



The Last Pages of the Self

A Narrative and Phenomenological Case Study of Suicide Through Diary Entries

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Ethics Statement

This study involved the analysis of publicly available materials and biographical data. Ethical approval was not required as no human participants were involved and no confidential or private data were used.

Conflicts of interest:

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Abstract

Background: Suicide may be understood not only as a behavioral outcome or symptom expression, but also as a crisis in identity, meaning, temporality, and relational value. Personal writings can offer a rare, though ethically sensitive, window into how suicidal suffering is narrated over time.

Purpose: This article examines how suicidality was voiced across a longitudinal corpus of diary entries and suicide-proximal writings attributed to “Katie,” using the Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI) as a narrative and phenomenological framework.

Approach/Methods: A qualitative, single-case narrative-phenomenological design was used. Fifty-five published writings were analyzed through an interpretivist and constructivist stance. Coding combined open narrative-phenomenological reading with ENSI-informed analysis of identity layers, the Fractured Self Continuum, the Suicidal Pursuit of Goals, and Controls of Self-Deception. Reflexive memoing, code-to-quote matrices, negative case analysis, and peer debriefing supported analytic transparency.

Findings/Argument: Katie’s writings appeared to shift from self-correction, spiritual repair, and future-oriented striving toward narrowed time horizons, relational uncertainty, polarized self-appraisal, affective containment, and closure-oriented language. Across the corpus, anchors of purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety appeared less stable. Defensive patterns also seemed to shift from denial and projection toward splitting, repression, and reaction formation, suggesting movement from protective coherence toward reduced flexibility and closure.

Implications: ENSI offers a layered vocabulary for interpreting how suicidal meaning may become organized in language without claiming causation, universality, or diagnostic certainty. The study supports identity-and-meaning-informed approaches to suicide formulation that attend to temporality, relational value, defensive style, and narrative possibility.

Keywords: suicide; narrative identity; phenomenology; diary analysis; ENSI; meaning-making; qualitative case study; suicidal crisis

Introduction

Suicide represents one of the most profound disruptions of human continuity: a rupture of life, narrative, identity, and meaning. Although suicidology has been shaped primarily by diagnostic, epidemiological, and risk-based paradigms, a growing body of scholarship has called for closer attention to suicidality as a psychological, existential, relational, and narrative phenomenon (Baumeister, 1990; Shneidman, 1993; Galynker, 2023). This shift does not reject prediction, diagnosis, or risk assessment. Rather, it widens the field of inquiry toward the lived interiority of suicidal suffering: how suicide becomes imaginable, morally or emotionally organized, and sometimes experienced as increasingly inevitable within a destabilized sense of self.

This paper responds to that call through a phenomenological and narrative analysis of writings attributed to “Katie,” a young woman whose diaries and suicide-proximal texts were reproduced in a published volume that compiles and contextualizes her writings (Lester, 2014). The study does not claim to reconstruct Katie’s full life, explain her death in causal terms, or access her inner world with certainty. Instead, it treats the corpus as a publicly available longitudinal record through which changes in meaning, self-understanding, relational positioning, temporality, and emotional organization can be examined with interpretive caution.

The analysis is informed by the Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI), a narrative suicidology framework that conceptualizes suicidal suffering as unfolding across interrelated layers of selfhood: existential, social, narrative or cognitive, emotional, and primal. ENSI attends to how anchors such as purpose, belonging, self-worth, and felt safety may become less stable as a person’s life story narrows, fragments, or loses a livable future. Building on recent identity-informed analyses across literary, autobiographical, psychological autopsy, and suicide-note corpora (Gay, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d), the present study uses ENSI as a sensitizing framework rather than a deterministic explanatory model. Its purpose is to organize attention to how identity, time, and meaning are voiced across Katie’s writings.

The theoretical lens integrates existential psychology, narrative identity theory, phenomenology, and contemporary suicidology. Within this frame, Katie’s writings are approached as linguistic artifacts and situated expressions of lived experience. They make visible not only what is said, but how distress is narrated: through shifts in tone, audience, temporality, spiritual language, self-reference, moral reasoning, and patterns of closure. Her journals offer a rare first-person longitudinal corpus in which suicide-related meaning appears alongside self-criticism, spiritual bargaining, relational uncertainty, cognitive constriction, affective fluctuation, and changing forms of self-address. These textual patterns are interpreted cautiously, as possible indicators of an evolving identity crisis rather than as direct evidence of motive or cause.

Clinical and diagnostic models that emphasize psychiatric illness, neurobiological vulnerability, and psychosocial stressors have substantially advanced suicide risk identification and treatment planning (Turecki et al., 2019; World Health Organization, 2021). Yet these approaches may not fully capture how suicide is experienced within a person’s world: how suffering becomes storied, how the future becomes unavailable, how belonging is perceived as conditional or lost, and how death can come to appear as resolution within a narrowed field of meaning. Complementary approaches that center identity, meaning, narrative coherence, and the therapeutic relationship are therefore increasingly important in both theory and practice (Frankl, 1969/2018; Baumeister, 1991; Michel & Jobes, 2020; Galynker, 2023).

The contribution of this article is not to offer a universal model of suicide or a definitive interpretation of Katie’s death. Rather, it demonstrates how a longitudinal narrative corpus can be read for shifts in identity, temporality, relational meaning, and defensive organization over time. In doing so, the paper advances an identity-and-meaning-centered account of suicidality that may support more nuanced clinical formulation, more ethically attentive qualitative inquiry, and more precise language for describing how a life story may become increasingly difficult to inhabit.

Background: Understanding Suicide Through Personal Writings

For decades, suicide notes, diaries, and other personal writings have offered researchers, clinicians, and theorists a rare form of access to the subjective world of suicidal suffering. These texts do not provide transparent access to motive, nor can they reconstruct a life in full. However, they can preserve traces of how distress was narrated, organized, justified, resisted, or given meaning over time. When approached with methodological caution, such writings can illuminate shifts in self-perception, relational positioning, temporality, agency, and existential orientation that may otherwise remain inaccessible in clinical or epidemiological accounts (Shneidman, 1981; Leenaars, 1988; Heinrich et al., 2008).

Suicide notes have often been studied as final communications, but their significance extends beyond farewell or explanation. They can function as narrative artifacts in which the person addresses self, others, God, memory, guilt, shame, or a future imagined without them. Studies of suicide notes have identified patterns of cognitive constriction, perceived burdensomeness, relational rupture, moral reasoning, and existential distress, challenging accounts that treat suicide only as

impulsive, irrational, or reducible to psychiatric symptomatology (Michel et al., 2002; Van Orden et al., 2012). Some texts are organized, reflective, and morally reasoned; others are fragmented, contradictory, or marked by silence. These differences matter because form, not only content, may reveal how a person's world is narrowing.

Recent scholarship in narrative identity theory and phenomenological suicidology has therefore moved toward interpreting suicide-related writings not merely as symptoms of disorder, but as situated expressions of lived experience (McAdams, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2015; Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2024). From this perspective, suicidal texts can be read for how suffering becomes storied: how the self is positioned, how time is imagined, how relational value is appraised, and how death may come to appear as resolution within a constricted field of meaning. This approach aligns with emerging identity-informed analyses of literary, autobiographical, psychological autopsy, and suicide-note materials, which examine how suicidal suffering may become organized through disruptions in meaning, belonging, self-continuity, and future orientation (Gay, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d; Gay, 2026).

The present study extends this body of work by applying an identity-and-meaning lens to a rare longitudinal corpus: the published diaries and suicide-proximal writings attributed to “Katie” (Lester, 2014). Unlike brief final notes, Katie's writings provide a longer temporal record in which shifting goals, spiritual conflict, relational distress, bodily self-appraisal, and future-oriented language can be examined across time. This study does not treat the corpus as proof of why Katie died, nor does it claim to recover the totality of her life or social world. Rather, the analysis examines how suicidality appears to become thinkable within the language of one person's evolving self-story.

A longitudinal diary corpus is especially valuable because it allows attention to movement. The question is not only what appears in the final writings, but how patterns of meaning, temporality, self-reference, and relational address change across entries. This makes it possible to examine suicidality as a developing narrative and phenomenological trajectory rather than as a single event detached from context. The value of such an approach lies in its depth, not in statistical representativeness. It allows for a careful, situated reading of how identity, story, and suffering may intersect as a life becomes increasingly difficult to inhabit.

Suicide as Identity Disruption

A central insight in contemporary suicidology is that suicide may involve a profound disruption in the person's capacity to sustain a coherent, tolerable, and meaningful sense of self. Baumeister (1990, 1991) described suicide as an attempted escape from aversive self-awareness, particularly when the self becomes experienced as failed, burdensome, exposed, or unbearable. Shneidman (1993) similarly conceptualized suicide as a response to psychache, a form of psychological pain rooted in frustrated needs, including needs for meaning, belonging, autonomy, dignity, and self-worth. Existential accounts deepen this view by emphasizing the collapse of purpose, value, and one's felt place in the world (Yalom, 1980).

These perspectives are not opposed to clinical, psychiatric, or neurobiological accounts. Rather, they address a different level of explanation: the subjective organization of suffering. A person may experience symptoms, stressors, and vulnerabilities, but these are lived through a self that interprets, remembers, anticipates, and narrates. Suicide can therefore be examined not only as a behavioral outcome, but as a crisis in the person's relationship to self, others, time, body, and future.

Empirical and qualitative studies support the importance of this level of analysis. Research on suicide notes and diaries has identified emotional pain, cognitive constriction, detachment, diminished future orientation, and ruptures in personal meaning (Heinrich et al., 2008; Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2010). More recent work on suicidal crises has similarly emphasized narrowed cognitive focus, restricted possible futures, and destabilized narrative self-continuity (Galynker, 2023; Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2024). These findings suggest that suicidal states may involve not only the intensification of distress, but also a reorganization of identity in which ordinary sources of continuity, belonging, and possibility become harder to access.

Narrative Identity and the Suicidal Self

Narrative identity theory holds that people construct a sense of self by organizing remembered past, experienced present, and anticipated future into an internalized life story (McAdams, 2011). This story is not decorative. It helps a person maintain continuity, interpret suffering, imagine alternatives, and locate themselves within relationships and moral worlds. When narrative identity is disrupted by trauma, loss, shame, relational rupture, or repeated failure, the future may become difficult to imagine as open. In such conditions, a person may encounter something like narrative foreclosure: the felt sense that one's story has no viable continuation (Goldie, 2012).

Suicidality can be understood, in part, through this collapse of narrative possibility. The suicidal self may not simply want life to end; it may experience the available story of life as no longer inhabitable. The future may narrow, the self may become fixed in a single unbearable interpretation, and death may come to appear as the only remaining form of agency, relief, or coherence. This does not mean suicide is rational, inevitable, or fully explained by narrative. It means that suicidal suffering often has an internal logic that deserves careful interpretation.

Katie's writings can be read within this frame. The journals include future projections, religious reflections, self-corrections, bodily judgments, and ritualized forms of planning that change in tone and structure over time. The significance of these writings lies not only in their explicit content, but in their form: repetition, contradiction, shifting audience, moralized self-description, temporal narrowing, and changes in self-reference. These patterns are consistent with phenomenological accounts of altered temporal and relational self-experience in severe distress (Ratcliffe, 2015; de Haan, 2020) and with identity-focused analyses of suicidal texts across different forms of life writing (Gay, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d).

The Existential Network of Suicidal Identity

The Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI) is used in this study as a sensitizing framework for examining how suicidal suffering may be voiced across multiple layers of selfhood. ENSI does not claim to diagnose, predict, or causally explain suicide. Rather, it provides an interpretive vocabulary for describing how meaning, belonging, narrative coherence, affect regulation, and threat-oriented experience may become destabilized over time.

ENSI conceptualizes identity across five interconnected layers. The existential layer concerns meaning, purpose, value, and one's orientation toward life as worth continuing. The social layer involves belonging, relational worth, perceived burdensomeness, and the experience of being held in mind by others. The narrative or cognitive layer concerns the internal story that links past, present, and future into a coherent arc. The emotional layer reflects affect regulation, emotional tolerability, and the felt quality of experience. The primal layer concerns threat, escape, bodily urgency, and the organismic sense of whether continued life feels survivable.

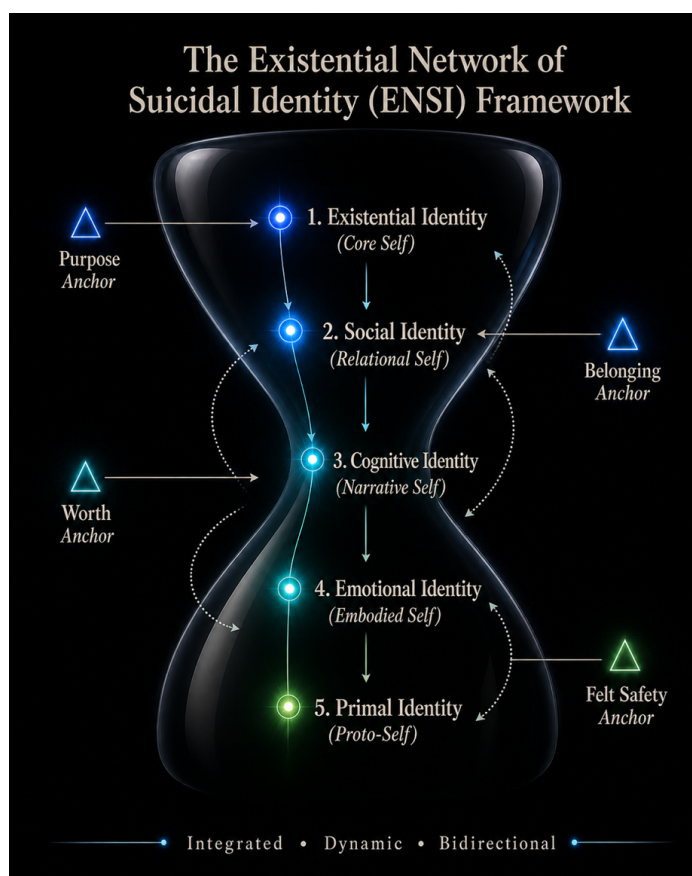
These layers are supported by identity anchors such as purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety. When these anchors become unstable, distress may spread across layers. For example, a loss of purpose may intensify relational shame; relational shame may narrow the future; a narrowed future may heighten bodily urgency; and bodily urgency may make escape feel increasingly compelling. ENSI therefore allows the analysis to attend to how different forms of suffering interact rather than treating them as isolated symptoms.

ENSI also incorporates three related constructs used to describe movement across a suicidal trajectory. The Fractured Self Continuum describes changes in identity organization, from disorientation to fragmentation, deconstruction, and confusion. The Suicidal Pursuit of Goals describes how the internal logic of action may tighten when ordinary pathways to relief, repair, or belonging feel unavailable. This movement begins with thwarted meaning, develops into relational burden, narrows through acute self-awareness and constriction, moves through ambivalence, and may culminate in a flight-through-fight position in which escape is appraised as the remaining act of agency. The Controls of Self-Deception describe defensive strategies that may initially preserve coherence and dignity, but later restrict emotional and narrative flexibility (Cramer, 2000).

In this manuscript, these constructs are used descriptively. A diary entry may be examined in terms of its dominant identity layer, its apparent position within a trajectory of goal constriction, and the defensive style that seems to shape how distress is expressed. This does not establish a fixed sequence or universal pathway. Instead, it supports a disciplined reading of how Katie's language changes over time and how those changes may relate to identity, meaning, time, and relational value.

Figure 1.

The Existential Network of Suicidal Identity Framework



As shown in **Figure 1**, ENSI organizes suicidal identity across five interrelated layers: existential, social, narrative or cognitive, emotional, and primal. These layers are supported by anchors of purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety. The figure provides a visual orientation to the framework used in this analysis, while the interpretation remains context-bound and specific to Katie's published writings.

Phenomenology, Temporality, and the Suicidal Mind

Phenomenology offers a way to describe how time, self, body, and world are experienced in suicidal states. Suicidal suffering often involves more than intense emotion. It may involve a changed relationship to reality itself: the future contracts, ordinary possibilities lose credibility, the body becomes a site of threat or disgust, and the self is experienced as trapped inside a life that no longer feels livable. Shneidman (1993) described this narrowing as temporal parochialism, while phenomenological accounts of depression and suicidality have emphasized disruptions in time, agency, embodiment, and interpersonal attunement (Ratcliffe, 2015).

Katie's journals can be read through this temporal and phenomenological lens. Early entries appear more future-oriented and concerned with repair, change, or self-improvement. Across the corpus, the writing appears to become more ritualized, self-critical, morally charged, and temporally compressed. Spiritual longing, bodily shame, relational uncertainty, and logistical closure increasingly appear in proximity. Form changes alongside content: sentences shorten, metaphors become more fixed, imagined audiences shift, and the future is increasingly organized around near-term thresholds. These patterns are consistent with descriptions of temporal narrowing, linguistic constriction, and narrative closure in suicidal states, though they remain interpretive rather than definitive claims (Shneidman, 1993; Ratcliffe, 2015; Galynker, 2023; Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2024).

Purpose and Research Aims

The purpose of this study is to examine how suicidality is constructed in language and experience across time through disruptions in identity, meaning, temporality, and relational value. Grounded in ENSI, the analysis treats Katie's writings as situated expressions of meaning-making rather than as evidence of fixed causes. The goal is to describe how suicide may have become increasingly thinkable within a changing identity system that struggled to sustain coherence, connection, and a livable future.

Katie's journals and notes are approached as narrative and existential texts that make audible shifts in purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety. Read longitudinally, they provide an opportunity to examine how changes across existential, social, narrative or cognitive, emotional, and primal dimensions may be voiced through form, tone, audience, moral language, and temporal scope.

The study has four aims. First, it applies ENSI to map where Katie's writings appear to emphasize particular identity layers and anchors. Second, it conducts a narrative and temporal-linguistic analysis of indicators such as goal constriction, ambivalence, moral reasoning, audience shifts, and changes in narrative structure. Third, it examines how disrupted anchors, phase-typical defenses, and relational meanings may interact as suicide becomes framed as relief, resolution, or escape. Fourth, it contributes to contemporary suicidology by advancing an identity-and-meaning-centered account that may support prevention approaches focused on widening time, restoring belonging, and rebuilding narrative possibility.

In sum, this study positions suicide in this corpus as a narrative and existential endpoint within one person's published writings rather than as a singular event detached from context. ENSI provides a layered and temporally sensitive map for describing that trajectory, while preserving the limits of posthumous, single-case interpretation.

Methodology

Philosophical stance and design

This study adopts an interpretivist and constructivist stance, using hermeneutic phenomenology to examine how suicidality is lived, narrated, and articulated in language (van Manen, 1990; Ratcliffe, 2015). Narrative identity theory provides a complementary lens for understanding how persons configure remembered past, experienced present, and anticipated future into a workable story of self (McAdams, 2011). Within this stance, texts are not treated as neutral containers of fact or transparent records of motive. They are approached as situated expressions of experience, shaped by memory, audience, social context, emotional state, and the limits of what language can hold.

The design is a qualitative, single-case narrative-phenomenological study guided by the Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI). ENSI is used as a sensitizing and organizing framework for examining identity processes across existential, social, narrative or cognitive, emotional, and primal layers of selfhood, and for tracing temporal patterns that may be voiced in suicidal language (Gay, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d). The study does not claim to establish causality, diagnose Katie retrospectively, or reconstruct the full truth of her inner life. Rather, it offers a disciplined interpretive reading of a published longitudinal corpus, asking how meaning, belonging, temporality, self-appraisal, and agency appear to shift across the writings.

The term Findings is used rather than Results, consistent with qualitative conventions and the interpretive aims of the study.

Data provenance, access, and contextual limits

The corpus comprises 55 writings attributed to "Katie," including diary entries and suicide-proximal notes spanning multiple years and culminating in the period before her death. The materials analyzed here were obtained from a published volume that compiles and contextualizes Katie's writings (Lester, 2014). Because the study draws exclusively on an existing published source, there was no contact with living participants, no recruitment, no interviews, and no new data collection.

An inventory was created to document each item, including title or first line, page reference in Lester (2014), available dates or internal temporal markers, textual form, and any redactions or generalizations required for privacy. Inclusion criteria were first-person writings attributed to Katie that addressed identity, meaning, relationships, temporality, morality, spirituality, embodiment, or suicidality. Exclusion criteria were duplicate entries, third-party commentary, editorial summaries, or externally authored contextual material. Where dates were ambiguous, relative temporal cues within adjacent entries were used to sequence materials conservatively.

The analysis is limited by the contextual information available in the published source. Katie is treated here as a socially situated person, not as an abstract case. However, the study does not infer identity categories, cultural background, class position, sexuality, family dynamics, or religious meaning beyond what is available in the source material or visible in the writings themselves. Where spiritual, familial, gendered, relational, or cultural meanings appear, they are interpreted cautiously as situated features of this corpus rather than universal markers of suicidality. This limitation is central to the

design: the study can examine how Katie's writings organize meaning, identity, and time, but it cannot fully reconstruct the social world in which those meanings were formed.

Ethics, permissions, and protections

This study analyzes publicly available materials reproduced in a published source that compiles and contextualizes Katie's writings (Lester, 2014). In accordance with institutional guidance on publicly available data, the study did not require research ethics board review or consent procedures because no living participants were recruited or contacted and no new private information was elicited.

Formal exemption from review does not remove ethical responsibility. Posthumous suicide-related writings occupy a morally sensitive space: they are publicly accessible, yet they originated as private expressions of suffering. The ethical justification for using these materials therefore rests not on public availability alone, but on proportionality, necessity, and dignity-preserving representation. The scholarly purpose of the analysis is to examine how identity, meaning, temporality, and relational value may be voiced across time in a rare longitudinal corpus. Excerpts are used only where they are necessary to support an analytic claim, and the study avoids sensationalism, voyeurism, method detail, or any presentation that would treat Katie's death as spectacle.

The following principles informed design and reporting.

Respect for persons and narrative dignity

The pseudonym "Katie" is maintained for continuity with the cited source while preserving anonymization. Potentially identifying details are removed or generalized. Quotations are brief, non-graphic, and contextualized. The purpose is to render patterns of meaning intelligible without exploiting private suffering or reducing Katie to the circumstances of her death.

Minimizing harm and contagion sensitivity

Reporting avoids explicit method details, instructional content, romanticized language, and any framing that presents suicide as inevitable, admirable, or narratively complete. Suicide is discussed as a complex crisis of meaning, identity, suffering, and perceived possibility rather than as a solution. Where a direct quotation is not necessary, paraphrase is used to reduce risk and protect dignity, consistent with suicide-specific guidance for responsible communication (World Health Organization, 2021).

Proportionality and necessity

The quote-to-claim ratio was deliberately conservative. Excerpts are included only when they demonstrate a specific analytic feature, such as temporal narrowing, audience shift, moralized self-appraisal, or changes in identity language. The analysis therefore aims to provide sufficient evidentiary grounding without reproducing more of Katie's private writing than the argument requires.

Transparency and accountability

The manuscript states the provenance of the data, the limits of the corpus, the interpretive role of the author, and the posthumous nature of the analysis. Claims are framed as tentative, context-bound, and open to alternative readings. An audit trail documents inclusion decisions, codebook revisions, redaction choices, memo development, and changes in interpretation.

Cultural, spiritual, and relational sensitivity

Spiritual, familial, moral, and relational language is treated as situated rather than universal. The analysis does not presume that religious or moral language carries the same meaning across persons or communities. Where such language appears, the interpretation remains anchored to the immediate textual context and is framed as one plausible reading among others.

Together, these commitments align with qualitative ethics, suicide-specific reporting principles, and the interpretivist stance of the study, balancing scholarly value with protection of dignity and prevention of harm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2000; Shneidman, 1993; World Health Organization, 2021).

Author reflexivity and positioning

The author's clinical and scholarly work centers on narrative suicidology, suicide risk formulation, and identity-based approaches to understanding suicidal suffering. This position shaped the analytic attention given to meaning, temporality, relational value, self-continuity, and shifts in language. It also created a risk of over-recognizing patterns consistent with ENSI or under-attending to meanings that may be more visible from other cultural, gendered, spiritual, familial, or social positions.

The author's standpoint is therefore not treated as neutral. The analysis was conducted by a single coder whose professional location in nursing, clinical suicide-related care, and narrative suicidology informed the questions asked of the text. Where the author elects to disclose specific social-location descriptors, they may be included here to further clarify how race, gender, sexuality, culture, class, religion, or professional authority may shape interpretation. At minimum, this study acknowledges that Katie's writings are being interpreted from outside her lived world and without access to direct clarification from Katie, her family, clinicians, or community.

To support reflexive accountability, a reflexive journal was maintained throughout analysis. Memos documented expectations brought to the corpus, emotional responses to the material, shifts in interpretation, possible rival readings, and moments where the ENSI framework risked becoming too directive. Prompts included: What am I expecting to find? What features of the text resist the framework? What meanings might I be missing because of my own position? What alternative explanation would a reader from a different social or cultural location reasonably offer?

Periodic peer debriefing with a suicidology colleague was used to stress-test code boundaries, challenge early inferences, and identify places where claims required softer language or additional evidentiary support. This reflexive practice aims for disciplined transparency rather than neutrality, consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology and reflexive thematic analysis principles (van Manen, 1990; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019).

Data preparation and transcription

Because the writings were reproduced in print, all included items were transcribed into an analysis corpus. Orthography, punctuation, emphases, line breaks, and unusual phrasing were preserved where possible because form was analytically relevant. Transcription was cross-checked against the published source (Lester, 2014). A separate column was used to flag potentially identifying details, sensitive content, or passages requiring paraphrase or generalization for ethical reporting.

The prepared corpus included fields for item number, title or first line, source page, available date, inferred temporal position, textual form, preliminary notes, potential identifiers, and analytic memos. This structure allowed the writings to be read both individually and longitudinally.

Analytic framework and codebook development

ENSI organized the analysis at two levels. First, entries were coded for identity-layer emphasis: existential, social, narrative or cognitive, emotional, and primal. The existential layer concerned meaning, purpose, moral orientation, and reasons for continuing. The social layer concerned belonging, relational value, perceived burdensomeness, attachment, and being held in mind by others. The narrative or cognitive layer concerned coherence, autobiographical structure, future orientation, agency, and constriction. The emotional layer concerned affect regulation, emotional tolerability, shame, numbness, and embodied distress. The primal layer concerned threat, escape, bodily urgency, and survival-oriented language.

Second, entries were read for trajectory constructs within ENSI: the Fractured Self Continuum, the Suicidal Pursuit of Goals, and the paired Controls of Self-Deception. The Fractured Self Continuum was used to describe shifts from disorientation to fragmentation, deconstruction, and confusion. The Suicidal Pursuit of Goals was used to examine how goal logic may tighten across thwarted meaning, relational burden, constriction and acute self-awareness, ambivalence, and flight through fight. The Controls of Self-Deception were used to describe defensive styles that may protect coherence while also narrowing possibility. These included denial, projection, splitting, repression, and reaction formation.

The term self-deception is used theoretically rather than morally. It does not imply intentional dishonesty or blame. It refers to patterned ways of preserving coherence, dignity, or emotional tolerability when experience becomes difficult to integrate.

The initial codebook combined theory-driven ENSI categories with inductive subcodes specific to this corpus. These included ritualized control, spiritual bargaining, moral debt, bodily judgment, audience drift, short-horizon future projection, third-person self-reference, calm-with-closure tone, and serene finality. Code definitions included inclusion

criteria, exclusion criteria, anchor examples, links to exemplar passages, and notes on possible rival interpretations. The codebook was versioned and iteratively refined during analysis.

Coding procedures

Coding proceeded in three cycles.

First, an open narrative-phenomenological reading was conducted. Entries were read for metaphor, tense, temporal markers, person shifts, audience address, tonal movement, repetition, contradiction, and changes in self-positioning across time (McAdams, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2015). This cycle prioritized what the text appeared to be doing before assigning it to ENSI categories.

Second, theory-informed coding applied ENSI identity layers and trajectory constructs while allowing inductive subcodes to emerge. Particular attention was given to markers of constriction, ambivalence, moral reasoning, spiritual language, relational positioning, and phase-typical defenses. Coding remained flexible, and entries could receive multiple codes where layers overlapped.

Third, temporal synthesis aligned entries along an inferred sequence to examine changes in future horizon, identity anchors, audience, self-reference, and goal logic over time. The analysis focused less on isolated statements and more on movement across the corpus: how particular forms of language appeared, disappeared, intensified, or clustered near later entries.

Coding and memoing were supplemented by code-to-quote matrices exported to spreadsheets for auditability. These matrices linked claims to excerpts, codes, temporal position, analytic memos, and possible alternative readings. Single-coder analysis was balanced through peer debriefing focused on ambiguous segments, overextended claims, and points where the framework might be imposing coherence onto the data. Where interpretation remained uncertain, the manuscript uses calibrated modal language such as “may suggest,” “appears consistent with,” “can be read as,” or “is compatible with.”

Trustworthiness and quality criteria

Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the corpus, repeated reading, reflexive memoing, negative case analysis, and systematic attention to disconfirming or framework-resistant segments. Dependability was supported through a versioned codebook, documented coding decisions, and an audit trail of changes in interpretation. Confirmability was strengthened through code-to-quote matrices, analytic memos, and peer debriefing. Transferability is offered through thick description of textual indicators so readers can assess whether the analytic patterns resonate in comparable contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2000).

Member checking was not feasible because the study is posthumous and based on a published corpus. Inter-coder reliability metrics were not pursued because the study is grounded in reflexive, interpretivist analysis rather than a positivist coding paradigm. This choice does not remove the need for accountability; rather, accountability is pursued through transparency, reflexivity, auditability, and careful linkage between textual evidence and interpretive claims (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The aim of the study is analytic depth and theoretical transferability rather than representativeness. Readers are therefore invited to judge the quality of the analysis by the coherence of the interpretive process, the fit between excerpts and claims, the visibility of limits, and the usefulness of the framework for understanding comparable narrative materials.

Analytic calibration and limits

The analysis treats Katie’s writings as situated expressions rather than universal indicators of suicidal experience. Sociocultural, spiritual, familial, gendered, and relational contexts are considered only where visible in the text or described in the published source. Because no collateral interviews, clinical records, or family accounts were used, interpretations cannot be clinically verified. They remain textual, theoretical, and context-bound.

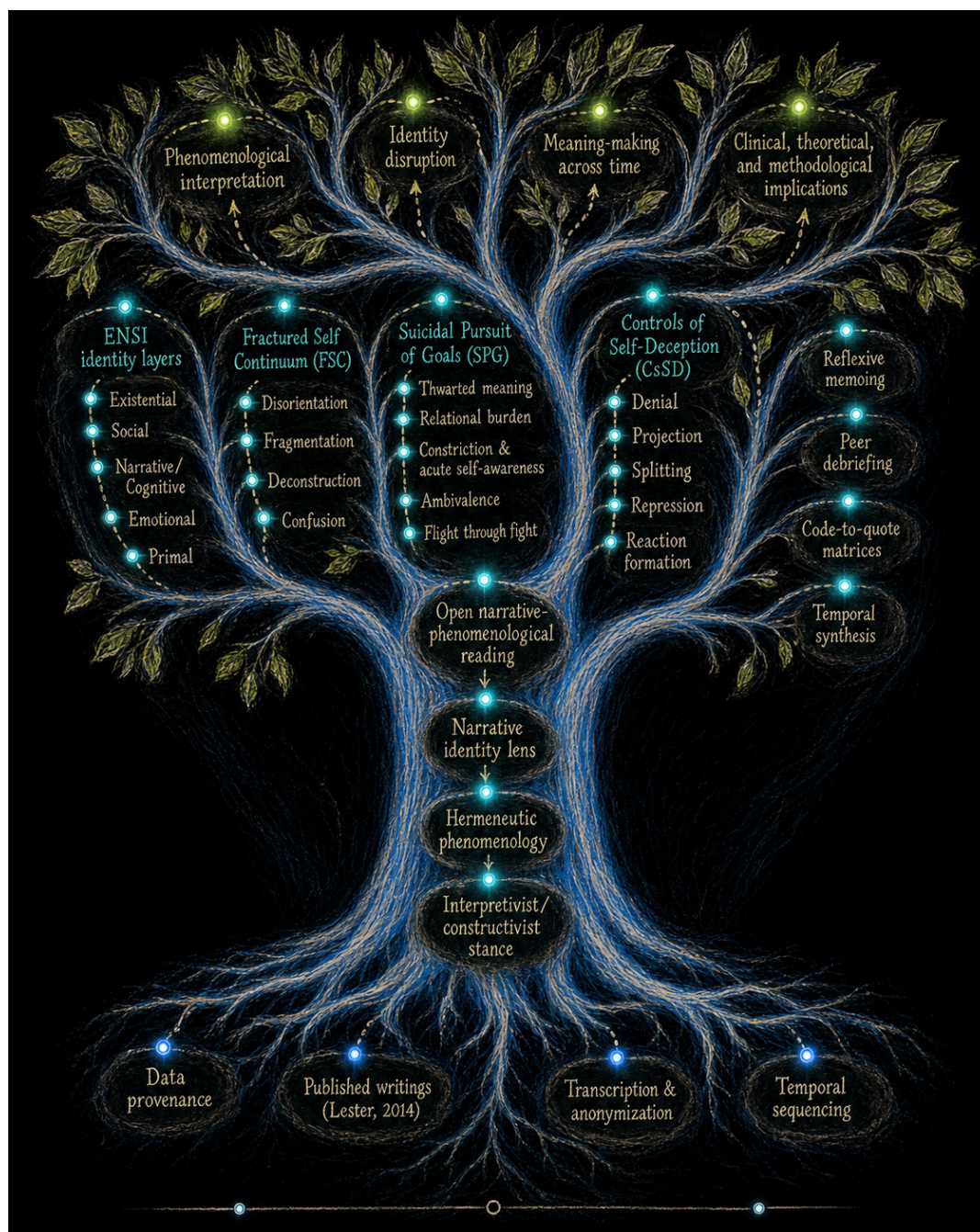
To avoid overreach, categorical verbs such as “proves,” “reveals,” or “demonstrates” are avoided in favor of qualified expressions such as “suggests,” “may indicate,” “can be read as,” and “appears consistent with.” This is especially important for constructs such as narrative foreclosure, defensive organization, temporal collapse, and identity disruption, all of which can admit multiple plausible readings (Goldie, 2012; Ratcliffe, 2015).

Figure 2. outlines the qualitative and narrative-phenomenological methodology used to analyze Katie’s published writings through the Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI). The process begins with data provenance,

transcription, anonymization, and temporal sequencing. It then moves through open narrative-phenomenological reading, ENSI-informed coding, code-to-quote matrix development, reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, and temporal synthesis. The analytic framework integrates ENSI identity layers, the Fractured Self Continuum, the Suicidal Pursuit of Goals, and the Controls of Self-Deception. These tools are used descriptively to support a context-bound interpretation of identity disruption, goal constriction, and meaning-making across time. The final stage identifies theoretical, methodological, and practice implications while preserving the limits of posthumous, single-case interpretation.

Figure 2

Methodological Framework for Analyzing Suicidality Through the ENSI Model



Synthesis

This section presents a narrative synthesis of Katie's journals and suicide-proximal writings, organized by the five phases of the Suicidal Pursuit of Goals (SPG). The analysis examines how identity-layer signals appear across the Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI): existential, social, narrative or cognitive, emotional, and primal. Each phase is also read alongside the Fractured Self Continuum (FSC) and the Controls of Self-Deception (CsSD), which are used here as descriptive concepts rather than fixed diagnostic categories.

Because this is a posthumous, single-case, text-based analysis, the findings are presented as situated interpretations of a published corpus rather than definitive claims about Katie's motives, intentions, or inner life. The phase structure is used to organize patterns visible in the writings, not to imply a universal sequence or causal pathway. Where the text admits multiple readings, claims are framed with qualified language.

Phase 1: Thwarted meaning

FSC stage: Disorientation

Common CsSD pattern: Denial

Early entries are generally future-facing and oriented toward self-improvement, control, spiritual repair, and imagined transformation. Katie's writing often holds to the possibility of becoming different, better, stronger, or more acceptable. At the same time, the entries suggest instability in purpose and self-definition. A line such as "I don't know who I am right now" can be read as an early marker of existential disorientation: the self is still narrating a future, but the basis for that future appears uncertain.

Within the existential layer, purpose and value appear fragile rather than absent. Katie continues to seek meaning, but the search often takes a corrective or redemptive form. Socially, the entries suggest a felt uncertainty about being understood or securely held by others. This may reflect emerging concerns about conditional belonging or relational value, although such interpretations remain limited by the absence of collateral context. Narratively, the writing remains mostly linear, but repeated goal revision suggests difficulty sustaining a stable forward path. Emotionally, distress is often managed through rules, discipline, routine, and moralized self-regulation. The body is not yet primarily represented as a site of acute threat; it appears more often as something to be corrected, disciplined, or brought under control.

This pattern is compatible with SPG's phase of thwarted meaning. Denial, understood here not as deception or lying but as a defensive minimization of painful complexity, may function protectively. It allows Katie to preserve agency and hope by holding to the possibility of imminent transformation, even while deeper identity uncertainty becomes more audible.

Phase 2: Relational burden

FSC stage: Fragmentation

Common CsSD pattern: Projection

As the writings progress, relational meaning becomes more unstable. Katie's entries appear increasingly organized around questions of noticeability, value, blame, and whether her presence matters to others. Statements wondering whether anyone would notice her absence, alongside self-blaming passages, suggest that the social layer becomes a more prominent site of distress.

Existentially, language of brokenness or spiritual rupture may indicate a deepening moral and spiritual struggle. The self is not only distressed but appraised as damaged, insufficient, or difficult to redeem. Socially, the writings seem to move between longing for recognition and anticipating judgment. Narratively, hopeful repair and disappearance-oriented language appear close together, creating a fractured structure in which incompatible futures coexist. Emotionally, the tone sometimes becomes more distanced, and third-person self-reference begins to appear as a possible marker of self-alienation. The primal layer remains less explicit, although bodily shame and disgust become more visible.

Projection, in this context, refers to the movement of intolerable blame, shame, or disappointment between self and others. Katie's writings sometimes locate pain in perceived failures of others to care or understand, while elsewhere returning that failure to the self. This oscillation may protect dignity in moments of relational strain, but it may also intensify isolation when neither self nor others can be experienced as reliably safe.

Phase 3: Constriction and acute self-awareness

FSC stage: Deconstruction

Common CsSD pattern: Splitting

In this phase, changes in form become especially important. The writings show shorter phrases, repetition, looping themes, and increasingly narrowed concerns around shame, purification, escape, peace, and change. The existential layer appears less able to support an open future. Purpose, worth, and spiritual reciprocity seem harder to access. Spiritual language remains present, but it often appears alongside self-condemnation or a search for purification.

The social layer also changes. Address becomes less clearly directed toward specific others and, at times, seems to shift toward an abstract or generalized “you.” This may suggest a weakening of concrete relational anchoring, although it should not be overread as relational absence. Narratively, phrases such as “I want to change,” “I want peace,” and “I want it to be over” appearing in proximity suggest a tightening of goal logic. The writing seems to move from multiple possible futures toward fewer, more absolute formulations. Emotionally, regulation appears less stable; distress is voiced through bodily unease, tension, or nausea. Primal cues become more visible in anticipatory threat language or observational distance from the self.

Splitting refers here to a defensive organization of experience into rigid either/or categories. It is not used as a diagnosis, but as a way to describe polarized textual movement: good or bad, pure or failed, relief or endurance, change or disappearance. In ENSI terms, this may mark strain in the narrative or cognitive layer, where the capacity to hold complexity, ambiguity, and alternative futures appears diminished.

Phase 4: Ambivalence

FSC stage: Confusion

Common CsSD pattern: Repression

Entries in this phase often hold both reach and retreat. Katie’s writing appears to contain gestures toward repair, faith, meaning, or continued life alongside language and organization suggestive of closure. This makes ambivalence central. The text does not simply move in one direction; rather, it seems to alternate between the possibility of staying and the imagined relief of ending.

Existentially, phrases such as being “at peace with God” may reflect spiritual reassurance, resignation, or an attempt to make unbearable conflict feel morally or spiritually containable. Socially, references to others can read as anticipatory farewell, although such passages must be interpreted cautiously because farewell-like language may carry different meanings across relational and spiritual contexts. Narratively, future-oriented statements persist, but they increasingly cluster within short time horizons. This suggests a contraction of temporal scope rather than a complete absence of future imagination. Emotionally, intensity is sometimes muted or reframed through spiritual, moral, or disciplined language. Practices described as meditation, control, or discipline may contain both soothing and punitive meanings. Primal cues include dissociative or sensory language, suggesting moments where the body and self feel less integrated.

Repression refers here to the muting or displacement of conflict from direct awareness. In the writings, this may appear as calm phrasing, abrupt topic shifts, spiritual reframing, or logistical organization where emotional conflict might otherwise be expected. This defensive pattern may allow functioning and coherence to continue, while also making ambivalence harder to name directly.

Phase 5: Flight through fight

FSC endpoint: Late confusion with increased primal organization

Common CsSD pattern: Reaction formation

Late writings appear more summary-like, resolute, and closure-oriented. The tone is often calmer than earlier distress would lead one to expect. This calm should not be treated as proof of intent or as a universal warning sign. In this corpus, however, serenity appears close to language of strength, purity, rest, and closure, making it clinically and theoretically significant.

Existentially, Katie’s language emphasizes clarity, character, strength, and spiritual resolution. A prayer-like line such as “Let me be strong and defined along with my character... Let me sleep uninterrupted” can be read as a wish for coherence, rest, and final integration rather than ongoing transformation. Socially, direct address becomes less prominent, and the imagined audience appears more private, abstract, or implied. Narratively, third-person phrasing and list-like organization suggest that the writing may be moving toward summary rather than continuation. Emotionally, affect appears flattened or contained, with less overt pleading or contradiction. The primal layer becomes more salient insofar as escape, bodily agency, and urgency appear more central to how action is organized.

Reaction formation refers to the expression of an opposite or compensatory stance when an underlying affect is too threatening or difficult to integrate. In this phase, composure, strength, purity, or certainty may function as a protective

surface over despair, fear, or conflict. This is offered as a plausible reading rather than a definitive interpretation. Within SPG, the pattern is compatible with a late phase in which escape may be appraised as the remaining form of agency.

Synthesis across phases

Across the corpus, the ENSI map helps organize how Katie’s writings appear to shift across meaning, belonging, self-story, emotion, and bodily threat. The movement is not linear in a strict sense. Earlier forms of hope, repair, spiritual searching, and self-correction persist even as later forms of constriction and closure become more visible. Nevertheless, the writings suggest a broad pattern: anchors of purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety become less stable; time horizons narrow; relational address becomes less secure; and self-description becomes more polarized, distant, or closure-oriented.

SPG helps describe how goal logic appears to tighten across the writings. FSC helps characterize changes in identity organization, from disorientation and fragmentation toward deconstruction and confusion. CsSD helps name defensive styles that may initially preserve dignity, hope, or coherence, but later reduce flexibility when they become rigid. These patterns are not presented as universal features of suicide, nor as evidence that Katie’s death can be fully explained by textual analysis. They are offered as a situated interpretation of how identity, time, language, and defensive organization may interlock as suicide becomes increasingly thinkable within one published longitudinal corpus.

Table 1
Katie’s ENSI-SPG Identity Trajectory Matrix

SPG phase	Existential identity	Social identity	Narrative/cognitive identity	Emotional identity	Primal identity
Thwarted meaning	Purpose appears uncertain; spiritual and moral self-correction become prominent. Example: "I don't know who I am right now."	Felt invisibility and uncertainty about being understood or valued by others.	Repeated goal revision; unstable but still future-facing self-story; redemptive planning.	Regulation organized through discipline, rules, and containment.	Minimal explicit threat language; the body appears more as an object of discipline than danger.
Relational burden	Spiritual rupture and moral brokenness become more visible. Example: "My soul feels so broken."	Burdensomeness, blame, and conditional belonging appear more central.	Hope and futility coexist; the narrative begins to fragment across incompatible possibilities.	More distancing from affect; possible third-person self-reference or self-alienation.	Bodily shame and disgust become more evident.
Constriction and acute self-awareness	Purpose, value, and spiritual reciprocity appear less accessible.	Social references become sparse, ambiguous, or generalized.	Repetition, looping phrases, and either/or appraisals suggest narrowing of narrative possibility.	Emotional overwhelm and somatic distress become more prominent.	Threat and escape language begin to surface.
Ambivalence	Spiritual calm may coexist with unresolved conflict and closure-oriented language.	References to others may carry anticipatory farewell or unresolved attachment.	Future projections persist but cluster within shorter time horizons.	Affect may be muted, moralized, or reframed through discipline and spirituality.	Dissociation, sensory disconnection, or bodily unreality may appear.
Flight through fight	Language of strength, purity, rest, and resolution becomes more prominent.	Relational audience appears less direct or more inwardly addressed.	Summary-like organization, third-person phrasing, and closure sequences become more visible.	Affect appears contained, flattened, or held at a distance.	Escape, urgency, and bodily agency become more salient.

Table 1 summarizes one interpretive mapping of Katie's published writings across SPG phases and ENSI identity layers. It is not intended to establish a fixed sequence, causal pathway, or universal model of suicidal development. Rather, it shows how textual indicators of meaning, belonging, narrative coherence, emotional regulation, and threat-oriented experience appear to cluster across the corpus. Interpretations remain context-bound and limited by the posthumous, single-case design.

Controls of Self-Deception in Katie's Writings

In this corpus, defensive patterns can be read as attempts to preserve a workable self while anchors of purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety become less stable. Within ENSI, these patterns are described as Controls of Self-Deception (CsSD). The term self-deception is not used morally and does not imply intentional dishonesty. It refers to patterned ways of protecting coherence, dignity, or emotional tolerability when experience becomes difficult to integrate.

The following readings are offered as plausible patterns within Katie's writings. They align broadly with SPG phases, but they should not be understood as fixed stages or clinical diagnoses. A single passage may contain more than one defensive style, and alternative interpretations remain possible.

Denial

Often visible during SPG phase: Thwarted meaning

Denial refers to the minimization, disavowal, or postponement of painful reality. Early entries emphasize self-improvement, spiritual renewal, and imminent change, sometimes in elaborate or corrective detail. Lines such as "I will be stronger tomorrow" or "If I just pray enough, I will be made right" can be read as holding to transformation rather than directly naming the depth of distress. In this context, denial may protect agency and hope, even as it delays fuller engagement with loss, shame, or despair.

Projection

Often visible during SPG phase: Relational burden

Projection refers to relocating intolerable feelings, blame, or disappointment outside the self, although in Katie's writings this often appears as an oscillation between blaming others and blaming herself. At times, she writes as if unseen, uncared for, or misunderstood; elsewhere, she returns fault to herself. This movement may preserve dignity by making relational injury speakable, but it may also intensify isolation when neither self nor others can be experienced as reliably safe.

Splitting

Often visible during SPG phase: Constriction and acute self-awareness

Splitting refers to organizing experience into rigid either/or categories. In the writings, this appears in more polarized self-appraisal, moral or purity language, and global statements about being unlovable, failed, or beyond repair. Such language leaves little room for ambiguity, partial repair, or mixed meanings. Within ENSI, splitting can be understood as pressure on the narrative or cognitive layer, where the integrative work of holding complexity becomes more difficult.

Repression

Often visible during SPG phase: Ambivalence

Repression refers to the keeping of conflict, affect, or unacceptable distress outside direct awareness. In Katie's writings, repression may appear through calm statements, spiritual reframing, sudden topic shifts, or logistical organization in places where emotional conflict might otherwise be expected. Phrases such as "I am still. I am quiet. I am fine" can be read as efforts to hold tension at the edge of awareness. This may allow coherence to continue, but it may also keep ambivalence from being explored directly.

Reaction formation

Often visible during SPG phase: Flight through fight

Reaction formation refers to the expression of an opposite or compensatory stance when an underlying feeling is difficult to tolerate. Near the end of the sequence, expressions of strength, purity, clarity, or peace appear close to closure-oriented writing. A line such as "Let me be strong and defined along with my character" can be read as composure organized against despair or fear. In this corpus, reaction formation may help explain why calm and resolve appear alongside signs of finality.

Synthesis

Across the sequence, CsSD appears to move from strategies that preserve hope, dignity, and coherence toward strategies that organize experience around certainty, control, and reduced ambiguity. Read with SPG and the ENSI layers, these defenses may initially buffer identity and later constrain emotional, relational, and narrative flexibility. The account remains descriptive and context-bound. Its purpose is not to pathologize Katie's language, but to show how defensive style, goal pursuit, and identity layers may interact as suicidal meaning becomes more organized and less open to alternative futures.

Figure 3

Controls of Self-Deception (CsSD) in Katie's Suicidal Trajectory

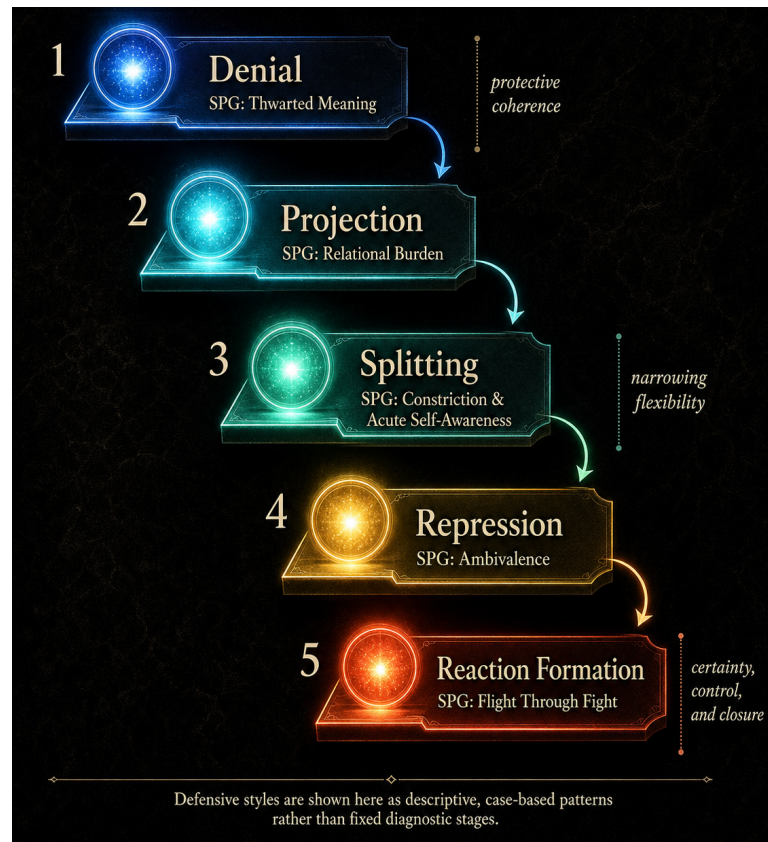


Figure 3 presents a descriptive mapping of five defensive patterns identified in Katie's writings: denial, projection, splitting, repression, and reaction formation. Within ENSI, these Controls of Self-Deception are conceptualized as protective strategies that may preserve coherence, dignity, or emotional tolerability when distress becomes difficult to integrate. In this corpus, these patterns appear to shift across the SPG trajectory, from efforts to maintain hope and self-correction toward more rigid forms of certainty, control, and closure. The figure should be read as an interpretive model of this case, not as a universal sequence or diagnostic classification.

Discussion

Read through an identity-and-meaning lens, Katie's corpus suggests a gradual tightening of goal logic alongside changes in how self, time, body, and others are narrated. Across the SPG phases, the writings appear to move from purpose-seeking and self-correction toward a narrower field of possibility in which relief, rest, purity, and escape become more closely linked. This should not be read as a linear or inevitable pathway. Earlier gestures toward repair, faith, relational longing, and self-improvement persist across the corpus. However, the later writings suggest that these possibilities become harder to sustain as future horizons shorten and the language of closure becomes more prominent.

Several layer-specific patterns recur. At the existential layer, Katie's writings show moral striving, spiritual conflict, and a search for value or coherence. At the social layer, they suggest uncertainty about being seen, valued, or securely held by others. At the narrative or cognitive layer, repetition, polarized phrasing, third-person self-reference, and compressed time horizons suggest increasing difficulty sustaining an open self-story. At the emotional layer, affect appears to move between intensity, containment, moralization, and flattening. At the primal layer, bodily distress, escape language, and

urgency become more visible later in the sequence. These shifts are evident not only in explicit content, but also in textual form: person changes, audience drift, looping phrases, short-horizon projections, and list-like closure sequences (Shneidman, 1993; Heinrich et al., 2008; McAdams, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2015; Galynker, 2023; Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2024; Gay, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d).

Theoretical contribution

This case contributes to narrative and phenomenological suicidology in three main ways. First, it illustrates how features often treated as general indicators of risk may be differentiated by identity layer. Temporal narrowing and cognitive constriction are not only cognitive events; in Katie's writings, they appear alongside spiritual uncertainty, relational insecurity, moralized self-appraisal, bodily distress, and changes in narrative form. Describing these patterns by layer provides more granularity than a single global construct of distress and aligns with phenomenological accounts of how the world, the self, and the future may contract in suicidal states (Shneidman, 1993; Ratcliffe, 2015).

Second, the analysis suggests that defensive style may change alongside the tightening of goal logic. Denial, projection, splitting, repression, and reaction formation are not used here as diagnoses or personality labels. They are treated as textual patterns through which Katie may have preserved coherence, dignity, or emotional tolerability under conditions of increasing strain. This matters because late-sequence calm, purity language, or moral clarity can otherwise be misread either as recovery or as simple resolve. In this corpus, such language appears closer to closure-oriented material, suggesting that composure may sometimes function as a protective surface over conflict rather than as straightforward emotional relief. This interpretation remains tentative, but it supports a more dynamic view of defenses as strategies that may initially preserve possibility while later reducing flexibility.

Third, the analysis positions ENSI alongside, rather than in opposition to, interpersonal, capability, and crisis-oriented accounts of suicide. Constructs such as thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, acquired capability, temporal constriction, and narrative crisis can be located within a broader identity system without claiming that identity explains everything (Joiner, 2005; Van Orden et al., 2012; Galynker, 2023; Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2024). ENSI adds a mid-level vocabulary for connecting lived experience, textual form, and clinical formulation: not simply whether risk is present, but where the person's story appears to be losing support across meaning, belonging, worth, emotional tolerability, and felt safety.

Methodological implications

The findings support the value of analyzing suicide-related writings longitudinally and formally, attending to both what is said and how it is said. In Katie's corpus, meaningful shifts appeared through temporal markers, person shifts, audience address, repetition, moral or spiritual language, and changes in narrative organization. These features are easily missed when suicide-related texts are read only for explicit statements of intent or affective content.

A layered analytic framework can also discipline interpretation. Rather than treating all distress language as equivalent, ENSI organizes attention across identity domains while still allowing inductive subcodes to emerge. The framework therefore functions as a sensitizing device: it helps the analyst ask more precise questions about the text without claiming to reveal the final truth of the person's life or death. Future research can formalize temporal-linguistic markers such as audience drift, short-horizon projection, third-person self-reference, either/or appraisals, moralized self-regulation, and calm-with-closure tone, then examine their usefulness across larger and more diverse corpora.

At the same time, this study demonstrates why reflexivity and ethical restraint are necessary in posthumous textual analysis. Katie's writings are not neutral data points. They are private expressions reproduced in a public source and interpreted from outside her lived world. Methodological transparency therefore requires clear data provenance, a visible audit trail, calibrated claims, and explicit acknowledgment that cultural, spiritual, familial, gendered, and relational meanings may exceed what the text alone can disclose.

Practice implications

The practical value of this analysis lies in formulation, not prediction. A single posthumous case cannot establish clinical rules. However, it can suggest areas of attention that may enrich suicide risk assessment, safety planning, and therapeutic dialogue. Listening for identity-layer signals and temporal-linguistic form may help clinicians notice when a person's future, relational value, and self-story are becoming harder to sustain.

Early identity destabilization. Clinicians may benefit from asking directly about anchors of purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety. Rather than relying only on symptom intensity or explicit intent, assessment can include questions such as: What does next week or next month feel like from here? Where do you still feel held in mind by someone? What

still tells you that your life has value, even faintly? What parts of yourself feel hardest to live with right now? Such prompts should be used collaboratively and without forcing narrative coherence where the person cannot yet find it.

Temporal widening and narrative repair. When timelines compress, safety planning may be strengthened by interventions that widen the future in small increments. These may include micro-commitments, scheduled follow-up, naming competing pulls toward life and death, and re-authoring conversations that separate the voice of shame, purity, burden, or debt from the voice of care. The clinical task is not to argue a person into optimism, but to help preserve enough time and relational contact for alternative meanings to remain possible.

Working with defenses without shaming. If repression, reaction formation, splitting, or denial appears present, clinicians can validate the protective function before inviting flexibility. For example, a clinician might say, “It makes sense that part of you is reaching for order when everything feels unbearable. Could we also make room for the part that is unsure, tired, or afraid?” This approach treats defensive patterns as understandable strategies rather than as resistance, manipulation, or pathology.

Relational and spiritual specificity. When distress is expressed through spiritual, moral, or relational language, clinicians should explore what those meanings signify for the person and whether trusted supports should be involved. Spiritual, cultural, family, or community supports may be helpful when they are chosen by the person, non-coercive, and aligned with the person’s own values. The aim is not to impose meaning from outside, but to strengthen anchors of belonging, worth, and felt safety in ways that are credible within the person’s world (Michel & Jobes, 2020).

Implications for education and service design

Training programs can use brief, carefully de-identified and non-graphic excerpts to teach clinicians how to listen for changes in audience, temporality, self-reference, and moralized language. Education should emphasize that these features are not warning signs in isolation, but formulation cues that require context, collaboration, and clinical judgment.

Documentation templates could also include fields for identity anchors and future horizon alongside standard risk items. For example, clinicians might document the person’s current sources of purpose, perceived belonging, self-worth, felt safety, time horizon, and dominant self-story. This would not replace structured risk assessment. Rather, it would add a narrative and identity-informed layer to formulation, making visible what a purely checklist-based approach may miss.

Services can also build small practices that widen time and restore connection. Follow-up contact, warm handoffs, relational continuity, and scheduled next contacts may be framed not only as monitoring, but as ways of holding a place for the person in the world. This distinction matters because surveillance alone can feel external, while relational continuity can support belonging and future orientation.

Situating the case

The findings remain context-bound. Katie’s religious motifs, purity language, bodily self-appraisal, and family references likely reflect personal history and local meanings that cannot be fully reconstructed from the published corpus. Similar language could carry different significance in another cultural, spiritual, gendered, familial, or communal setting. For this reason, ENSI should not be applied as a universal decoding system. It is better understood as a set of questions: Where is meaning supported or threatened? How is belonging imagined? What future remains narratively available? How is distress embodied? Where does the person locate agency, escape, or safety?

This distinction is central to the ethical use of the framework. The goal is not to make Katie’s story stand in for all suicidal experience, but to use the case to refine a language for interpreting how identity and meaning may become unstable across time. In practice, that language must be adapted through collaboration with the person, their social world, and, where relevant, cultural or spiritual caregivers.

Theoretical practicality

For theory, this study advances ENSI as a mid-level framework connecting phenomenology, narrative identity, and suicide risk formulation without reducing suicide to a single cause. For research, it identifies textual features that may be studied across other corpora, including survivorship narratives, clinical notes, crisis service records, psychological autopsy materials, and suicide-proximal writings. For practice, it offers a vocabulary for hearing how people speak about time, belonging, worth, agency, body, and possible futures.

The practical invitation is modest but important: clinicians and researchers can attend not only to whether a person is distressed, but to how distress is organizing the self. When identity anchors become less stable, the future narrows, and

language begins to close around certainty, purity, burden, or escape, intervention may need to focus not only on risk interruption, but on restoring relational and narrative possibility.

Figure 4
Integrated ENSI Framework: A Visual Summary of Katie’s Suicidal Narrative

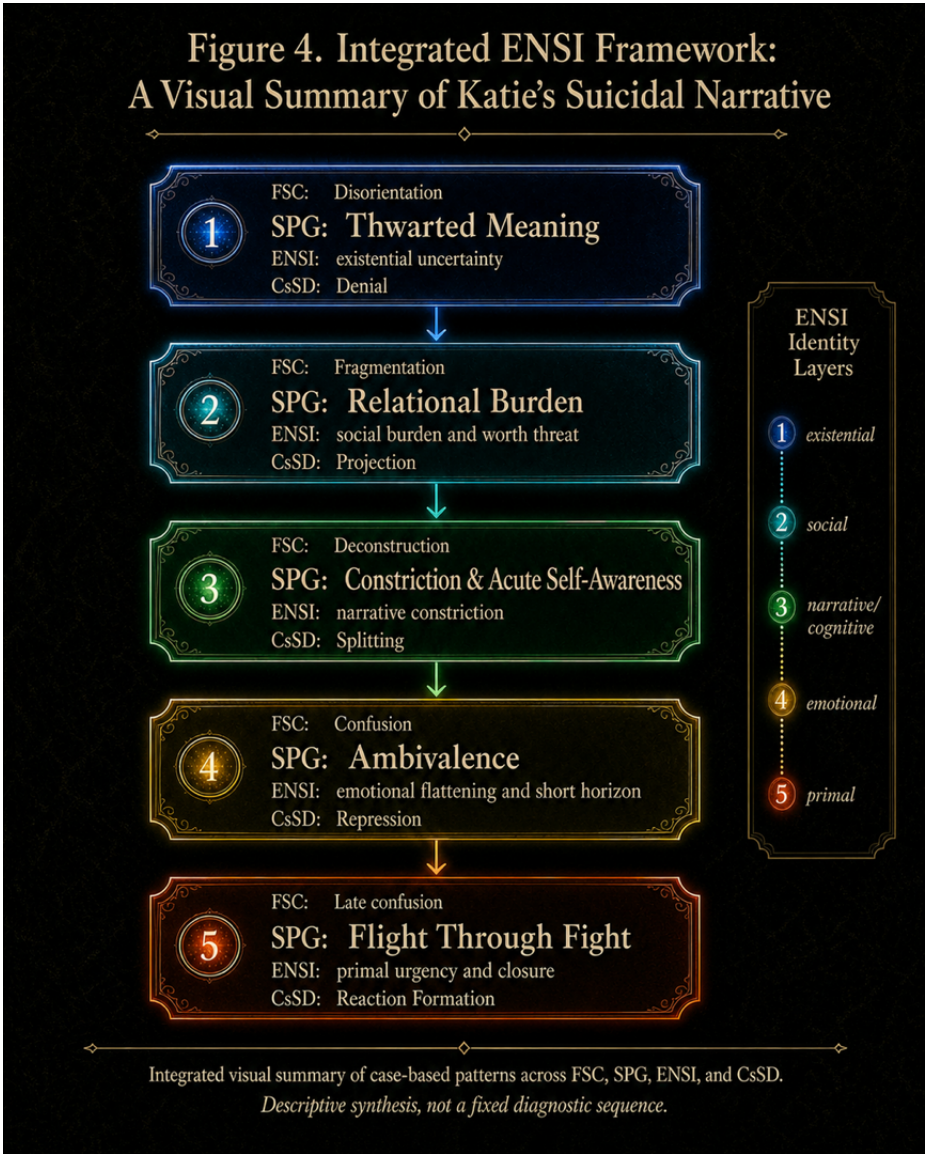


Figure 4 provides an integrated visual summary of the case interpretation by bringing together the Fractured Self Continuum (FSC), the Suicidal Pursuit of Goals (SPG), and the Controls of Self-Deception (CsSD) within the broader ENSI framework. It depicts how identity-layer disruption, goal constriction, and defensive organization appeared to interact across Katie’s published writings. The figure should be read as a descriptive and case-based synthesis rather than as a causal model, diagnostic sequence, or universal pathway. Its purpose is to show how meaning, belonging, narrative coherence, emotional regulation, and threat-oriented experience may cluster over time within this corpus.

Limitations

This study is a posthumous, single-case analysis of texts reproduced in a published source (Lester, 2014). The design affords depth, close reading, and theoretical elaboration, but it does not permit clinical verification, causal inference, or claims of representativeness. The purpose is analytic interpretation and transferability rather than generalization.

The analysis is derived from language rather than interviews, observation, clinical records, or collateral accounts from family, friends, or clinicians. As a result, the interpretations cannot be confirmed against Katie’s own account or against broader contextual data. Sociocultural, spiritual, familial, gendered, and relational meanings are addressed only where

visible in the writings or described in the published source. Important aspects of Katie's social position and lived world may therefore be missing, underdeveloped, or interpreted differently by those closer to her context.

The analysis was conducted by a single coder. No inter-coder reliability procedure was used because the study is grounded in interpretivist and reflexive qualitative methodology rather than a positivist coding paradigm. To strengthen accountability, the study used a versioned codebook, audit trail, negative case analysis, reflexive memoing, code-to-quote matrices, peer debriefing, and conservative modal language. These strategies do not eliminate interpretive subjectivity; rather, they make the interpretive process more visible and open to critique.

The use of posthumous suicide-related writings also raises ethical limitations. Although the corpus was publicly available and formal ethics review was not required, the materials originated as private expressions of suffering. The study therefore used brief, non-graphic quotations, avoided method detail, and adopted a dignity-preserving approach consistent with qualitative and suicide-specific guidance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2000; Shneidman, 1993; World Health Organization, 2021). Even so, any scholarly use of such material carries residual ethical tension.

Finally, ENSI is the organizing framework for the analysis, and this creates both strength and limitation. It allows a coherent reading of identity, meaning, temporality, and defensive organization across the corpus, but it may also sensitize the analysis toward some patterns over others. The findings should therefore be read as one theoretically informed interpretation of Katie's writings, not as the only possible reading.

Future research and theoretical opportunities

Future work should test, refine, and responsibly extend this identity-and-meaning-centered account across broader and more diverse materials.

Multi-case ENSI applications. Comparative studies could apply the layered identity map and SPG × CsSD pairing across diverse corpora, including survivorship writings, clinical narratives, crisis service records, psychological autopsy materials, and suicide-proximal texts. Such work could examine which patterns appear across cases and which vary by age, culture, spirituality, gender, diagnosis, social position, and setting.

Formalizing temporal-linguistic markers. Future studies could operationalize features suggested by this analysis, including audience drift, person shifts, purity metaphors, short-horizon projection, list-like closure sequences, calm-with-closure tone, and either/or appraisals. Mixed-methods studies could then examine whether these features co-occur with clinical changes over time without presuming causation.

Cross-context validity and cultural attunement. More research is needed on how similar language forms carry different meanings across cultural, spiritual, familial, and communal contexts. Collaborations with cultural consultants, spiritual caregivers, lived-experience partners, and community knowledge holders could refine how anchors of purpose, belonging, worth, and felt safety are understood and supported locally.

ENSI-informed assessment prompts and training. Future work could develop and pilot brief clinical prompts that surface identity anchors and future horizon alongside standard suicide risk items. Training modules could teach clinicians to recognize defensive patterns without shaming and to practice identity-restoring micro-skills such as horizon widening, narrative repair, and relational tethering.

Tooling and implementation science. ENSI-informed documentation fields, supervision guides, and consultation templates could be developed and evaluated for usability, acceptability, and influence on formulation quality. Implementation studies should examine whether these tools improve continuity, relational formulation, and care planning while maintaining responsible, contagion-sensitive communication standards (World Health Organization, 2021).

Methodological refinement. Future qualitative studies could compare single-coder reflexive approaches with small-team interpretive audits to better understand the trade-offs between depth, reflexivity, and consensus. Publishing codebooks, audit trails, or exemplar matrices as supplementary materials may also strengthen transparency.

Together, these directions can extend the framework while preserving its central caution: suicidal language must be interpreted in context, with attention to dignity, culture, relational meaning, and the limits of posthumous analysis.

Read through an identity-and-meaning lens, Katie's published writings suggest how suicidal meaning may become organized across time when a life story feels increasingly difficult to inhabit. The analysis does not position her death as the inevitable endpoint of a fixed sequence, nor does it claim to explain suicide through narrative alone. Rather, the corpus shows how purpose, belonging, worth, felt safety, temporal scope, and defensive organization may become less stable as distress is narrated, revised, contained, and eventually narrowed. This interpretation aligns with accounts that locate suicidal

suffering not only in symptoms or risk factors, but also in threatened meaning, disrupted self-continuity, and narrative rupture (Shneidman, 1993; McAdams, 2011; Martela & Steger, 2016).

Conclusion

ENSI offers a compact vocabulary for describing this movement without reducing it to a causal formula. Across Katie's writings, existential orientation appears increasingly strained, social value feels uncertain or conditional, narrative continuity becomes more difficult to sustain, emotional experience oscillates between overflow and containment, and bodily or primal language becomes more prominent near closure. Read together with the SPG phases and paired CsSD patterns, the framework helps link how language is used to where an entry may sit within a changing identity trajectory. Serenity near closure, purity metaphors during constriction, third-person self-reference, short-horizon projections, and audience drift are therefore not treated as universal warning signs, but as context-bound textual features that may support deeper formulation (Bloch-Elkouby et al., 2024; Galynker, 2023; Gay, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d).

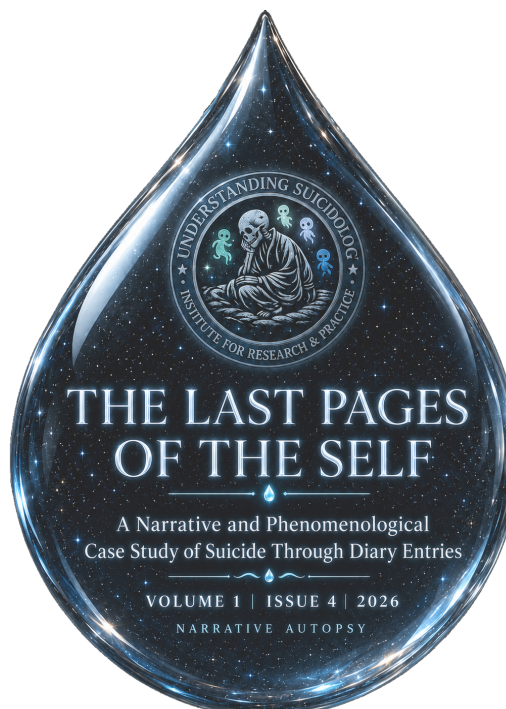
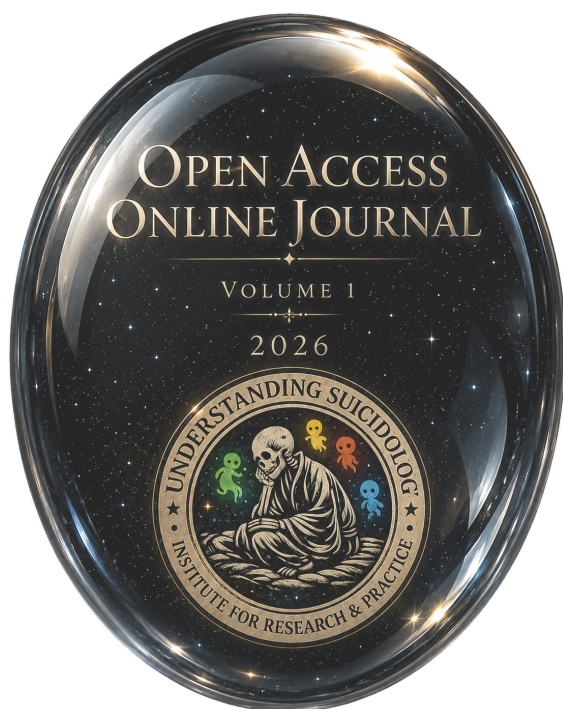
The practical implication is a shift from prediction alone toward restoration. Listening for how people speak about time, belonging, worth, agency, body, and possible futures may help clinicians notice forms of destabilization that standard risk checklists can miss. Care can pair safety planning with identity-restoring work that widens the future horizon, strengthens relational value, and supports narrative repair. When distress is voiced through spiritual, moral, cultural, or familial language, collaboration with trusted supports may be useful when it is chosen by the person, non-coercive, and grounded in their own meanings.

Katie's writings are patterned and, at times, quietly coherent in their struggle. They show moralized self-regulation when purpose becomes uncertain, audience drift and third-person distance when belonging feels unstable, short-horizon projections when the future contracts, and calm that appears alongside closure-oriented language. ENSI helps clinicians, researchers, and educators name these features with greater precision while preserving the limits of posthumous interpretation. Prevention, in this view, is not only about interrupting risk. It is also about helping a person recover enough time, connection, and meaning to imagine a story they can still stand inside.

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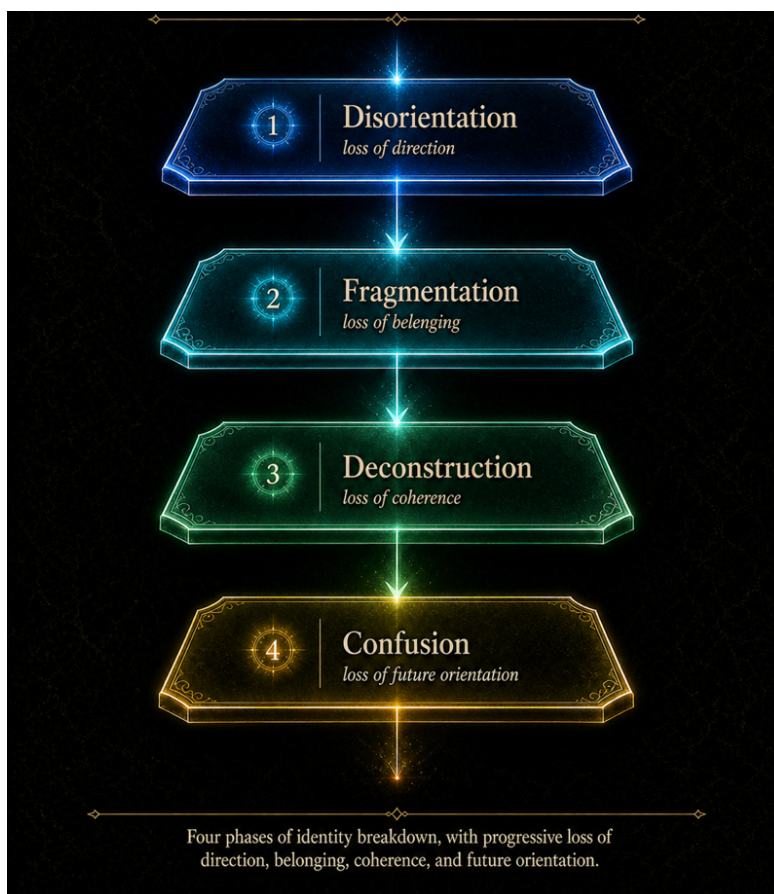
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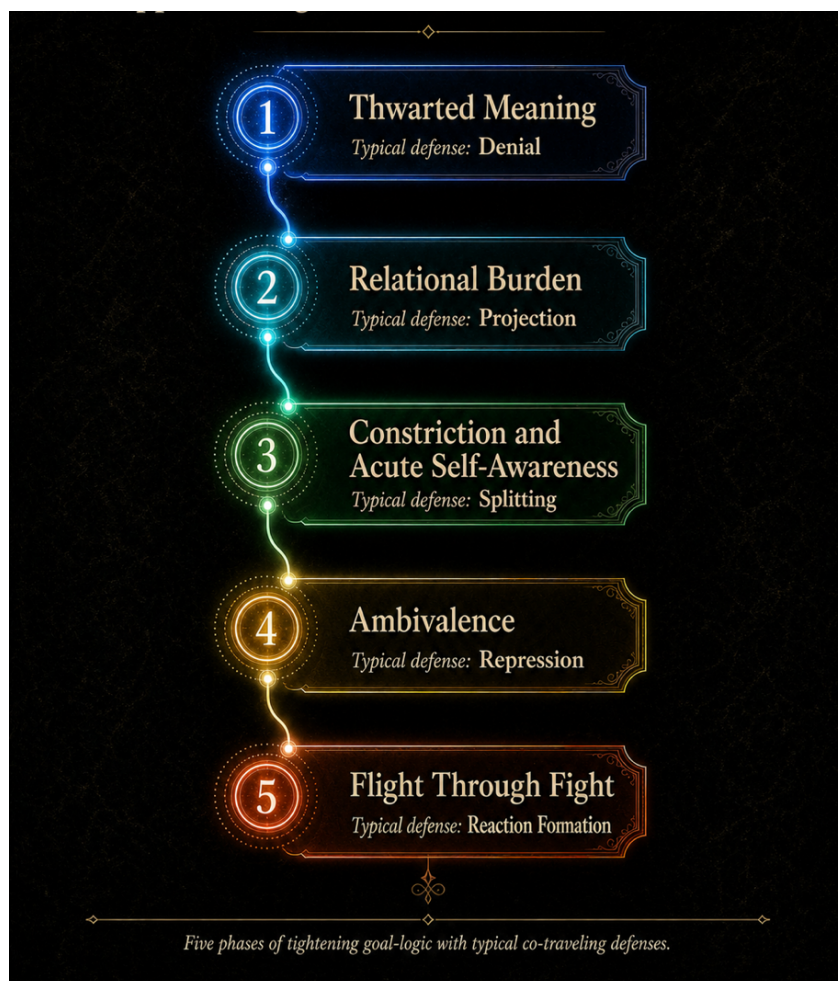
Appendix A

Appendix A Figure A1.

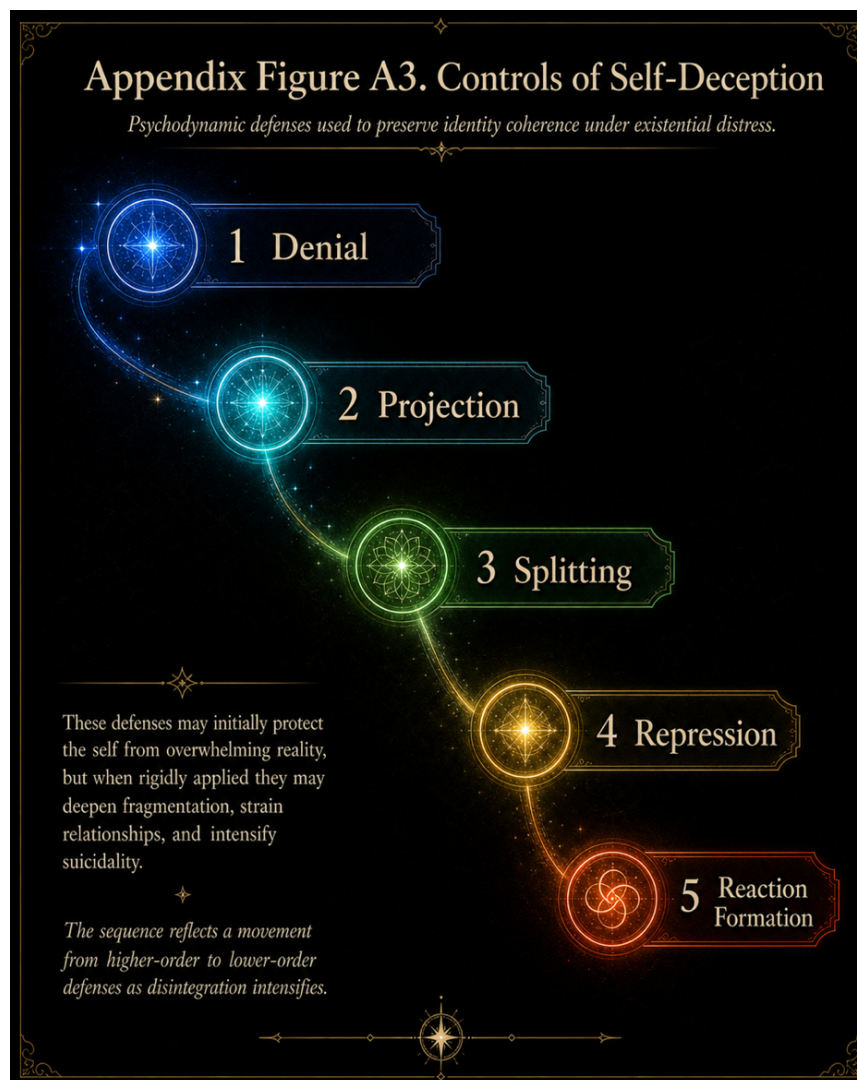
Fractured Self Continuum.



Four phases of identity breakdown: disorientation, fragmentation, deconstruction, confusion, with increasing loss of direction, belonging, coherence, and future orientation.

Appendix A Figure A2.*Suicidal Pursuit of Goals*

Five phases of tightening goal-logic (thwarted meaning, relational burden, constriction and acute self-awareness, ambivalence, flight through fight) with typical co-traveling defenses (denial, projection, splitting, repression, reaction formation).

Appendix A Figure A3*Controls of Self-Deception*

The Controls of Self-Deception (CsSD), is a psychodynamic construct within the ENSI framework that outlines five defense mechanisms individuals unconsciously deploy to preserve identity coherence under existential distress. Beginning with Denial and progressing through Projection, Repression, and Reaction Formation, these defenses initially serve to shield the self from overwhelming reality. However, when rigidly applied, they ultimately deepen identity fragmentation, sever relational ties, and exacerbate suicidality. The sequence reflects a descent from higher-order to lower-order defenses as psychological disintegration intensifies.