

Are Protest Suicides different? A LIWC Analysis of Korean Suicide Protest Notes and Non-Protest Suicide Notes

Introduction

South Korea consistently has the highest suicide rate among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

- From 1983 to 2022, the **suicide rates** for the working-class ages 18-64 **increased over the years**.
- Among the working class, protests have had a significant impact on the sociopolitical atmosphere even during the democratic transition in 1987.

During this time, the working class of South Korea faced horrible working conditions, leading to many committing **protest-related suicides**. Through **48 non-protest-related suicide notes (Buffalo collection)** and **32 Korean protest-related suicide notes (Korea collection)**, we aim to uncover and compare the psychological processes between the protest and non-protest notes.

Using Dr. Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, we aim to use the constructs of acquired capability for suicide, thwarted belongingness, hopelessness, and perceived burdensomeness to **uncover if the motivation for suicide is the same in protest and non-protest notes**.

Hypothesis

There will be significant linguistic or psychological differences between the groups. These findings can help support new methods of intervention for at-risk individuals and provide insight into less common methods of suicidal behavior.

LIWC Dictionary

Language Inquiry and Word Count

- Analyzes text to measure emotions, social, cognitive, and structural components

Uses for this study:

- Created a custom dictionary with words that capture the constructs of the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide
- Comparison of word frequencies in both sets of text

References



Results

Pronouns (“we” vs “I”):

The Korean group uses first-person plural pronouns like **“we”** (LL: 29.52, %DIFF: -84.29) and **“our”** (LL:28.63, %DIFF = -86.65) at a significantly higher rate than the Buffalo group. While Buffalo relies heavily on **“i”** and **“me”** (LL: 25.55)

Political Identity- Perceived Burdensomeness

High-significance words in the Korean sample include **“union”** (LL: 59.34), **“laborer”** (LL: 48.54), **“struggle”** (LL: 20.04), **“comrades”** (LL: 13.07) and **“regime”** (LL: 14.80).

Filial Piety and the “Moral Debt”

Words like **“son”** (LL: 21.80), **“parents”** (LL: 14.80), **“father”** (LL: 10.09), and **“mother”** (LL: 8.66) are statistically dominant in the Korean notes.

Acquired Capability (ACS) and Physicality

Significant markers include **“death”** (LL: 20.04), **“fire”** (LL: 16.54), and **“body”** (LL: 7.97).

Interpersonal Relationships

There is a heavy usage of **“you”** (LL: 79.28) and **“love”** (LL: 65.55, %DIFF = +8978.69).

Concrete Material Burdens (Economic PB)

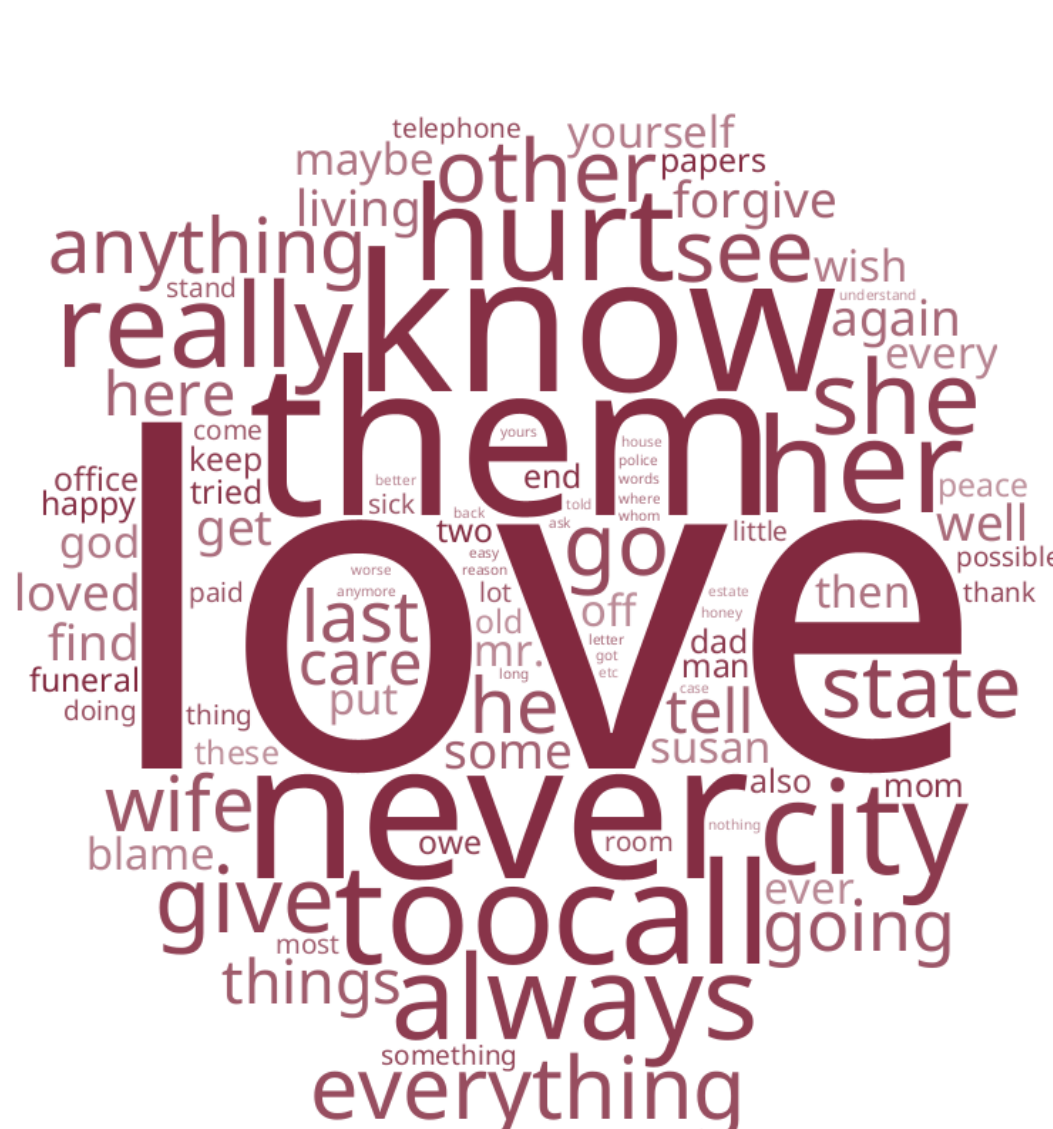
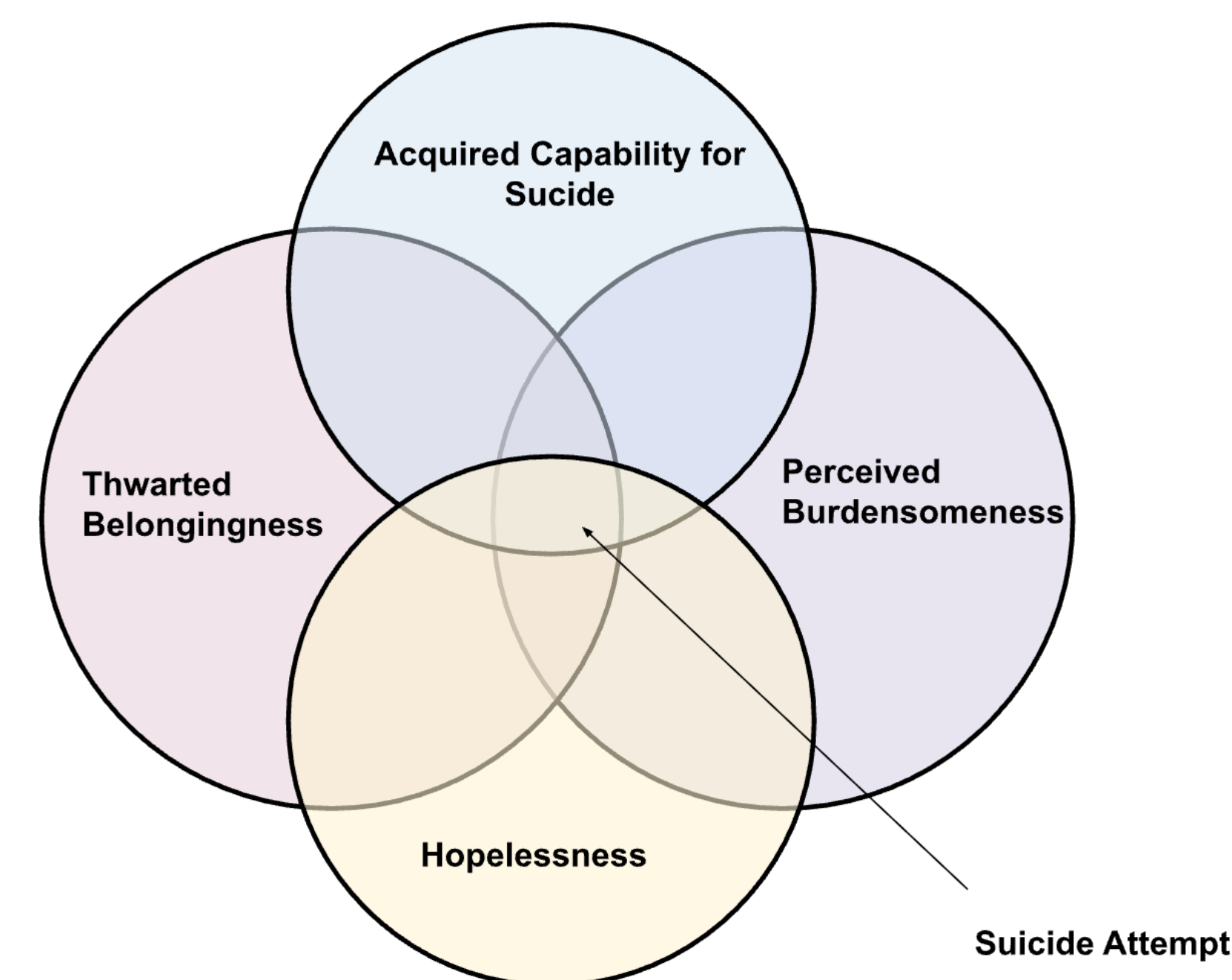
Buffalo notes feature words like **“bills,” “car,” “house,”** and **“home.”**

Direct Emotional Affect

High frequency of words like **“sorry,” “please,”** (LL: 5.16), **“forgive,”** (LL: 8.15), and **“hurt”** (LL: 18.65).

Summary Measures: 50% Threshold

The Korean notes were significantly more **Analytic** ($M = 60.2$ vs. 23.93 ; $d = -1.48$) and higher in **Clout** ($M = 56.1$ vs. 27.9 ; $d = -0.88$), whereas the Buffalo notes were more **Authentic** ($M = 68.6$ vs. 54.1 ; $d = 0.49$) and have a much higher emotional **Tone** ($M = 50.8$ vs. 16.1 ; $d = 1.07$).



Buffalo



Korea

Methods

Linguistic Analysis & Dictionary Development

- Thwarted Belongingness (TB)
- Perceived Burdensomeness (PB)
- Hopelessness (H)
- Acquired Capability for Suicide (ACS)

Validation & Reliability

Multistep Validation Process:

- Face & Construct validity**
 - Evaluated word stems against established IPTS definitions
- Contextualization**
 - Reviewed every word instance with LIWC Contextualizer feature

Internal Consistency

- Cronbach Alpha test on each construct aiming for reliability threshold ≥ 0.70

Statistical Framework: Analyzed overarching patterns between Korean and Buffalo suicide notes

- T-tests & Cohen's d:** Compared word frequencies of 1st and 2nd person

LIWC's statistical test

- Log-Likelihood:** Quantified the cultural and contextual shift between the two groups

Discussion

There is a linguistic and emotional difference between the Korea (protest-notes) and the Buffalo (non-protest notes)

Buffalo

- Authors see themselves as a burden to the world or to their personal relationships
- Their death or descriptions of their death were often more personal
- Family-centered language

Korea

- Wording suggests that the authors felt like they belonged to a greater cause
- Political oppression heavily implied
- Their death was used as a political tool to raise awareness

Limitations

- Human errors: may have occurred as we manually did word frequencies and contextualizing.
- Translation: The Korean texts are translated into English, so some nuances may have been lost in translation. Also, the Korean sample is primarily from protests back in 1980s, it may not reflect modern Korean suicidal ideation.

Future Direction

- Conduct more statistical tests to analyze the overarching patterns between protest (Korean) and non-protest (Buffalo) suicide notes, such as correlation tests, Fischer's z transformation, and binary logistic regression.