the situation of helplessness is both “difficult both to test and apply” (222) and Iga’s “hypotheses explain too much and are only stereotypes and not causes” (222). West emphasized that it is the sense of failure and shame that causes suicide in Japan, based on his interviews with a variety of experts on civil indebtedness and suicide. One police officer said to West, “. . . Guy [a debtor] borrows from loan sharks at some crazy interest rate that he can’t possibly repay. He thinks about bankruptcy but decides that would be too much of an inconvenience [meiwaku] for his family and friends, so he hangs himself” (West 2005:248). West (2005) presented the following statement of a debt counselor of the civil rehabilitation system for bankruptcy,

“So when they [debtors] come in, they automatically are opposed to bankruptcy. ‘Just give me anything but bankruptcy,’ they’ll say. ‘Bankruptcy will be worse than the loan sharks, I’ll have even less financial freedom [kubi ga motto mawaranakunaru] and I’ll be dead before it ends’” (256).
The term *meiwaku* literally means to “annoy her/his surrounding others.” Because Japanese are expected to avoid annoying family and friends over personal life issues, failing to do so exhibits a person’s lack of responsibility to discipline oneself to handle life. In addition, the term *kubi ga motto mawanakunaru* means “one’s neck will be turning around even less.” For Japanese, being able to “turn around the neck towards people” means her/his life is secure and he can be trusted living among others in society. If one’s neck is not able to turn around and face others, it means one has failed to live as a productive and trusted member in society and the individual feels shame. In this context, the sense of failure and shame stems from the sense of not being able to take responsibility for one’s life.

Therefore, failure and shame, and responsibility are interrelated, meaning Iga and West proposes the same sense and psychological factor for Japanese suicide; Japanese today commit suicide from the sense of responsibility. At the same time, by combining Durkheim’s proposition on Japanese groupism, I conclude that Japanese today commit suicide to express the morality of responsibility to society by taking their own lives, and to manage the disruption of the moral order that their own conduct has produced. This kind of rationale can be found in many individual cases of suicide in Japan.
CHAPTER 3. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Asahi Shimbun as Data Source

I use Asahi Shimbun’s suicide news reports to conduct content analysis to fulfill the two objectives of this study using content analysis: 1) to compare Asahi Shimbun’s suicide reports with the national suicide statistics to pinpoint the characteristics of the Japanese mass media’s reporting practices, 2) to analyze the Japanese mass media’s construction of moral panic based on (1). These two objectives of this study lead into the main focus of this study, which is to investigate the reporting practices of the Japanese mass media and their relationship with the social behavior and the Japanese mass media in the time of moral panic. Among the five national newspapers in Japan (Asahi Shimbun, Yomiuri Shimbun, Mainichi Shumbun, Sankei Shimbun and Nikkei Shimbun), Asahi Shimbun is considered one of the reformist or liberal newspapers, compared to Yomiuri and Sankei Shimbun, which are considered to be conservative. Mainichi Shimbun is considered relatively neutral and Nikkei Shimbun’s interests center on economics. The readership of Asahi Shimbun is the middle-class white collar workers; this fact should help to provide an understanding of how contemporary Japanese populations that represent the dominant class react to mass media reports on suicide. Although this study centers on a single newspaper, Asahi Shimbun represents the general way the Japanese mass media report on suicide.

Data Collection and Coding for National Suicide Statistics Comparison

Articles of Asahi Shimbun are available through the Asahi Shimbun electronic database, Kikuzo II, which allows for articles to be downloaded. The total volume of
newspaper coverage of suicides was far too large to be used for this content analysis, so a sample was designed using two months of each of four years between 1998 and 2008. The years were selected to provide two years when suicide rates were already high and there was public concern about it (1998 and 2000) and then two years when a new suicide prevention law was established and media guidelines for newspaper coverage of suicide were being proposed (2006 and 2008). The two months of June and December were selected because June had the highest number of suicides during an entire year, and December had the least number of suicides during an entire year according to the Suicide Prevention Whitepapers published by the Cabinet of Japan (Cabinet of Japan 2008). The sample thus provides a reasonable approximation of suicide coverage over the entire period, with sufficient density of coverage in particular time periods (100% coverage of the selected months) and balanced distribution of the sample over the ten year period. The term 自殺 (jisatsu) which translates into “suicide” was entered into the Kikuzo II search engine for the allotted two months of the designated four years.

The first stage of coding took place on the selection of articles that were suitable for this study. There were a total of 1757 articles downloaded from the Asahi Shimbun Kikuzo II database for the first stage of coding. The three criteria for determining the suitability for this study are as follow: 1) articles of domestic suicide cases; 2) articles that do not handle suicide as topics for art exhibitions and announcements of book publications; 3) articles that do not handle people’s speeches and utterances that use the term 自殺 (jisatsu) (Suicide) in a context irrelevant to the
phenomenon of suicide used by this study. Out of the total 1757 articles, 944 articles qualified and were coded as suitable for comparison with the national suicide statistics. For the comparison study the following categories were coded: 1) the date of the article, 2) the title of the headline, 3) gender of the person involved in the suicide – male or female, 4) age of the person involved in the suicide – all ages were later categorized in accordance with the categorization of the national suicide statistics, 5) reason for the suicide – economic, health, school, workplace, household, bully, 6) suicide method – jump in front of moving trains, jumping off buildings, burning, drowning, medication, hanging, cutting, etc., 7) occupation – student, administrative post, employed, unemployed, housewife, house-husband, unknown, etc. The national suicide statistics created by the national police agency categorizes the common reason for suicide as health problems, economic problems, household problems, workplace problems and school problems. Although bully is not included in the national suicide statistics as one of the reasons for suicide, I realized during the coding process that student “bully” suicide in significant amount. Student bully suicide should be included in the category of school problem but I differentiated with the school problems which included suicide such as being scolded by the teacher or parents. At the same time, the national suicide statistic’s categorization of the suicide methods were hanging, jumping off, jumping in front of moving vehicles, use of gas, self-poisoning, drowning. I realized during the process of coding that the two methods of “burning” and “cutting” frequently appeared more than these commonly used methods, and coded them separately. I considered that such appearance of unique
suicide reason (bully) and suicide method (burning and cutting) in the news articles should represent the Japanese mass media’s reporting practices on suicide.

**Group Interview**

In order to understand the Japanese mass media’s role in Japanese society through its reporting practices, I conducted a group interview with nine individuals who work for the Okinawa Suicide Prevention Hotline (*Okinawa inochi no denwa*) on December 22, 2008 at the Okinawa Mental Health Center. I provided a total of eleven questions to the suicide prevention hotline workers as follows: Q1: How long you have been working for the suicide prevention hotline; Q2: Do you pay attention to the Japanese news reports on suicide?; Q3. What do you notice about the Japanese mass media and its news sources on suicides?; Q4: How do you think the Japanese media functions in Japan from a suicide prevention perspective?; Q5: Do you have any general opinions regarding the Japanese media’s representation of suicides? (Criticism, praises, no opinions, etc.); Q6: Do you think that the suicidal are affected by the Japanese media’s representation of suicides?; Q7: Do you recall any changes in the hotline callers after there were certain suicide reports made by the Japanese media? What particular kinds of changes do you remember?; Q8: In the past ten years, have the suicidal callers changed? In what ways have they changed?; Q9: What kinds of people call the hotline? Are they primarily people who seem to be considering suicide themselves, or do you also get calls from concerned family members or friends?; Q10: What about the way the Japanese mass media report about mental illness in connection with suicide cases? Does it fit what you know from your work with the
suicide hotline? Do these representations of mental illness seem to affect the callers to the hotline? In what way?; Q11: How do you think the Japanese media should report suicides?

The Okinawa Suicide Prevention Hotline is a branch of the Suicide Prevention Hotline (*inochi no denwa*) which is located in prefectures in Japan. The help calls from each prefecture are not necessarily received by a volunteer in the same prefecture, and calls are received nationwide whenever there is an opening in the hotline, regardless of where the call is from. Therefore, a call from Tokyo might be received in Okinawa or a call from Okinawa might be received by a volunteer in Tokyo. The experiences of these hotline volunteers, therefore, should provide understanding of the mass media’s role in Japanese society through its reporting practices.

**Data Collection and Coding for Moral Panic Analysis**

In the course of analyzing the basic sample of discrete months of data over a ten year period, it became apparent that there was extensive reporting about suicides of young people in which bullying was implicated. There was heightened reporting in October 2006, which began to look like part of a moral panic. In order to explore the issue, it was necessary to get a more complete sample of relevant data over the period of time spanned by the moral panic, with additional coverage of the period before and after in order to define the full time parameters of the phenomenon. The moral panic was initially thought to involve a small cluster of specific bully suicide cases that were reported in fall 2006, but as the sample was drawn it became apparent that the
construction of the moral panic spread into other related kinds of reports and the
criteria for inclusion were steadily expanded to encompass the entire phenomenon of
the moral panic over bully suicides and the periods before and after it occurred.

A separate data sample of Asahi Shimbun reports on student bully suicide was
drawn from the Kikuzo II database. This was a 100 percent sample of all articles using
the relevant search terms for approximately two year period from September 2005
through December 2007. The time period for this second sample began with fall 2006
when the initial cluster of cases was reported, and then was extended month by month
until it covered the entire period of elevated coverage and included several months on
either side when coverage was very low from September 2005 to December 2007.
There were a total of 392 articles that qualified for content analysis of the four bully
suicide cases.

Although initially search terms related to the specific bully suicide cases in fall
2006 were used, ultimately the two basic keywords of いじめ (ijime) (bully) and 自殺
were entered into the Kikuzo II search engine in order to download articles for content
analysis of articles that did not directly touch on the four bully suicide cases but were
related to student bullying and student bully suicide. This was also a 100 percent
sampling from September 2005 (when the first case in the cluster actually occurred)
to December 2007. The expanded sample included all stories related to the specific
events in the moral panic, plus ancillary coverage such as reports on extension of
child helpline service, voices from readers, editorials and columns that mentioned
bullying and student bully suicide. Therefore, these articles were counted as part of
the moral panic over student bully suicide. They were not included into the count of articles concerning the four bully suicide cases, but were counted for the total number and type of articles during the entire time of moral panic over student bully suicide which will be seen in Chapter 5. There were 927 articles that qualified for coding and the coding categories for the articles were as follows: 1) date of article, 2) headline, 3) type of article – regular news reports, voices from readers, columns and editorials. Therefore, adding the articles for comparison with the national statistics and moral panic analysis, there were a total of 2263 articles coded for the content analyses for the study in this thesis.
CHAPTER 4. ASAHI SHIMBUN AND NATIONAL SUICIDE STATISTICS

Suicide as a Social Problem in Contemporary Japan

The number of suicides in Japan was steady, with approximately 20,000 deaths per year, between the 1950s and mid 1990s, which constituted a suicide rate of approximately 17 to 20 per 100,000 persons. The number of suicides suddenly increased by approximately 8,000 per year in 1998 and exceeded 30,000 for the first time in the nation’s history. The number has since then remained constant at a level above 30,000 per year or at a rate ranging from 24.2 to 27 per 100,000 persons. Table 4.1 shows the suicide rate from 1988 to 2008.
Table 4.1 shows that males consistently commit suicide at a very much higher rate than females do, whose ratio was roughly 1.75 to 1 prior to 1998, and at the range of 2.5 to 1 thereafter. In this respect, the sudden increase in the total rate of suicide in 1998 was due to the significant increase in suicide by males. Up until today, the suicide rate has remained constant at the same level since 1998, so as the differentials between male and female, showing that male suicide continues to lead Japan’s high suicide rate for more than a decade. Therefore, the sudden increase in the total rate of suicide in 1998 was due to the significant increase in suicide by males while there was a very small increase in females. Up until today, the suicide rate has remained constant at the same level since 1998, so as the differentials between male

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Suicide Rate</th>
<th>Male Suicide Rate</th>
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<td>2008</td>
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and female, showing that male suicide continues to lead Japan’s high suicide rate for more than a decade.

In particular, middle-age suicide (30 to 59 years-old) and elderly suicide (60+) committed by men has been considered the greatest cause for the increase in the number of suicides in Japan since the year 1998. The Cabinet of Japan (2008) writes that “[W]ithin the 8,261 increase in the number of suicide in 1998, suicide by ages 45-64 consists approximately 40 percent,” suggesting that suicide by middle-age men was the major factor for the increase in the total number of suicide in 1998 (9). Perceiving the dramatic increase of the number of suicides, governmental involvement in suicide prevention took place few years after 1998. The Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare formed the Intellectuals Meeting for Suicide Prevention Countermeasures in 2001 (Kawanishi 2008:754) The formation of the Intellectual Meeting was followed by the creation of “Healthy Japan 21” in 2000, which creates goals to attain a society where all citizens of Japan can live healthily, peacefully and actively (Cabinet of Japan 2007:46). Following this event, the House of Councilors established an Urgent and Effective Comprehensive Countermeasures for Suicide in July of 2005 (Kawanishi 2008:754). Around the same time, the NPO Suicide Prevention Support Center Lifelink’s launched a signature movement to encourage the Japanese government to create a law for suicide prevention (Kawanishi 2008:754). The NPO Suicide Prevention Support Center Lifelink gained 101,055 signatures within a one and a half month time period and submitted all signatures to the Voluntary Diet Members on Considering Suicide Prevention (NPO Suicide
Prevention Support Center Lifelink Homepage). In October of 2006, the Cabinet of Japan finally established the Basic Law on Suicide Countermeasures which came into effect in October 2006 (Kawanishi et al. 2008:754). These involvements in suicide prevention by both government and civilians reveal that suicide was recognized as a major social problem and an attitude towards control over the phenomena was established in the Japanese society. Therefore, one can expect that some form of social outcome will arise from the social construction of suicide as social problem in contemporary Japan.

**Comparison of Asahi Shimbun Data with National Suicide Statistics**

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine the characteristics of Japanese media reports of suicide, particularly by looking into Asahi Shimbun’s reports which represent a good deal of the characteristics of Japanese media in contemporary Japan. This will be accomplished first by comparing the pattern of Asahi Shimbun’s reporting with the Japanese national suicide statistics for the variables that are available. Because of the nature of the Asahi Shimbun data, it is not possible to compare them directly with national suicide rates. Instead, we can compare the percent distribution of the national suicide figures (based on actual numbers of suicide rather than population adjusted rates) for specific years with the percent distribution of the suicides reported in Asahi Shimbun during the selected time periods that were sampled within those same years. Although we do not expect that the mass media report all suicide cases, or that news reporting should match the overall national parameters, comparing the percent distributions of suicides reported by Asahi
Shimbun with the percent distribution of the national statistics for the same years provides us with a good starting point for examining where the newspaper over and under-reports suicide. Systematic discrepancies in the pattern of mass media reporting in these categories provide indicators of the criteria that are being used in suicide reporting, and also suggest what sorts of category are used for the mass media construction of suicide problems and the category that are formed into moral panic.

**Gender Ratio of Suicide**

Table 4.2 shows a comparison between the gender distribution in the Asahi Shimbun reports and the national suicide statistics. Table 4.2 shows a comparison between the gender distributions in the Asahi Shimbun reports with that of the national suicide statistics. Throughout the four year period studied, there was a consistent gender ratio between males and female suicide of 7:3, or 2.33:1.

Table 4.2 Comparison of % Distribution of Male and Female Suicides in Asahi Shimbun and National Statistics for Selected Years.

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<td>(%)</td>
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Source: national statistics extracted from Police White Papers on Suicide Prevention 2008; Asahi Shimbun data from author’s content analysis.

The gender ratio cited in the national suicide statistics is calculated by the number of suicides and, for this reason, contains a gender ratio that is somewhat lower than those calculated in rates. This is because of the rates correct for the underlying gender imbalance in the population, in which female outnumber male.
Suicide by Age

Table 4.3 below compares the age distribution in the *Asahi Shimbun's* reports with the age distribution of the national suicide statistics. As noted earlier, the results in the table are a comparison of the percent distribution, which does not accurately reflect the suicide rates within particular age groups in relation to their proportion of the overall population. If we first divide the data into three age categories of roughly comparable size, under thirty (Youth), 30-59 (Middle-Age), and 60 and older (Elderly), the general pattern is easier to see. We can then look more closely at variations in the smaller age groups represented in the table.

The subtotals for youth, middle-age, and elderly are shown in boldface in the table. It is immediately apparent in the national statistics that the middle-age category accounts for about half of the suicides, the elderly category another third, and youth category constitutes the remaining one-eighth of the total. By contrast, *Asahi Shimbun* over-reports youth suicides at roughly three times the actual percentage of occurrence. Since the data are based on percent distributions, significant under-reporting of suicides in one age category will necessarily appear as over-reporting in another age category. This produces corresponding decreases in reports of suicide by the middle-aged and the elderly. *Asahi Shimbun* reported suicides by the elderly at roughly half of their actual percentage, and except for the year 2000, there was an under-report of middle-age suicides by about 10 to 20 percent.

As noted earlier, the dramatic increase in suicide was largely accounted for increases in suicide by middle-aged men. Although there are small variations in the
comparisons for all three of the decade age categories (30-39, 40-49 and 50-59), we can tease out a small pattern. *Asahi Shimbun* consistently under-reported middle-aged suicides relative to the national percentages, except that in 1998 and 2000 it over-reported suicides by those in their thirties, in 2000 it over-reported suicides by persons in their fifties, and in 2008 came closer to the actual percentage for persons in their forties and fifties. The pattern suggests that *Asahi Shimbun* may not have picked up the particular characteristics of the overall increase in suicide in the first year that the number suddenly increased, but that they did focus on middle-aged suicide in the next year for which we have data, 2000. This is an interesting finding, but further exploration of it lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Table 4.3 Comparison of % Distribution of Suicide by Age in *Asahi Shimbun* and National Statistics, Selected Years.

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<td></td>
<td>Asahi</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Asahi</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;=19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*&lt;30</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*30-59</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*60+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>32,863</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>31,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Source: National Statistics extracted from National Police Agency Suicide Statistics 2008; *Asahi Shimbun* data from author’s content analysis.

Much more important for this study is the substantial over-reporting of suicides by youth. In 1998 and 2000, *Asahi Shimbun* reported suicides undertaken by the age group under 19 – youths – at approximately 10 to 15 times more than the national
statistics percentage (2 percent). The reports increased in 2006 and 2008, and became one of the categories that were dramatically over-reported in *Asahi Shimbun*.

Most astonishing is the reporting of suicides among the category of those younger than 20 (since 20 is the age of majority in Japan, these are suicides by minors). Although the national suicide statistics show that only 2 percent of all suicides were committed by minors in each of the four years, *Asahi Shimbun* reported suicide by this age group at a dramatically higher frequency: more than ten times their actual percentage distribution in three of the four years. The imbalance was even greater in 2006 and 2008, when reports of youth suicides had 13 to 15 times more than their actual proportion of all suicides in the national suicide statistics. This finding suggests that the distortion that Rohlen (1983) observed in reporting of suicides by youth in the 1970s was still apparent decades later, although the nature of the over-reporting requires further investigation and may be quite different from the sensationalism over entrance examinations as a motivation for suicide that Rohlen (1983) found.

**Occupational Distribution of Suicide**

Table 4.4 shows the occupational distribution of suicides in *Asahi Shimbun* reports compared with the national suicide statistics. The occupational distribution of suicides offers hints about what kinds of life situations are most likely to lead to suicide and also bears some relationship to the age distribution, since the very young and the elderly are less likely to be employed. About half of all suicides in Japan were committed by the unemployed, with the percentage rising to 57 percent in 2008. Most
scholars on suicide link the increase in suicide by middle-aged men to the loss of secure employment and income. However, as seen in the table, the unemployed were consistently reported on a much smaller percentage than the national suicide statistics.

The next two largest categories in the national statistics were suicides among the employed (about a quarter of suicides) and the self-employed (about 20 percent in the first three time periods measured, dropping to 10 percent in 2008). Suicides by the self-employed (which might also be an indicator of economic insecurity) were seriously under-reported in every year. By contrast, there was an over-report of suicide by the employed in two of the four years studied.

Table 4.4 Percent Distribution of Suicide by Occupation in National Statistics and *Asahi Shimbun* for Selected Years.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A N</td>
<td>A N</td>
<td>A N</td>
<td>A N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>9 21</td>
<td>7 22</td>
<td>0 20</td>
<td>5 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>17 2</td>
<td>21 2</td>
<td>18 2</td>
<td>5 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>25 24</td>
<td>42 23</td>
<td>20 25</td>
<td>35 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>19 47</td>
<td>7 47</td>
<td>16 47</td>
<td>35 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>34 2</td>
<td>19 3</td>
<td>45 3</td>
<td>20 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0 5</td>
<td>4 3</td>
<td>1 3</td>
<td>0 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N %</td>
<td>89 100</td>
<td>32,863</td>
<td>57 100</td>
<td>31,957</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: National Suicide Statistics extracted from National Police Agency Suicide Statistics 2008; *Asahi Shimbun* data from author’s content analysis.

As noted earlier, since this analysis is comparing percentage distribution between the national suicide statistics and *Asahi Shimbun* reporting, an under-reporting in one category necessarily produces an over-reporting in some other category. Two occupational categories stand out as being heavily over-reported while constituting very small percentages of all suicides nationally: students and those holding administrative posts.
*Asahi Shimbun* over-reported suicides by persons in administrative posts by about a factor of ten (meaning ten times their actual percentage) in each year except 2008 when it was only five times the actual percentage. Most of the suicides by this occupational group were related to political corruption and bribery scandals in *Asahi Shimbun*. Even more dramatic is the over-reporting of suicides by students. While suicides by students accounted for only 2 to 3 percent of all suicides in Japan, this category constituted a far higher percentage among all suicides reported in *Asahi Shimbun*: 30 percent of suicides in 1998; 19 percent in 2000; a staggering 45 percent in 2006; and 20 percent in 2008; Over 6 times the actual percentage in 2000 and 2008, and fifteen times the actual percentage in 1998 and 2006. This over-reporting of suicide by students correlates with the over-reporting of suicides by minors, since these are primarily the same cases coded on two different dimensions.

**Methods of Suicide**

Table 4.5 compares methods of suicide shown in national suicide statistics and the distribution of suicide methods reported in *Asahi Shimbun*. The most common method of suicide in Japan, which was used in 65-70 percent of all suicides during the four years examined, was hanging.
Table 4.5 Percent Distribution of Suicide Method in National Statistics and *Asahi Shimbun* Reports for Selected Years.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jump Off</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jump In</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>32,86</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>31,95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although hanging is also prominent in the reports in *Asahi Shimbun*, it was reported far less than its prevalence in the national suicide statistics. By contrast, *Asahi Shimbun* reported on suicides by gas in 2006 at twice the national percentage and 3.7 times the national percentage in 2008, when that method accounted for just over half of all suicides reported in *Asahi Shimbun*. What the table does not reveal is that subsumed in the general category of gas in the national suicide statistics were some very specific methods that were prominently reported in *Asahi Shimbun*. The use of carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulfide suddenly appeared and was reported prominently in *Asahi Shimbun* from 2006 to 2008, while neither is a commonly used suicide method in Japan. Table 4.5 shows that using gas of all types comprised only 14 percent of suicides in the national suicide statistics in 2006 and 2008, while the use of gas, including carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulfide, were over-reported in *Asahi Shimbun*. Carbon monoxide appeared in *Asahi Shimbun*’s coverage of suicide cases in
2006 and hydrogen sulfide suicide appeared in 2008. Each had roughly comparable percentage with the other commonly used method but slightly higher in percentage than drowning as they appeared in 10 to 11 percent of the total methods reported during the four years examined. Both suicide methods are not categorized as a recognized suicide method in the national suicide statistics even in the commonly used gas category (e.g. municipal gas) in itself, yet Asahi Shimbun covered and over-reported the two methods of carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulfide suicide, which exhibits one of the reporting practice where unique categories are over-reported.

At the same time, although the percentages were smaller, Asahi Shimbun also over-reported suicide methods of jumping off of high buildings or structures and jumping in front of moving trains. The latter is a relatively rare suicide method, accounting for only 2 percent of suicides in the national suicide statistics in each year except 2006, when it accounted for 8 percent of suicides nationally. By contrast, Asahi Shimbun over-reported this method at 5times the actual percentage in every year except 2006, when the actual rate was exceptionally high and Asahi Shimbun’s reporting of 24 percent of suicides by jumping in front of trains only constituted 3times the actual percentage.

**Reasons for Suicide**

Table 4.6 shows the percent distribution of reasons for suicide in the national statistics and in Asahi Shimbun. The most common reasons for suicide in Japan – health problems and economic distress – had a significantly lower percentage of reports in Asahi Shimbun. While it is understandable that there was not much
reporting on suicides for health reasons, the under-reporting of suicide by economic
distress should be given attention because of the claim that economic distressed
middle-aged men were the main reason for the increased suicide rate from 1998
onwards.

Table 4.6 Percent Distribution of Reasons for Suicide in National Statistics and Asahi
Shimbun Coverage for Selected Years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>32,863</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>31,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: National Suicide Statistics extracted from Police White Papers 2008; Asahi Shimbun
data from author’s content analysis.

As with the consistency of the over-reporting of students and minors in the
demographic categories of suicide, Asahi Shimun drastically over-reported school
issues as reasons for suicide. While only 1 percent of suicides were attributed to
school problems in the national suicide statistics, 13 to 38 percent of Asahi Shimbun
suicide reports cite the reason for suicide as school problems, and virtually all of these
over-reports concerned suicide involving bullying.

I have so far discovered the main characteristics of the Japanese mass media’s
reporting practices on suicide where unusual and unique categories of suicide are
highlighted and over-reported while usual and common categories are
underrepresented. Therefore, the question is: what sort of influence should such
reporting practices by the Japanese mass media have on the Japan society? By answering this question, I should be able to understand the Japanese mass media’s role in contemporary Japanese society.

I conducted an interview with suicide prevention hotline workers in Japan, to address the question. The answer provided by these volunteer worker addresses that the Japanese mass media does more than just over–reporting of certain categories of suicide, and have some amount of influence in terms of suicidal behaviors among people in Japanese society. When I asked the volunteer workers at the suicide prevention hotlines service (inochi no denwa), “Do you think the suicidal are affected by the Japanese mass media’s suicide news reports?” A volunteer worker said, “There was a caller who said s/he is thinking about committing hydrogen sulfide suicide. S/he said, “I know that this might disturb my neighbors. Do you think it is better to jump in front of a train?” When I asked the volunteer workers, “Do you recall any changes in the hotline callers after there were certain suicide reports made by the Japanese media? What particular kinds of changes do you remember?” One volunteer worker responded, “After the Akihabara incident, there was caller who said that “I understand the person who did it.” Another volunteer worker responded, “I think there is influence by the mass media. There are people who are influenced by the mass media. After those (i.e. Akihabara incident) news reports, the callers became emotionally unstable. News reports on incidents and accidents do influence the callers.”

The Akihabara incident took place on July 8th, 2008 when a 25 year old man ran over five pedestrians who were walking the on a street where vehicles were shut
out temporarily for pedestrians in Akihabara, Tokyo. He then stabbed twelve people who were also walking and those who jumped in to provide aid for the injured. Seven people were killed and 10 were injured in the incident. The 25 year old man said he committed the crime because he was tired of living, hated the world, and wanted to be executed by law enforcement for committing the crime. The man had been posting his isolated and alienated feelings on a website and had announced that he would commit the crime earlier. Although this case was primarily about his rampage and killing people, in the context of his suicide ideation to conduct “suicide by being executed by the police,” the suicidal could have been easily affected by the news reports.

The suicide hotline volunteer worker’s explanations reveal the consequence of the Japanese mass media’s reporting practice – distortion of the reality on suicide – and how they affect the suicidal behavior through their reporting practice. This discovery provides only some hints that there are Japanese mass media impacts on the Japanese society in terms of how they can formulate people’s beliefs and actions in contemporary Japan, although the information reported do not necessarily reveal the reality of suicide.
CHAPTER 5. THE MORAL PANIC OVER STUDENTS BULLY SUICIDE

Based on the findings on the Japanese mass media’s reporting practice on suicide and the possible consequential influence on suicidal behavior in Chapter 4, this chapter examines the mass media construction of suicide problems particularly in terms of moral panic. The interview with the suicide prevention hotline workers in Japan revealed some hints that there might Japanese mass media’s influence on the micro level, and these hints provide some reasons to consider that there is a macro level influence where a substantial body of people is influenced by the mass media reports – moral panic. One of the specific characteristics of Asahi Shimbun’s reporting practices was over-reporting of student bully suicide, while student bully suicide constituted only 2 percent of the national suicide statistics. As I was searching for anything that could explain the Japanese macro level consequence of the mass media’s over-reporting of student bully suicide, I discovered a series of student bully suicide cases that Asahi Shimbun heavily over-reported from 2006 to 2007. These student bully suicides were over-reported both in terms of high article counts and in terms of the density with which the stories appeared, as they were condensed within a short time period. I consider this situation as a moral panic fomented over student bully suicide because of the nature of the mass media reports and public responses which will be described in this chapter.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) write that the construction of moral panic is characterized by over-reporting practices of minor social problems and exaggeration of the seriousness of the problem by the stories that describe it (25). At the same time,
Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) characterize that there is a construction threatened social concern mostly in the form of hostility over the social problem and attitudes towards control over them while the social problem is created through disproportionate reports by the mass media, which appears suddenly and disappears in the form of volatility (31-8). In this study of moral panic over student bully suicide, I employ these characteristics of moral panic proposed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda. In particular, through analyzing *Asahi Shimbun’s* news reports, I look at what the public concern and attitudes towards control was in terms of the fundamental characteristic of that is central to the Japanese moral panic over student bully suicide. The articles on student bully suicide can be seen in Figure 5.1 below. These articles represent the total number of articles that were directly related to student bully suicide cases.
The number of articles reported during the moral panic over student bully suicide dramatically exceeded the average number of student bully suicide articles in Asahi Shimbun from October 2006 to December 2007. The total number of Asahi Shimbun articles related to student bully suicide in 2006 and 2007 was 393. Asahi Shimbun’s reports on student bully suicide per month were consistently low until September 2006, and then suddenly increased in October with a peak of 120 articles in October. Although the number of articles decreased in November there were still a larger number of articles compared to the usual level (0), which fluctuated until December 2007. The pattern of reports shown in Table 5.1 provides evidence that
there was a moral panic over student bully suicide because of the dramatic over-reports by *Asahi Shimbun* and the significant increase of reports within a short time period. The sudden significant rise and drop in the number of articles from the usual level reveals the disporportionality of moral panic over student bully suicide and how it was volatile. I will later come back to the analysis of public concern and their attitudes towards control of student bully suicide, but for now, the characteristics of shown in Figure 5.1 provide enough evidence that there was a mass media construction of moral panic over student bully suicide in contemporary Japan.

The construction of moral panic over student bully suicide came as a result of two student bully suicide cases which were reported in *Asahi Shimbun*. One occurred in Takigawa city of Hokkaido (Takigawa suicide) and the other occurred in Chikuzen town of Fukuoka (Chikuzen suicide). The Takigawa suicide involved a 6th grade female student, who hanged herself in her classroom on September 9, 2005, and the Chikuzen case involved an 8th grade male student who hanged himself in a storage house next to his home on October 11, 2006. Although the Takigawa suicide case took place in September 2005, one year prior to the Chikuzen suicide, both cases were reported at very same time in October 2006 and set the stage for moral panic over student bully suicide from October 2006 to December 2007. This was because the mass media began reporting on the underlying problem common to these two cases, which was the school and educational system’s *concealment of the existence of bullying among students*. The concealment by the school and educational system was the main problem or unacceptable conduct that the public objected to, and therefore
was the foundational element that constructed the moral panic. I used the term “unacceptable” because the Japanese public does not accept irresponsible conduct by people in society as Iga (1986) and West (2005) explains.

There were six student bully suicide that consisted the moral panic over this matter (Takigawa, Chikuzen, Gifu, Saitama, letters of suicide announcements and Kita-Kyushu principal suicide) which all exhibit the same central problem — concealment of the existence of bullying. The problem was central to the constructed public concern in the form of hostility, and attitudes towards control of it. At the same time, the mass media exhibited disproportionality in their reports through over-reporting, and a characteristic of volatility as the reports appeared suddenly and disappeared after a short while. I describe the six student bully suicides below and start from Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide which was the basic cases of the constructed moral panic over student bully suicide. At the same time, these series of student bully suicides entailed the characteristic of imitation suicide as they occurred one after another. Therefore, the nature of the mass media reports and public response during the moral panic over student bully suicide entail the foundational theory of Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) and Durkheim (1897).

The Takigawa and Chikuzen Suicides

The Takigawa board of education initially stated that there was no suicide notes found and that it was not able to clarify whether or not the female student was bullied. However, the board of education later stated that the student’s homeroom teacher found several letters in the student’s desk, but returned them to the student’s parents
without reading them (Asahi Shimbun Sept 11, 2005a and 2005b). During the following weeks, the facts of both the Takigawa and Chikuzen case were unfolded as both the Takigawa and Chikuzen board of education admitted that the students took their life because they were being bullied. The suicide note by the student who killed himself in the Chikuzen case was revealed which read, “I cannot live any more. Bullying is the reason,” indicating that his death was precipitated by bullying (Asahi Shimbun Oct 14, 2006).

The unacceptable conduct of not taking responsibility for the bullying problem in schools became the central problem in this case. When the public established a sense of threat and hostility towards the school and board of education for their conduct, the public responded by making 850 complaint phone calls and sending 1,000 emails to the board of education. Representative comments included, “It is strange that you did not admit that there was bullying,” and “You took too long to find out the facts” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 5, 2006). Minister Ibuki of the Japanese Ministry of Education’s criticized the school for not revealing the female student’s suicide note and instead hiding them (Asahi Shimbun Oct 5, 2006). In order to take responsibility for not being able to provide leadership at the time of the event, and for creating confusion and doubt among the citizens, the chair of the Takigawa board of education of resigned from his position (Asahi Shimbun Oct 15, 2006a). It was also revealed that the homeroom teacher in the Chikuzen suicide was engaged in the bullying and had said, “It is easy to tease him” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 16, 2006b). The male student had said before his suicide in the Chikuzen suicide had said, “I will kill myself” and his
classmates responded by pulling down his pants and saying, “It is a lie” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 15, 2006b). The students who bullied the male student explained that they “did it because the teacher was doing it” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 21, 2006). In later days, Asahi Shimbun included commentary from a reader, which said that the adults should discipline the children who bullied the student (Asahi Shimbun Oct 18, 2006a). Asahi Shimbun itself wrote an editorial that criticized the school and board of education for not fully investigating and hesitating to find out the exact reason for the student’s suicide (Asahi Shimbun Oct 18, 2006b).

After student bully suicide was constructed into a moral panic, both the Japanese and local government sent investigative teams to both Takigawa city and Chikuzen town. National and local level governmental meetings were held to discuss preventive methods and intervention means in bullying cases. This governmental involvement was a move to prevent student bully suicide from further occurring. At the same time, the Takigawa board of education pledged to prevent bully suicide from occurring in the future, as well as their promise to learn from this experience (Asahi Shimbun Oct 18, 2006c). The governmental and educational system’s involvements in controlling student bully suicide exhibited how the moral panic becomes controlled by the public at the ending as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) explained.

In addition to the public concern and attitudes towards control, there were insiders and outsiders involved in constructing the moral panic. As Joel Best (1990) frames, the outsiders are the external pressure group and the insiders are the internal pressure groups who participate in the construction of social problems, and the
outsider utilizes the mass media to report the problem, while the insiders have direct influence on the policymaking and mass media reports. In the case of Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide, the outsiders was the general public who held concern in the form of hostility towards the school and educational system’s irresponsible or unacceptable conduct for whom the mass media played an important role in establishing it as a major social problem. Second, the insiders were the school officials and educational authorities who were involved in policymaking to control the social problem who, in other words, became involved in cleaning up after their own conduct in the form of taking responsibility. In this context, both the insiders and outsiders functioned as pressure groups and contributed to the establishment of the central problem of the moral panic over student bully suicide – concealment of the existence of bullying.

Towards the end of the moral panic, *Asahi Shimbun* presented voices from readers, who encouraged students to move on from the disaster. One reader wrote, “I was bullied when I was young, but I did not commit suicide because I did not want to be defeated by those who bullied me” (*Asahi Shimbun* Oct 22, 2006a), while another stated, “Please give signs that you are bullied, consult a friend, call the city office help service” (*Asahi Shimbun* Oct 22, 2006b) and a third reader wrote, “Tell your parents that you are bullied, there is the suicide prevention hotline service and please do not commit suicide” (*Asahi Shimbun* Oct 22, 2006c). After these attitudes towards control of the irresponsible conduct by the school and educational system were created, the number of *Asahi Shimbun* reports on the Takigawa suicide suddenly declined which showed volatility of the reports as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) described as the
final characteristic of moral panic. The pattern of *Asahi Shimbun*’s reports of the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide is shown in Figures 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2 *Asahi Shimbun* Articles on the Takigawa and Chikuzen Suicide.

![Graph showing Takigawa and Chikuzen Bully Suicide](image)

Source: Author’s sample from *Asahi Shimbun Kikuzo II* database.

October marked the escalation of mass media reports of Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide when they emerged and when the school and board of education launched statements that concealed the facts of bullying, and when readers wrote a commentary criticizing the school and board of education. *Asahi Shimbun*’s reports peaked in October on both suicides when the local and national government became involved in controlling the social problem of student bully suicide. The reports dropped in November as the social problem became under social control as schools, educational
institutions and governments took action to prevent further bully suicides, and when the readers started to pay less attention.

The important characteristic of the moral panic over student bully suicide in the two student bully suicide cases was that it centered on the concealment by the school and educational system rather than student bully suicide itself. This characteristic suggests that a particular Japanese morality – responsibility – is concerned in moral panic over suicide in contemporary Japan. Therefore, moral panic in Japan is not only constructed through the Japanese mass media’s reporting practice as seen in Chapter 4, but the public’s judgment of what is moral and immoral regarding the central delinquency during the moral panic. There are two dimensions of the Japanese moral panic over suicide problems: 1) The mass media over-reports certain categories of suicide; 2) The public is involved in judging the immorality or unacceptable conduct that centers in the moral panic over the suicide category. The irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the school and educational system was the main problem that centered on the moral panic over student bully suicide. The characteristics of the problem of Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide were the central issue in the following four student bully suicide cases which are described below.

**Gifu and Saitama Suicide**

There were two student bully suicide cases that followed Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide – the Gifu and Saitama suicides. The appearance of the Gifu and Saitama suicides in *Asahi Shimbun*’s reports in October occurred when the moral panic over student bully suicide was at its peak, which exacerbated the moral panic
over student bully suicide. These two student bully suicide cases unfolded in the exact same manner as the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicide, as the school and educational system tried to conceal that the students who committed suicide were bullied.

On October 23, 2006, a female middle school student in Gifu prefecture committed suicide after being bullied by the members of her basketball club at school (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006a). The homeroom teacher found suicide notes that said, “I am bullied in my club at school” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006a). It was immediately revealed that the club mates either passed the basketball to the student from a very close distance or would not pass the ball to her at all during basketball games. However, similar to the other bully suicide cases, the school and board of education said that they were not able to confirm whether or not the student was being bullied, but would continue to investigate the case (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006a). At the same time, Asahi Shimbun reported that the suicide note also stated, “I am sorry that I disturbed you. You will now have the burdens off your shoulders” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006a). It was also found that the female student was often told by her classmates, “You are annoying” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006a). However, the school repeatedly said that “There might have been bullying but we cannot determine if this was the cause of the suicide at this point” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006a). The irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the school and educational authorities of trying to conceal the existence of bullying was also the main problem that centered on Gifu suicide which is part of the overall moral panic over student suicide in contemporary Japan.
The father of the Chikuzen suicide victim appeared in an interview and asked, “What is the country doing? “If they had tried to learn what was happening in schools, we could have prevented such a thing from happening” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006b). The parent of the student who committed suicide in Takigawa also appeared in an interview and said, “I cannot trust the school anymore” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006b). A parent whose son had committed suicide by bullying 12 years earlier said during an interview, “Children do not die easily and there might have been something happening in the club. The school expects that there was no bullying but they should investigate carefully” (Asahi Shimbun Oct 30, 2006b).

By incorporating the interview with the parent of the Chikuzen suicide victim in its coverage of the Gifu suicide, Asahi Shimbun connected the Gifu suicide with earlier two suicide cases and, in doing so, recycled information about the earlier cases and thereby heightened the public tension. On October 30, the school finally admitted that there was a great possibility that there is a relation between the student’s suicide and bullying based on questioning they conducted with the members of the basketball club (Asahi Shimbun November 1, 2006).

Then less than two weeks later, on November 12, 2006 a male middle school student in the city of Honjo in Saitama prefecture hung himself in the storage shed next to his house, but no suicide notes were found. The school counselor knew that the student was being bullying and tried to talk to the student about the problem. The student, however, rejected help by saying that he would talk to his parents instead. The student responded to a survey administered by the school and said that he was not
being bullied (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). The board of education and the school administration had decided to send the homeroom teacher to the student’s home because he was absent from school, only to find that it was already too late (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). The mother of the male student appeared in an interview and said, “I cannot think about anything right now. . .” and the father said, “I don’t want my child’s death wasted.” However, as in the previous student bully suicide cases, the school principal said, “We do not know if there was a relationship between the bullying and the male student’s suicide” making it appear as if the suicide was not a result of bullying (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006)

As a result of the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct, the board of education criticized the school for its tardy intervention in the case. The superintendent of the board of education criticized the school’s response as too slow and said, “I do not think that it was appropriate that the school did not respond immediately [to the student suicide]” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). At the same time, the superintendent of the board of education encouraged students in Saitama prefecture to consult adults if they were being bullied, and the mass media provided the phone number and service hours of the child human rights hotline in Saitama prefecture (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). The governor of Saitama prefecture made an unusual announcement and told the students, “Please do not kill yourself.” Around the time, the Saitama board of education decided to provide a survey to all students from elementary to middle school on whether or they were being bullied (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006) in order to prevent such cases from occurring in the future.
The Gifu and Saitama suicides emerged several weeks later than the outburst of moral panic over student bully suicide and unfolded in the same manner as the previous suicides and became one component of the overall moral panic. Although these two suicide cases were reported in small number (Gifu 33 and Saitama 8 articles) the general increase in coverage of both these cases from October to November 2006 was due to the detailed follow-up news reports that described how the female student was bullied by her club mates and how she suffered from the situation. The peak of *Asahi Shimbun* reports of the Saitama suicide came in November 2006 and the case unfolded and reports continued in December 2006 through January 2007 due to emerging follow-up reports.

The difference between the Saitama suicide and the earlier three suicides was that the school in the Saitama suicide admitted the existence of bullying but did not connect it to the student suicide, whereas the school system in the earlier cases did not admit the existence of bully itself. However, the lack of responsibility to connect the bullying to the student suicide became the major problem in the Saitama suicide, and as with the earlier case, the central problem of this case was measured by whether or not the delinquency entailed the morality of responsibility or not. One of the characteristics of the Gifu and Saitama suicide is that the public acted as an outsider group that pressured the mass media to report on the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the school who became pressured to resign for their position as the cases unfolded. It is expected in Japan that officials and authorities take responsibility for whatever failure they make by resign from their position that conferred social status.
or else they will be conceived by the Japanese public as irresponsible and will feel the
sense of failure and shame as Iga (1986) and West (2005) discusses. At the same time,
as these two subsequent cases appear as imitation suicides, which may have occurred
in reaction to the newspaper coverage of the outburst of Takigawa and Chikuzen
suicides in accordance to the characteristics on imitation suicide that Durkheim
(1897) explained. The letters of suicide announcement case described below shows
more detailed characteristics of the Japanese morality exhibited by the school and
educational system during the moral panic.

Letters of Suicide Announcement

The moral panic over student bully suicide took an unusual turn early in
November, after the extensive news coverage of the four suicides and official
responses to them had appeared as a major delinquency. The turn clearly exhibited the
school and educational system’s trying to act as if they are responsible in order not to
be conceived as irresponsible from the Japanese public and to avoid experiencing the
sense of failure and shame.

On November 7, 2006, a student sent a letter to the Japanese Ministry of
Education in which he announced that he would commit suicide because he was being
bullied at school (Asahi Shimbun Nov 7, 2006). The student wrote letters to the
Minister of Education, the local board of education, the school principal, his
homeroom teacher, his classmates, the parents of his classmates, and his parents
(Asahi Shimbun Nov 7, 2006). The letters questioned why his classmates were
bullying him, and why the school principal did not intervene, especially since his
parents reported to the school that he was being bullied (Asahi Shimbun Nov 7, 2006). The Japanese Ministry of Education took reaction by holding a press conference in which they said the chain reaction of bully suicide evident in the Saitama and Gifu suicides should be stopped. During the press conference the minister sent out a message to the student who sent the letter, which stated, “You have only one life. When you were born, your father and mother embraced your life. Please tell someone exactly how you are feeling. I want you to know that the world does not abandon you” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 7, 2006).

Because the letter was postmarked at a location name that included the word 豊 but the location could not be fully identified from the postmark, a major investigation was launched to identify the student, checking schools associated with all local post offices in Japan that included the word 豊 in their name (Asahi Shimbun Nov 7, 2006).

Aichi and Osaka prefectures conducted investigations into post offices that had the word 豊 in their names, while Ibaraki and Gunma prefectures, which had conducted an investigation earlier, reported that they did not find anything unusual. The Gifu prefecture board of education instructed schools in its prefecture to investigate if there were any students who are experiencing bullying. Schools in the Toyoshima district of Tokyo investigated to see if there were any unusual absences, and surveyed students to investigate whether any students were being bullied (Asahi Shimbun Nov 8, 2006). Tokyo made an announcement that workers at the board of education would accept phone calls 24 hours a day, as the letter announced that the suicide would take place on November 8. Sakai in Osaka sent messages to its schools
and students which encouraged them to not commit suicide, and the female students of Hiroshima Bunkyo Women’s University created and posted a poster that declared, “You are not alone. We want you to live” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 9, 2006).

Meanwhile, another letter that announced suicide was sent to the Japan Ministry of Education, which was postmarked Shibuya, so the ministry warned schools in Shibuya district to be aware of any event that might come up. The mass media reported the phone number and hours of service for the child human rights hotline service. Schools in the Toshima district of Tokyo announced that they would be at the schools for 24 hours on November 11 because this letter announced that the suicide would take place on this day. However, four more sets of letters that announced impending suicides were sent to the Japan Ministry of Education and also to a middle school in the city of Sapporo and to the town of Yagumo in Hokkaido.

Interviews with experts on education were reported in which arguments on the issue of bullying in schools were made rather than on the student suicide. There were commentaries on bullying, for example, an expert on education stated in an interview that “These [series of announcements] are good signs because they show that the children still trust the educational system. The Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides showed that the educational system was not functioning. This is a good chance to change the educational system if it is not functioning” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 11, 2006). An educational sociologist said, “Bully and suicide was a problem in the past but the schools had not learned anything from the past” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 12, 2006). At the same time, A psychological counselor said, “Telling the children not to be absent
from schools means to close the emergency door for them. Adults can get a paid leave, but children can only be absent when they are sick or if they are attending funerals” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 14, 2006a).

The Japan Ministry of Education reported that they received a letter, which might be a response from the male student who was the first one to send a letter that announced suicide to the minister. The superintendent of education of Gunma prefecture, who received a letter that announced suicide, said, “Do not kill yourself” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 14, 2006b). The chairman of the suicide prevention hotlines service (いのちの電話 inochi no denwa) in Hokkaido said, “I am concerned about the way the media reports suicide in relation to bullying. It is inconsiderate to connect suicide as a result of suffering from a certain situation, which should not be done” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 15, 2006). Meanwhile, another letter that announced suicide was sent to the Japan Minister of Education which was postmarked in Kumamoto prefecture.

Another set of letters that announced suicide were sent to the Japan Ministry of Education which were postmarked from Hitachinaka in Ibaraki prefecture and Ishimaki in Miyagi prefecture. The Ishimaki city board of education responded to this by saying, “Please consult about your problem.” At the time, five more sets of letters of that announced suicide were received by middle schools in Niigata, but the government of Niigata prefecture said later on that nothing unusual happened. One reader wrote to the editor of Asahi Shimbun, saying that “my mother used to say do not do things to others which you would not like them to do to you in return” (Asahi
Upon entering the year 2007, the Ministry of Education adopted a control and prevent attitude and said that they are thoroughly involved in preventing suicide and provided consultations and questionnaires to schools to prevent other cases from occurring in the future. The government of Kumamoto prefecture also said that they were committed to preventing suicide. The Tokyo board of education created a bully prevention booklet and distributed them to all teachers in Tokyo.

Based on the fact that this series of suicide announcements were sent to the schools and educational bearucratics, people became concerned with preventing bullying and investigating on the actual number of bullllying taking place concurrently. For example, the Itabashi district in Tokyo provided questionnaire sheets to parents to ask if there was any bullying taking place with their children and distributed an email address for bullying consultation to the elementary and middle-school students. Kumamoto prefecture also provided similar questionnaires to all public schools and Tokyo became involved in establishing an “emergency 110” service and “consultation letter mailboxes” in schools. At the same time, a questionnaire result showed that Saga prefecture found 214 bully cases in their schools, which was an eight fold increase over the previous year, and 581 students were found to be bullied in the city of Ishimaki, Miyagi. The government of Kumamoto prefecture said that 30,000 of its students were bullied.

Towards the end of 2006, fewer mass media reports were made on the suicide
announcements as the school and educational system moved towards preventing and controlling student bully suicide from occurring. This fact entails the end of the case as it became under social control by the public in the context of what Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) explained. More importantly, there were no possible follow-up incidents occurred and therefore the mass media did not have any further news reports to make on this case.
The similarity with the earlier four suicide cases with this suicide announcement case was that student suicide was not the central problem in the moral panic, and the problem was the school and educational system’s ways of acting to prevent student bully suicide. Unlike the previous student bully suicide cases, there were no student suicides involved in this case, and the central concern among the mass media and public in this case was the school and educational system’s extreme efforts in trying to eliminate bully suicides from actually taking place. This case exhibited how Japanese school and educational system act as if they are responsible in order to avoid taking actual responsibility if anything did happen, and to avoid experiencing the
sense of failure and shame as Iga (1986) and West (2005) proposed.

The Kita-Kyushu principal suicide case that was part of the moral panic over student bully suicide described in the next section, involved a school principal’s taking his life after concealing the existence of bullying in his school. This case exhibited the same central problem of the moral panic over student bully suicide – the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the school and educational system. This case entailed a dramatic outcome as the school principal committed suicide to take responsibility for his act, which also revealed the Japanese morality of responsibility in the moral panic over student bully suicide.

Kita-Kyushu School Principal Suicide

The Kita-Kyushu principal suicide case marked the ending of the moral panic over student bully suicide in contemporary Japan. More importantly, this case exhibited the Japanese sense of responsibility in the context of what Iga (1986) and West (2005) proposes, which is the basic characteristic of the moral panic over student bully suicide.

On November 12, 2006, an elementary school principal in Kita-Kyushu city in Fukuoka prefecture hung himself (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). He had been criticized for an irresponsible reaction he made to a bullying case that took place in his school, where a 6th grade female student was threatened with extortion by eight of her classmates for the sum of 20,000 yen (approximately $200) (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). His colleague at school said he became exhausted after the bullying was revealed to the public (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). The school principal had
explained to the city board of education that the bullying case was a mere money issue and nothing more important than that prior to the October 11 (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). At the same time, his explanation to the board of education was revealed unexpectedly to the public by the mass media and he was obliged to apologize to the public via the media for his act of trying to conceal bullying which became the central problem as with the earlier student bully suicide cases. The school principal’s colleagues explained that the principal was a man of responsibility and after he was obliged to provide explanations about the bullying case via the media, he blamed himself for trying to conceal the bullying case and took responsibility by taking his life (Asahi Shimbun Nov 14 2006).

Upon perceiving that the school principal committed suicide from blaming himself, an interview with an educational clinical psychologist said, “Do not blame the school or a particular individual. The parents and community should think together on what to do about the problem” (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006). Five school counselors were sent to take care of the student’s possible psychological issues as an outcome of the principal’s suicide (Asahi Shimbun Nov 13, 2006).

As the principal’s suicide took place in November 2006, this month showed the first and highest peak of Asahi Shimbun’s news reports. Although this case entailed only a couple of articles, the appearance during the height of the moral panic in the same context with other student bully suicide cases tells us that the central problem of this case echoed with the earlier cases as the principal tried to conceal the factual background of incidents of student bullying. By taking his life, he took responsibility
for the disaster he created which shows the Japanese morality where individuals are expected to rake responsibility by resigning from the position which confers social status although this case was exceptional and showed an extreme outcome.

**Summary of the Moral Panic over Student Bully Suicide 2006-2007**

The overall pattern of *Asahi Shimbun’s* reports of all student bully suicides and related cases during the moral panic over student bully suicide in contemporary Japan is shown in Figure 5.4 below.
Figure 5.4 *Asahi Shimbun* Articles on the Moral Panic Over Student Bully Suicide 2006-2007.

Figure 5.4 shows not only the rise and decline of the moral panic, but also the appearance and disappearance of mass media reports over student bully suicide during the moral panic over student bully suicide from 2006 to 2007. The Takigawa suicide marked the first peak of the overall scare over student bully suicide in October and November of 2006. In the same manner, the Chikuzen suicide marked the first peak in November 2006 and had smaller peaks whenever a follow-ups on the school’s reports on suicide came out. The highest peak among the four cases was marked by the case of suicide announcement letters, which had the most number of articles. Although the

Source: Author’s sample from *Asahi Shimbun Kikuzo II* database.
Gifu and Saitama suicides and the Kita-Kyushu principal suicide had lower numbers of articles published about them, they contributed to the overall over-reporting phenomenon and, therefore, the creation of moral panic over student bully suicide in 2006.

The Takigawa suicide emerged in September 2005 and there were few reports within this month; the reports on the Takigawa suicide stopped for about a year after only 3 articles were initially reported. In the meantime, the Chikuzen suicide emerged in October 2006. Although there was approximately a one year gap between the occurrence of the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides, they were constructed as a moral panic at the same time in early October as the factual background of the concealment of student bully suicide emerged. The irresponsible conduct by the educational system and school authorities acted as the triggering factor of the entire moral panic over student bully suicide in contemporary Japan.

During the rest of the year of 2006, the newspaper focused on news reports of both the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides: there were 54 articles on the Takigawa case and 117 articles on the Chikuzen case. Therefore, there were a total of 171 articles published within the time period from September to December of 2006. From the beginning of 2007 to mid-2007, there were no articles on the Takigawa suicide, while there were 185 articles on the Chikuzen suicide. Therefore, there were 235 articles reported on both the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides during the entire moral panic over student bully suicide from late 2006 to early 2007. However, regardless of the demise of societal interest in both the Takigawa and Chikuzen cases after its peak in
2006, mass media reports on student bully suicides were published from October 2006 to mid July of 2007, totaling 114 articles. This sustained interest was due to the emergence of the two subsequent cases of the Gifu and Saitama bully suicides, the suicide announcement letters, and the Kita-Kyushu school principal suicide.

As the Gifu suicide occurred at the very end of October 2006, this month’s later period was occupied with articles on the Gifu bully suicide; news reports continued to mid November until the case demised as the problem became under control and the next case occurred. The Gifu suicide was followed by the Saitama suicide and the suicide announcement letters case, as well as the Kita-Kyushu school principal suicide case. In addition to the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides, news articles from mid November of 2006 to mid 2007 centered on reports of these four later cases. However, these numbers are strictly limited to the direct mass media reports on the four cases themselves. The types of articles during the moral panic provide better understanding of the characteristics of moral panic over student bully suicide. Figure 5.5 below shows the types of articles that were reported during the time of moral panic.
Figure 5.5 *Asahi Shimbun’s* Types of Articles of the Moral Panic Over Student Bully Suicide 2006-2007.

Source: Author’s sample from *Asahi Shimbun Kikuzo II* database.

Figure 5.5 shows the sudden increase and decrease of reports from 2006 to 2007. In addition to the number of articles, the types of articles reported during the moral panic shows how the moral panic was constructed. In total, there were 1319 *Asahi Shimbun* articles during the moral panic over student bully suicide from 2006 to 2007. As the factual backgrounds of both the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides were revealed in October 2006, and the two subsequent suicide Gifu and Saitama cases, the letters announcing suicides and the Kita-Kyushu school principal case emerged, there
was also an increase in reports related to student bullying, particularly from October to December 2006 which reported on extension of child help hotlines, human rights hotlines and surveys conducted in schools for bully prevention.

There were a stunning 182 articles within the single month of October 2006, which included 40 letters from readers encouraging students not to take their lives and which criticized adults, schools and boards of education. This fact shows that the *Aashi Shimbun* presented reader voices in order to construct a moral panic at the very early stage of reporting on the suicides, and the paper accomplished this by publishing public fear over the Takigawa and Chikuzen suicides. In addition, there were total of 21 feature columns within the single month of November 2006, which was an unusual number compared to the other months, which entailed less than 3 columns a month. Such columns included *Asahi Shimbun*’s serial column titled, “Saving Children from Bullying” (子供を守る いじめから *kodomowo mamoru ijimekara*), which discussed bullying issues in the school and educational system. *Asahi Shimbun*’s feature columns were mostly reported in November 2006 because the mass media constructed moral panic at this time, and there was an escalation of public attention to the student bully suicide cases. There were very few editorials that *Asahi Shimbun* launched during the moral panic over student bully suicide, totaling only eight. These editorials mostly criticized the educational system and the schools’ irresponsible attitudes towards the student bully suicide cases.

There were a total of 109 letters from readers during the moral panic over student bully suicides, which was the second biggest category of articles following the
news articles. The letters from readers generally criticized the adults, schools and educational system at the beginning while encouraging students to refrain from committing suicide, and the tone changed to reconciliation during the final stage of the moral panic. Other than this, most of the 1319 general articles that Asahi Shimbun reported during the moral panic were either on schools’ and board of educations’ reactions in regional settings, or on information of institutions and hotline services that gave help for bullying and suicide ideation.

In summary, in addition to the very intensive news coverage of a small number of actual events, they first presented a lot of letters from the public expressing their concern, and then slightly later, they printed comments from experts who weighed on the problem. It is also interesting to note that the mass media did not publish a whole lot of editorials but relied on the letters from readers and columns by experts to convey the moral force. As the Japanese newspaper is widely asserted to be neutral in their reports (e.g. Shunichi Takekawa, 2008), what I categorized as Asahi Shimbun’s general news articles reported on how the student bully suicide were unfold, the school and educational system’s explanations and announcements, prefecture and district’s involvement in preventing student suicide and other facts about the cases, and did not project any criticism and critiques on what was actually taking place. However, by reporting the mere facts, the general news articles projected the central problem in the moral panic which conveyed the central moral problem in the student bully suicide cases to the readers. In other words, the neutrality of the mass media reports encouraged the construction of the central problem in the moral panic over
student bully suicide.

After the peak of *Asahi Shimbun*’s reports and its sensational tone during October 2007, the article numbers decreased, and the tones and contexts of reporting showed a meltdown which progressed to reconciliatory attitudes and prevention and control measures. Therefore, the entire moral panic over student bully suicide disappeared in correlation to the creation of the public attitude towards control of the problem that centered on the school and educational system’s concealment of the existence of bullying and lack in trying to connect student suicide with bullying.

The four characteristics framed by Goode and Be-Yehuda (1994) are clearly exhibited in the moral panic over student bully suicide: 1) the public concern over student bully suicide was constructed in the form of hostility towards the irresponsible and unacceptable conduct by the school and educational system. The conduct by the school and educational system was constructed as the major problem in the moral panic over student bully suicide which triggered the over-reports by the mass media; 2) the central public concern led to the school and educational authorities to resign from their position that conferred social status to take responsibility which exhibits how the public controlled the deviant behavior in the moral panic; 3) however, the over-reports which significantly exceeded the usual level was disproportionate as student bully suicide itself was a minor issue as it consists only 2 percent in the overall national suicide statistics; 4) the over-reports by the mass media appeared suddenly and disappeared after a short time period showing volatility of the mass media reports.
I summarize that the moral panic over student bully suicide that occurred in contemporary Japan from 2006 to 2007 centered on the moral problem of the school and educational system who tried to conceal of the existence of bullying, their reluctant attitude to connect the bullying and student suicide, and bullying issues in school and educational system. Therefore, the suicide problem in contemporary Japan is measured by the morality and action surrounding suicide rather than the single act of suicide itself. For the moral panic over student bully suicide, the student suicides was an one of the issues, but the mass media and public attention was given to the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct of the school and educational system whose actions lacked responsibility. At the same time, the moral panic over student bully suicide in Japan not only exhibited the central problem in student bully suicide, but also imitation suicide conducted by students which otherwise would not have occurred if there were no over-reports of student suicides, and contagion of suicide would not have occurred among students.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis examined contemporary Japanese mass media’s reporting practices of suicide, and how the Japanese mass media constructs suicide problem in contemporary Japan particularly in terms of moral panic. This study was conducted particularly to answer the three research questions: 1) Do the Japanese mass media articles objectively reflect the social phenomenon of suicide in contemporary Japan? 2) If the answer is no, how do the Japanese mass media distort the reality of suicide in Japan? 3) What is the central problem in the Japanese mass media construction of moral panic over suicide?

This thesis discovered that: 1) Asahi Shimbun reported novel suicide methods, suicide by minor age groups, suicide of unusual reasons and occupations which does not reflect the reality of suicide in contemporary Japan; 2) Asahi Shimbun particularly over-reported student bully suicide while this category consists only 2 percent in the national suicide statistics; 3) The central problem of the moral panic over student bully suicide in contemporary Japan was the irresponsible or unacceptable conduct by the school and educational system rather than the act of student suicide itself; 4) There was imitation suicide among students during the moral panic which was encouraged by the over-reports of student bully suicide by the Japanese mass media.

These four discoveries reveal first that suicide problems in contemporary Japan are constructed through the mass media’s over-reports of minor suicide categories in Japan such as student bully suicide. Secondly, the central characteristic of the mass media construction of suicide problem in student bully suicide and moral panic over
the category is measured by whether or not the major actors in the suicide problem complied with the social expectation of acting responsibly or not. If not, the irresponsible or unacceptable conducts by the actors become the central problem in the suicide problem and in the moral panic. Finally, the massive mass media over-reports and public responses encourage imitation suicide among people.

I conclude this thesis by proposing that the causation of mass media construction of suicide problems particularly in terms of moral panic in contemporary Japan might not rest on the mass media reporting practices, dynamics of the public responses, but might entail the Japanese mass media’s corporate campaigning and marketing strategies to produce readerships by constructing social problems because the mass media is a mere social corporate entity. Therefore, I recommend that further study on the Japanese mass media’s construction of suicide problem in terms of moral panic should include the corporate and economic aspect of the Japanese mass media’s reporting practices.
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