

SUICIDE and the MEDIA

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- Introduction & disclaimer!
- Owen Wilson
- Are Celebrities from Another World?
- The Newsworthy Pyramid
- Questions on the Media and Mental Health
- Reporting on Suicide: Kurt Cobain
- Conclusion and discussion



OWEN WILSON - “tow-haired, Tinsel town hunk...the distraught actor [was] found bloodied and dazed after overdosing on pills and slitting his wrists.”



Google Coverage....

- **Daily Mail:** Arms length: Wilson shows the scars on his left arm of his attempted suicide...
- **FOX News:** Both of Owen's wrists were slashed superficially and Owen had taken an overdose...
- **News.Com:** Owen Wilson slashed wrists, took pills; Suicide attempt may be due to split with Kate Hudson; Owen asks for time 'to heal'...
- **Defamer.com:** He slit his wrists. He almost did not make it.“ It was a dark period in Wilson life, and Rolex watches played a key role in helping Owen regain his bearings...



Celebrity Health Post

In this Celebrity Health Week post, we'll take a look at some celebrities who have either reportedly attempted suicide, or who have completed suicide. Please note that I am not an authority on celebrities and mental illness, nor am I an authority on celebrities who have committed suicide. For a celebrity to be on this list, he or she or a spouse or reliable family member must have publicly discussed - verbally or otherwise - his or her suicide attempt or completion, or, in the case of the deceased, professionals must have addressed it later on.



Celebrity Suicides

Halle Berry discussed her attempt at suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning with *Parade*.

Drew Carey discussed his depression and two suicide attempts - one at the age of 18 and another in his 20s - with Nancy O'Dell of *Access Hollywood*.

Gary Coleman disclosed two suicide attempts by sleeping pills in a 1993 *Geraldo* interview.

Billy Joel reportedly attempted suicide in the early 1970s.

John McCain reportedly attempted suicide during Vietnam.

Sinead O'Connor reportedly attempted suicide.

Yoko Ono reportedly attempted suicide in the 1960s.

Donna Summer singer, reportedly attempted suicide.

Owen Wilson reportedly attempted suicide in 2007.



How can someone with so much money and such good looks and so much talent possibly have the kind of problems that would make them take their own life?

If only I had their looks or talent or fame then I'd be happy....



1.

Conflict

**2. Accidents
& Disasters**

**3. Rich and
Famous**

4. Human Interest

5. New

6. Children and Animals

7. Locality

8. Oddball and Bizarre

SANE & Stigmawatch

“SANE StigmaWatch monitors media portrayals of mental illness and suicide, to ensure they are accurate and respectful. It takes the media to task when these topics are covered inaccurately or irresponsibly, and – through the ‘Good News’ area – congratulates them on good coverage.”



Kurt Cobain

“Cobain's body was found when an electrician visiting the house to install a security system went round the back of the house when no one answered the front door and peered through windows. He thought he saw a mannequin sprawled on the floor until he noticed a splotch of blood by Cobain's ear. When police broke down the door they found Cobain dead on the floor, a shotgun still pointed at his chin and on a nearby counter a suicide note written in red ink addressed to Love and the couple's then 19 month old daughter Frances Bean.”



Report on Cobain

“Cobain was rushed to hospital in a coma after an unsuccessful suicide bid in which he washed down about fifty prescription painkillers with champagne. The suicide bid was officially called an accident and was not even made known to close friends and associates. Several days later he returned to Seattle. Cobain's wife, friends and managers convinced Cobain, who was still in deep distress to enter a detox program in L.A. According to a missing person's report filed by his mother Cobain fled after only a few days of the program.”



Research on youth suicide 1994

This study examined the total rate of suicide in Australia for young people (aged 15–19 and 20–24 years) for the 30 day period after the announcement of Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994, comparing with the identical period for the previous five years and accounting for unequal variability in weekends, Mondays and public holidays. The 1994 rates for male suicides for both age groups were lower than for 1992 and 1993, and were more similar to the 1990 rates. Female rates showed a steady small decline over the five years, sustained in 1994. Rates overall showed a reduction in all of the first five, ten and fifteen day rates, compared with previous years. There was no evidence of any increase in deaths from gunshot, the method used by Cobain.

The conclusion appears to be that this celebrity suicide had little impact on suicide in young persons in Australia. Possible reasons for this are discussed. (Authors: MARTIN G.¹; KOO L.² Source: Archives of Suicide Research, Volume 3, Number 3, 1997 , pp. 187-198(12) Publisher: Springer)



Media Expectations

- 1. What should we expect or demand from the media when it comes to celebrity suicide and mental health?**
- 2. Should we expect coverage of famous people, whose live lives are lived vicariously through the public gaze, to be treated the same as 'ordinary' people?**
- 3. Are there circumstances whereby the rules and guidelines about reporting suicide and mental illness can be abandoned? Or...**
- 4. Are there situations and cases where we must acknowledge a double standard at play and use this to promote mental health and even help reduce suicide?**

