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Making Sense of Critical Suicide Studies: Metaphors, Tensions, and Futurities

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Abstract: Critical suicide studies is a relatively new area of research, practice, and activism, which we believe can offer creative new vantage points with which to 'think' suicide into the future. We present findings from a qualitative research study undertaken to understand how critical suicide studies is being conceptualized by those who draw from this orientation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine scholars, practitioners, activists, and/or those with lived and living experience of suicidality. To analyze the data, we used reflexive thematic analysis and drew on a social constructionist orientation. We discovered that metaphors were an important way of conceptualizing and reflecting upon critical suicide studies. Four themes were generated: critical suicide studies is a site of respite and fortification; critical suicide studies is a felt experience; critical suicide studies is a desire line; critical suicide studies is yearning. We contend that the dominant language available to describe suicide and suicide prevention might not be adequate for expressing the complexities and contradictions of suicide prevention practice or suicide's ultimate unknowability. We call for more diverse, inclusive, and expansive frameworks for understanding and responding to suicide and show the potential of joining other critical scholars and social movements to build a more just, caring, and inclusive world.

Keywords: suicidology; critical suicide studies; critical qualitative research; reflexive thematic analysis; critical pedagogy; metaphors

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1. Introduction

Efforts to understand and describe suicide are by no means recent preoccupations, and interest in suicide is not the exclusive domain of academic researchers. The study of suicide has been actively shaped by professionals—including physicians, lawyers, and coroners—as well as artists, poets, and novelists, since the turn of the century (Laird 2011). Lively debates on the topic of suicide continue unabated in the 21st century. Our interest in the emergence of critical suicide studies as a response to some of the perceived shortcomings of mainstream suicidology adds to this ongoing discussion. For the purposes of this paper, mainstream suicidology refers to the dominant approach to researching and preventing suicide in Western contexts. While diverse and multi-disciplinary in nature, mainstream suicidology typically draws on individualistic frameworks, positivist methodologies, and apolitical ways of understanding, researching, and responding to suicide.

The field of critical suicide studies represents a site of intellectual work and social justice praxis. In this way, it has much in common with other types of critical scholarship and praxis (i.e., feminism, queer theory, critical disability studies, anti-colonial theory, critical race studies) that seek to understand and theorize social relations while also enacting meaningful social change.

In this article, we report on a qualitative study with researchers, practitioners, activists, and those with lived experiences of suicide to highlight how critical suicide studies is being interpreted, deployed, and reinvented. We show its layered, and at times competing,

theoretical, creative, ethical, political, and practical dimensions. By documenting how critical suicide studies is being understood and enacted by scholars, practitioners, and activists in the early stages of its emergence in the first part of the 21st century, we can begin to appreciate some of its more recent articulations and proliferations. We show that critical suicide studies is unfolding in several interesting directions and illuminate how those who draw from this perspective are putting the ideas to work in varied, local contexts.

We also highlight that critical suicide studies is a site of struggle, where meanings, methodologies, and identities are continuously up for contestation and re-imagination. Our study hints at some of the limitations and challenges inherent to critical suicide studies and social justice praxis, including the tensions that arise for researchers and practitioners working in a health or social care system that has been co-opted by neoliberalism, where cost-saving standardized treatments, efficiency metrics, and approaches that maximize individual productivity and self-management are prioritized (Baril 2023; Brown 2021). Like most critical social movements, critical suicide studies is an open-ended, restless set of ideas, practices, and ongoing struggles which we believe can offer some creative new vantage points with which to 'think' suicide into the future.

In the sections that follow, we situate our study within the existing critical suicide studies literature and other relevant critical scholarship. We then provide an overview of our methodology, including our theoretical framework for analyzing the qualitative interviews. The results are presented through four high-level themes and additional sub-themes, which represent patterned responses that we discerned from multiple readings of the transcribed interviews/dataset based on reflexive thematic analysis. The final discussion integrates the findings from our study with the existing theoretical and empirical literature as a way to deepen our analysis. We describe the limitations of our study and highlight a number of implications for future practice and research.

1.1. Related Literature

Mapping the Western history of suicide, Marsh (2010) illustrates how suicide has been variously understood as a sin, crime, or illness, revealing suicide's instability and variability over time. According to Marsh (2016), contemporary understandings of suicide and suicidology are tightly linked to three key assumptions: (1) suicide is pathological; (2) suicidology is science; and (3) suicide is individual. Fitzpatrick et al. (2014) made similar observations, describing contemporary suicidology as a social practice that coheres around specific ideas and assumptions:

> Suicidology, therefore, is unquestionably a social practice—directed toward the scientific study and prevention of suicide. Although shaped by multiple, often competing, epistemologies, the view that suicide was preventable and that science offered the best means for achieving this gave the practice of suicidology identity, unity, and direction. (p. 317)

Suicidology and suicide prevention have long been dominated by Western, scientific, psychological, and empiricist models. These models often view suicide as an individual pathology that can be prevented through expert interventions such as therapy and medication (Button and Marsh 2019; Marsh 2016; White et al. 2016). While mainstream models have contributed to our understanding of suicide, they have also been critiqued for being reductionist and failing to account for the social, cultural, and political factors that contribute to suicide (Hjelmeland 2016).

1.2. An Alternative Way of Seeing and Doing

Critical suicide studies is emerging as an alternative way of "seeing and doing" (Fitzpatrick et al. 2014, p. 305) which responds to many of the perceived limits of mainstream suicidology. It exposes some of the potential omissions and harms associated with dominant suicide prevention practices, including their de-politicized, Western, positivist, individualist, and psychocentric foundations (Wexler and Gone 2012; White et al. 2016; White 2017). In the face of persistently high rates of suicide in many parts of the world

(WHO 2021) and grounded in the recognition that suicide is not a singular or static event, but rather a highly complex, dynamic, social phenomena that is influenced by individual, cultural, social, economic, environmental, historical, and political conditions and contexts (Marsh 2010), critical suicide studies calls for more diverse, inclusive, and expansive frameworks for understanding and responding to suicide. Rather than assuming that suicide is fully knowable and controllable through the techniques of science (White 2012) and resisting the temptation to uncritically activate standardized suicide risk assessment and prevention protocols when faced with disclosures of suicidality (Baril 2020; Tack 2019), critical suicide studies questions many taken for granted assumptions about what suicide is and what might be done in response (Marsh 2016).

The scholars of critical suicide studies take seriously the possibility of doing harm under the guise of helping. These harms include, for example, practices of "white benevolence" (Gebhard et al. 2022), where helping professionals, many of whom are white, are always assumed to be caring, empathic, and innocent. Practices of white benevolence are especially likely in settler states such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the US, where racism and colonial violence against Indigenous peoples are well documented across professional helping fields including health, education, social care, and justice sectors (Gebhard et al. 2022). Other types of harms include forms of epistemic injustice, whereby the knowledge of suicidal persons or service users becomes subordinated to dominant medicalizing and pathologizing discourses. In other words, suicidal persons' experience can only be read and understood through the available vocabularies of psychiatric diagnosis, expert pronouncements, and official statements about the nature of mental illness and suicidal distress (Brown 2021; Fitzpatrick 2020; Fricker 2017).

Moving beyond critique, critical suicide studies seeks to mobilize a broader set of conceptual frameworks and responses outside dominant or exclusive expert-driven psy-discourses and positivist, evidence-based research frameworks. Critical suicide studies holds much in common with other progressive movements and joins with allied critical movements, social justice scholars, and activists (Alvarez et al. 2022; Button and Marsh 2019; Fernández et al. 2021; Freire 1987; Morrow and Malcoe 2017) to imagine and build a more just, caring, and inclusive social world.

1.3. Mobilizing Other Critical Frameworks

There is a growing body of critical research and scholarship, including feminist, activist, queer, mad, Indigenous, critical disability studies, and critical race theories, which offers a range of alternative models for thinking about and responding to suicide. For example, feminist frameworks, while highly diverse, challenge the myth of the masculinist, autonomous, unencumbered self; recognize our deep interdependence; place value on affective and embodied ways of knowing; and highlight the importance of social change in pursuit of a more just world (Ahmed 2017). Queer theories offer a way to challenge binary thinking and interrupt narrow notions of normality through approaches to praxis and activism that are theoretical, practical, political, and transformative (Muñoz 2009). Indigenous worldviews are grounded in holistic and relational ontologies, whereby "process-centred modes of living" (Simpson 2017, p. 22) prevail, and being in right relations with human and non-human others, ancestors, and the land are foundational values and teachings. Critical disability and Mad scholars call attention to the problematic ableist and sanist assumptions that govern dominant conceptualizations of suicidal persons and suicide prevention discourses (Baril 2023). Together, these theoretical frameworks provide the intellectual and pragmatic resources for us to recognize the complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors that contribute to suicide; attend to the broader contexts of distress and suicidality; and ask new questions that shed light on important ethical, political, and relational issues, including the potential oppression of suicidal people as a result of their encounters with the mainstream, neoliberal mental health system (Baril 2023; Brown 2021).

Two strands of critical theories are of particular interest to us here: critical pedagogy (Freire 1987) and feminist praxis (Goldman 1931).

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator born in 1921, who developed his educational theories in response to the social and economic disparities observed in his context, mainly during the military dictatorship. He was one of the main theorists of critical pedagogy, and his work continues to be relevant in the ongoing struggle for social justice and equitable societies. Besides his focus on pedagogy and the educator–student relationship, his work transcends the field of education, touching on fundamental issues of oppression, hierarchy, power, and knowledge, and can be translated to any social context. Freire (1987) focused on examining how the multiple and complex dynamics of exploitation and dominance work to maintain oppression and pointed to critical consciousness as a central piece in the fight for less oppressive societies.

We are interested in Freire's work as it emphasizes critical reflection as a unique way of recognizing, naming, and challenging oppressive systems and structures—a crucial process for personal and societal transformation (Freire 1987). By broadening and contextualizing our understandings of suicide, there is an opportunity to denounce oppressive violence such as colonialism, patriarchy, racism, ableism, and heteronormativity as major drivers of suicidality, while also pursuing the goals of social transformation towards equity and social justice (Reynolds 2016). In that sense, critical pedagogy becomes a valuable framework to examine how formal and informal educational contexts reproduce relations of power and inequity, making visible the ways in which our societies are currently organized to obstruct real social justice (Apple et al. 2009). Proponents of critical pedagogy call for a reform in our epistemological and ideological assumptions of what education, knowledge, and research should look like, so they can genuinely serve the goals of social transformation and emancipation (Apple et al. 2009).

To attend to more intersectional and gendered relations of power, Emma Goldman's ideas about feminism, political activism, and praxis are significant. She was an activist for multiple causes, including anarchism, women's rights, worker's rights, and social and economic justice in the first half of the 20th century. Her ideas on the roles of passion, joy, and beauty in the fight against injustices are refreshingly original and as relevant today as they were in the 1930's. She argued that

> A successful revolution includes a healthy passion for the inner life. (. . .) The right to stay alive in one's senses, and to live in a world that prized that aliveness, was, for her, a key demand in any struggle she cared to wage against coercive government rule. (Gornick 2011, p. 1)

Her theoretical formulations and her hands-on activism were, simultaneously, structurally oriented and intimately personal. Balancing the focus on structural oppression with a concern for personal experience, she fought for causes that were considered trivial in her time, such as birth control, sexual freedom, and marriage rights. Radical politics for her meant that people's lives became more just, equitable, caring, and joyous (Goldman 1931). Even though we reserve critique for some of her formulations, Goldman held out hope that we could hold multiple desires and aspirations at once: seriousness and joy, reflection and passion, and structural revolution and lived experience. Goldman's radical politics of joy, care, and fight offer a meaningful framework for rethinking our responses to suicide and what makes life worth living. Her activism sets the stage for critical suicide studies to hold the complexities and contradictions of fighting for more livable lives and societies, embracing subjectivity, advocacy, lived experience, and arts as meaningful ways of responding to current structural issues.

To summarize, critically oriented research and practice highlight how social practices, knowledge, and power are constructed and the interests they serve. Critical scholarship works to de-center and resist the narrow, Western, patriarchal worldview that has dominated our understanding of social life for centuries (Koro-Ljungberg and Cannella 2017; Range and Leach 1998; Steinberg 2012). Critical perspectives also help us to ask questions that serve to disrupt our cherished beliefs and invite us to consider our own implication in

doing harm, under the guise of helping (Gebhard et al. 2022). An unyielding commitment to social justice, equity, and ethically sustainable futures animates all critical qualitative research. While this always involves struggle, it does not require the abandonment of the pursuit of beauty, pleasure, joy, or collective flourishing (Goldman 1931. In fact, there has been a proliferation of scholarly and professional contributions from both within and outside the field of suicidology, calling for more creative, generative, and previously unthought approaches to understanding suicide. In the midst of such a vibrant public conversation, we join Jaworski's (2020) call for an "ethics of wonder and generosity" as we examine where critical suicide studies is going, how it is being understood by those drawing from this orientation, and how it might be storied and enacted in the future.

2. Methodology

This qualitative study was designed to provide us with a nuanced account of how practitioners, scholars, and activists are drawing from, and contributing to, critical suicide studies as an emerging field of practice. In this paper, we focus our attention on how participants are making sense of critical suicide studies and draw attention to the metaphors they use to describe their experiences and conceptualizations. A previous manuscript submitted for publication described how the ideas of critical suicide studies were being applied in specific contexts, including research, practice, and advocacy (White et al. 2023, submitted for review). In this paper, we focus more specifically on participants' understandings of critical suicide studies, and we consider how these ways of seeing and doing offer potentially novel approaches for engaging with, and responding to, suicide in the future.

Qualitative research enables in-depth exploration of the perspectives and subjective experiences of participants who are directly involved with the issue at hand (Braun and Clarke 2013). The goal of qualitative research is to explore an issue in-depth, capturing complexity and nuance, as opposed to making generalizations; therefore, it is common to draw on smaller sample sizes (Braun and Clarke 2013). It is particularly useful in addressing 'how questions' like the one guiding our study: How do participants make sense of critical suicide studies?

By acknowledging the historically and culturally contingent nature of suicide and suicidology, we make visible our social constructionist orientation. This means that we take as our starting point the idea that suicide cannot be reduced to a singular, static meaning that holds across time and culture. Suicide and our responses to it are multiple, dynamic, culturally situated, and socially produced. How we come to understand what suicide is, is not natural or self-evident (White and Kral 2014). Rather, we contend that any social reality, including suicide and suicidology, are social, historical, and political processes, which rely on social interaction, language, discourse, contexts, and relations of power to stabilize their meaning (Gergen 2011).

Drawing from a social constructionist framework, we also acknowledge that there is no such thing as a singular reality or unquestionable truth. All knowledge is socially constructed, and every practice is a social practice; all of it happens within specific cultural, historical, and sociopolitical contexts (Burr 2015). In other words, the ways in which we are led to think about life, death, suicide, and selves are not settled or self-evident categories; they are products of social interaction bound up in power relations (Burr 2015; White 2017).

2.1. Recruitment and Participants

Participants were recruited through a poster circulated on the critical suicide studies listserv. The poster explained the research questions, objective, and methodology, and invited those interested to contact the first author. Following the initial contact, both researchers assessed if the interested participants met all the inclusion criteria: adults, aged 18 or older, who drew from a critical suicide studies approach. A more detailed description of our recruitment process is described in a previous manuscript (White et al. 2023, submitted for review). This research was approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board.

Nine adults who self-identified as drawing from a critical suicide studies perspective agreed to participate in a one-hour, semi-structured qualitative interview with the two authors. Participants described their roles in multiple and overlapping ways, including researchers, practitioners, activists, and persons with lived experience of suicide or suicide bereavement. Some had extensive academic and teaching experience; others were early career researchers or graduate students; some were seasoned practitioners who had returned to take up advanced graduate degrees; others were combining their lived experience of suicidality with their professional roles in suicide prevention in the mental health field. Seven participants were from North American contexts (Canada and US) and two were located in European contexts, highlighting the fact that at the present time, the field of critical suicide studies represents mainly the interests and perspectives from those in Euro-Western, English-speaking contexts. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned.

Our decision on sample size was driven by the concept of "information power" (Malterud et al. 2016), understanding that the more relevant information for the research question that the sample holds, the fewer participants are needed. Critical suicide studies is not yet well-established as a distinct social practice and the number of researchers and practitioners who draw from this approach is relatively small. Our participants were selected for their specific affiliation with a critical suicide studies approach and thus their perspectives were maximally relevant. The interviews we conducted were extremely rich and the data tell a complex, multi-faceted, coherent, and useful story in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2021a).

2.2. Data Collection

The first and second authors conducted an individual semi-structured interview with each participant using the Zoom teleconference platform. The interviews lasted approximately one hour, were conversational in spirit, and were organized around a series of open-ended questions, enabling maximum flexibility. During and after the interviews, the researchers wrote field notes which were used as touch points during the analysis. The interviews were conducted in February 2022. In this article, we focus our attention on how participants are making sense of critical suicide studies, which includes documenting some of their hopes and concerns for the future.

2.3. Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the first author, with support of the Descript software (https://www.descript.com/transcription). The analysis of the transcripts was undertaken by the first and second authors using Braun and Clarke's model of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021a, 2021b). Reflexive thematic analysis is a reflexive, creative, and systematic model of generating themes from the data. In this approach, the researcher's subjectivity is considered an important analytic resource. In reflexive thematic analysis, themes are understood as "patterns of shared meaning, cohering around a central concept" (Braun and Clarke 2021a, p. 331). The following phases guided us in our analysis: (1) data familiarization; (2) initial code generation; (3) initial theme generation from coded data; (4) themes review; (5) themes defining and naming; (6) report writing.

As part of the data familiarization and initial coding phases, the first and second author read the transcripts multiple times, identifying potential themes and patterns in response to our specific research question. Through an iterative and reflexive process, we began coding the data and generated a series of preliminary themes and sub-themes to grasp the overall pattern being observed across the full dataset. After creating summary tables and concept maps to graphically represent our emerging findings, we eventually generated four high-level themes and eight sub-themes which were informed by our social constructionist orientation. This meant that we paid particularly close attention to language, discourse, and the social production of knowledge through relational processes (which

includes the research interviews themselves). The final result of this layered process of reflexive thematic analysis is presented next.

3. Findings

Across all interviews, we were immediately struck by participants' extensive use of metaphors when answering our interview questions about how they were understanding critical suicide studies. Given suicide's unfathomable quality (Jaworski and Scott 2016) and its complex entanglement with other social problems and structures of inequality (Alvarez et al. 2022; Fernández et al. 2021), it is not surprising that participants turned to metaphorical language to express their understandings of the social relations constituting suicide, suicide prevention, and critical suicide studies. We discovered that metaphors were an important way of conceptualizing and reflecting upon critical suicide studies and thus we made active use of these metaphors in our analysis (Kochis and Gillespie 2006; Steger 2007; Cassell and Lee 2012; Cassell and Bishop 2019). In response to our main research question, "How do participants make sense of critical suicide studies?", we have organized our findings under four overarching themes which represent the patterned responses of participants: (1) critical suicide studies is a site of respite and fortification; (2) critical suicide studies is a felt experience; (3) critical suicide studies is a desire line; (4) critical suicide studies is a yearning.

3.1. Critical Suicide Studies Is a Site of Respite and Fortification

Several participants conceptualized critical suicide studies as a site of respite and fortification, relying on metaphors that suggested it is simultaneously a place to seek refuge with others, as well as a staging area for preparing for battle against others. In this section, we present examples of these metaphors under two sub-themes: (1) metaphors of home (2) and metaphors of war.

3.1.1. Metaphors of Home

Throughout the interviews, participants told stories about how being affiliated with the critical suicide studies network carried the possibility for experiencing a greater sense of connection and belonging. Being a critical scholar/practitioner/activist was often described as lonely. By finding opportunities to connect with and learn from others who were raising questions about mainstream approaches to suicide, many participants described a feeling of finding or arriving 'home'. This feeling of home was achieved in part by becoming a member of an international network that enabled communication with other critical scholars, practitioners, and activists; reading and connecting through the scholarly work of critical suicide studies and feeling less alone; participating in conferences, workshops, webinars, and reading groups; and feeling seen and validated in their own critical work.

> I felt very alone for four years... in sort of the international community, or a larger international community. I was looking for a new home and I feel I've found it in the critical suicide studies network. *Lily*

> So it feels, and I think other people think about it too, it feels a little bit like a home. *Joe*

> You know, you want to find people who speak your language... you have to have an intellectual community that can, that you can engage with and can engage with you and be supportive. *Colin*

Ishmael, a postdoctoral fellow, acknowledged that building connections and support systems was one of his main desires when joining the critical suicide studies network.

> When I was writing my dissertation or even in the beginning of my postdoc, like, I really did feel alone, right? And not being able to meet other people... who are interested in these questions about the discourse of suicide, how race and so on intersect, or how they're mutually constituted, right? And so my hope

> was, and it continues to be, to meet other people, you know, who have similar interests. *Ishmael*

Interestingly, when conceptualized as a home, or a place of refuge, critical suicide studies offered participants a semi-private space where they could reduce isolation and gain strength by becoming part of a family or collective. This, in turn, allowed participants to shore up their resources and critical resolve so that they could capably maneuver in a different type of place—the battlefield.

3.1.2. Metaphors of War

To illustrate that conceptualizations of critical suicide studies are multiple, in this section we show that in addition to offering participants a sense of home, critical suicide studies is also viewed as a place where participants could prepare for battle. This is not entirely surprising given their inherently critical orientation, which positions critical suicide studies in tension with mainstream suicidology. Participants described the ways that challenging dominant discourses and assumptions, or bringing "critical perspective to mainstream practices," was at times met with strong opposition, leading participants to feel that they were having to go to battle. War metaphors were routinely used to describe this aspect of critical suicide studies. Such language included, for example, 'have ammunition', 'find allies', 'go to war', 'go toe to toe.'

Framing the work of critical suicide studies as a practice of "going to war," Lily also expresses doubts about whether the attempt to "convert the true believers" (through persuasion strategies, tactics, and alliance-building) is even possible:

> . . .it's necessary to preach to the choir once in a while to sort of get some support, and to develop your argumentation, before you go to war. You need to have a home base where you can come and sort of recharge before you go to war. Because I do believe we still need to go to war, but, uh, but I don't think, I don't think we are going to convert any of the true believers in the mainstream. *Lily*

Meanwhile, Brigid shared that as a PhD student, she participated as a member of a university student suicide prevention taskforce, where she needed to bring a fighting stance to the project:

> I would go toe to toe, especially with the chair who was a white male doctor from the school of medicine, who is not my favorite person (chuckles). And he and I would go toe to toe and, um, afterwards, what would happen is: I'd have multiple different people pull me aside from the group. So there were different staff and faculty as part of that task force, they would pull me aside and tell me how much they appreciated what I had said. *Brigid*

She shares her impression that the task force was not created with the intention to engage in transformative change. She suggests that a student's insider knowledge of the institution was a form of "ammunition" that had the capacity to undermine the task force's interests in maintaining the status quo:

> That's actually where I met an amazing student advocate. I don't know if anyone nominated her or if she nominated herself, there's no way she would have been selected. They're in, there were other people like her, no way they would've ever been selected to be on that committee because they didn't want people who had so much ammunition, like, in knowledge. *Brigid*

Meanwhile, Colin, a PhD student, shared that, within mainstream suicide research, there is a tendency to stay within well-established limits, which means recognizing the barriers and not operating outside of them. He noticed that, in critical suicide studies, it felt like there were more creative possibilities and a sense of freedom, where you could "take the gloves off" and fight some of these restrictive conventions in a more direct way:

> What I hear [in mainstream suicidology] is a pattern of recognize the barriers, stay in between these barriers of what you can, and can't do in suicide research. . .

> The draw to critical suicide research was that it seemed to have an appeal for me as something that would help to take the gloves off more, you know, as it were to recognize, and in a very purposeful way, these nuances and barriers and challenges to suicide prevention that you just don't see in traditional suicidology. . . So, finding a way to do research on suicide, that acknowledges barriers and even includes those within the research, but doesn't stay a slave to them. *Colin*

Lily, who is a full professor and a seasoned researcher, describes some of the ways in which she expects her writings on critical suicide studies to be received by the mainstream suicidology field:

> It's taken me three and a half years to write it (a book). And it's within the framework of critical suicide studies, of course. And the aim with it is to try to start some reflections and initiate some discussions. . .There are two possibilities here: either my head will be chopped off or I will be silenced to death. *Lily*

Such violent metaphors hint at previous hostilities and experiences of wounding, leading some participants to brace themselves for the worst, even though the intention is to start a conversation, not a war. Those who draw from a critical orientation have sometimes been subject to personal forms of attack or systematic exclusion, attesting to the way that dominant ideologies work to bring researchers and practitioners into line. Planning for backlash and anticipating resistance from the dominant group is clearly part of the overall community ethos when working towards transformative social change. It requires both a home (i.e., place of belonging, recognition, and care) and a fighting stance (i.e., a tactical strategy). In addition to being a home and a site to fortify oneself in preparation for battle, critical suicide studies is also an embodied experience that is deeply felt, sensed, and lived.

3.2. Critical Suicide Studies Is a Felt Experience

Scholars, practitioners, activists, and those with lived experiences shared stories about their work that reflected a deep personal investment that was often described through embodied accounts that involved the whole body and all of the senses. As we learned through listening to participants, critical suicide studies can be felt in people's mouths, backs, hands, and in their breath. The evidence to support this theme is presented through two metaphors: (1) embodied grammar of suicide, (2) affective relations.

3.2.1. Embodied Grammar of Suicide

In several senses, critical suicide studies is a 'word of mouth' practice involving taste, language, communication, words, and voice. Ishmael talks about the importance of proliferating the vocabulary in ways that move beyond the "anemic" quality of the mainstream discourse:

> I think there seems to be a growing consensus that there isn't enriched vocabulary for talking about suicide and it's so anemic, right? Uh, and so I find that interesting too, like that people, at least people who are interested in critical suicide studies are committed to proliferating the vocabulary. *Ishmael*

Another participant, Tyler, a professor and activist, spoke about "feeding himself" with the knowledge created by other critically minded people, while also stating the need to expand the vocabulary and the frameworks available:

> I got a lot of food for thought in the work of . . .Ian Marsh as well, in his denunciation of the pathologization of suicidality and the work of Chloe Taylor, and China Mills, and I really enjoy also the work of Scott Fitzpatrick and [Amy] Chandler as well. They were really kind of denouncing, like, the mistreatments and some of the problems that suicidal people were encountering. But simultaneously I didn't see kind of a word or a framework to allow us to think about really like all their form of stigmatization and mistreatment as a form of oppression, as it is the case

> with sexism and heterosexism and then cis-genderism and racism. So I was like, okay, we need to push a little bit further. *Tyler*

Brigid talks about how when she tried to elaborate on the critical public health perspective she brought to the student mental health task force, she was met with a remark from the Chair that felt dismissive and led her "mouth to drop open" as the Chair seemed to be suggesting that a population-level, whole-school, system-wide approach was too vast to be even considered:

> I said 'I'm coming from a public health point of view. And so that's my perspective, what I bring to this committee is like public health and response.' And he was like... ' Uh, we can't...' What did he say? 'We can't fill the ocean' It was something even worse than that, whatever, like, analogy he used. I just, my mouth just dropped open and I think everyone else's did. *Brigid*

Colin shared some of the challenges of researching military suicide and described how the words that are used mediate the relationship with the community. He spoke about the need to "sweet talk" his way into the community and elaborates on 'bad words' and how some ways of researching may leave a 'bad taste:'

> He (the advisor) told me not to use words like 'ethnography', 'anthropology', words like that, more specialist language. In some cases they're considered dirty words, he said, because, there were cases where, because of the failures or the issues, or, conflicts with other programs where anthropologists were involved, that some people in military leadership got a bad taste in their mouth about it. *Colin*

Critical suicide studies sometimes requires being hyper conscious about the vocabulary that is used, and the effects of these communications on other bodies. Sometimes it involves sweet talking, other times it involves enriching the vocabularies that are used so they can be more nourishing, life-giving, and robust. At times, operating from a critical suicide studies stance leaves some with their mouths hanging open in incredulity as they encounter resistance and ignorance. Critical suicide studies can also offer sustenance to those who are hungry for alternatives.

3.2.2. Affective Relations

Across the interviews, other embodied metaphors were used by participants to describe their work, highlighting the way that critical suicide studies is an affective mode of engagement that involves the whole body and relations with others. For example, Brigid describes the embodied reaction of the group following a problematic statement by the Chair.

> The medical professor did catch himself at one point and very quickly backtracked and like, tried to make amends and repair, cause he saw what it looked like that he was attacking a female student in the meeting. People, everyone's like backs kind of went up. *Brigid*

Tyler talks about what he calls "suicide affirmative healthcare" and shifting away from controlling others towards a logic of accompanying people as they contemplate whether to live or die. He notes that his ideas are sometimes met with strong, embodied, reactions that he describes taking place at the level of the skin (epidermal):

> I think that sometimes people, because it touches so much, so many sensitivities, the topic of suicide, people could react very quickly without kind of reading through my argument. So I feel like some people are like 'We don't want to go there' as soon as we talk about assisted suicide, et cetera. And for different reasons, they have very kind of, almost epidermal or very affective, strong reactions about it. 'No, I cannot even envision this in my head'. *Tyler*

Similarly, Carmen, a graduate student, talked about the "reluctance and hesitation" with which her desire to study suicide was met at her university. In the face of this resistance, Carmen tapped into a 'steely' embodied feeling and said, "watch me". She explains

> He said "We don't study that here, it's too hard"... I said 'Well, that's why I think it's important because people think it's too hard and that people don't want to talk about it'. He was like, 'Yeah, no, we don't work on that here. And you need to change the topic'... When people say no to me, I get like this steely (feeling), like 'Watch me, I'm going to do it'. And I just feel that the discouraging signals that I've been getting direct and indirectly are just incorrect. *Carmen*

Finally, Brigid reflects on the type of qualitative research that is commonly undertaken in critical suicide studies which she thinks has the capacity to be transformative in a way that is felt deep in the body:

> And so for me with phenomenology, it was always about the story. Like, if, so my idea was, if I could get compelling enough stories where it kind of like took people's breath away, I mean, to the point where I was writing them up sometimes, and I'd be sitting crying. *Brigid*

As these accounts testify, the topic of suicide is already emotionally laden. For those who are daring to study and respond to suicide through critical or alternative lenses, it appears that there is often an intensification of affect for speakers and listeners. The words and vocabularies that we use, the ways that we frame our projects, and the conversations that we have about suicide have effects that are often felt in the body. Such embodied and affect-laden accounts of practice and scholarship sit in sharp contrast to the more sterile and distancing language of science, evidence, protocols, and diagnostic categories favored by more mainstream suicidologists.

3.3. Critical Suicide Studies Is a Desire Line

According to participants, critical suicide studies is an organic project that is very much in-progress. It is unfolding against a backdrop of massive social upheaval, a global pandemic, increased levels of trauma and distress, growing inequalities, war and violence, skyrocketing inflation, ongoing colonial violence, forced migration, and environmental catastrophes. In that sense, critical suicide studies is much like a "desire line", which is defined as "an unplanned route or path (such as one worn into a grassy surface by repeated foot traffic) that is used by pedestrians in preference to or in the absence of a designated alternative (such as a paved pathway)" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). The term 'desire line' originates from urban planning, referring to new trails formed by people deliberately choosing an alternative route over pre-existing, well-worn paths, making visible a collective, yet unofficial, preferred line (Ruíz 2022). Desire lines, like critical suicide studies, reveal a desire for new pathways, and serve to mark out creative forms of everyday resistance. Importantly, they never completely replace the 'official' or dominant route, but rather co-exist with previous paths that always leave a trace but may no longer be useful.

With that in mind, critical suicide studies requires nurturing, care, and commitment in order to stay relevant and be sustainable. As a growing field, it holds multiple possibilities, tensions, and hopes, but it also seeks to find a coherent path forward. This theme is further elaborated under two metaphors: (1) pathbreaking metaphors and (2) preparing the ground.

3.3.1. Pathbreaking Metaphors

Critical suicide studies both gestures towards new possibilities but also draws from and mobilizes existing knowledge. Ishmael and Carmen, for example, talk about finding openings and making inroads into new paths, which is not always easy.

> And there is some interesting work happening in mental health and social justice here at [name of university]. And I've tried right to make, uh, inroads and it's very

> difficult for humanists to, uh, be taken seriously or acknowledged or recognized, right? *Ishmael*

> I'm not so convinced that you can't apply lessons learned in one context to other contexts or make some kind of discoveries or realizations in something as narrowly defined as a case study that won't still open up avenues for future research in other contexts. *Carmen*

Meanwhile, drawing on the metaphor of the ditch, Lily cautions that critical suicide studies should be alert to the danger of re-creating binaries or silos that are incompatible with a more integrated and holistic view:

> One of my concerns that I need to be constantly alert to, and I think also that goes for the greater field, is that we have to make sure that we don't fall into the other ditch. I mean, the mainstream is in the ditch of looking at the individual completely decontextualized. . . At least my aim is to try to see the whole picture and not make the same mistakes as the mainstream who dug themselves into one ditch. I don't want to end up in another ditch. I want to be on the main road. *Lily*

3.3.2. Preparing the Ground

Critical suicide studies, as a project under development, is also about preparing the ground for discussions to come. Colin suggested that the intellectual and practical work that critical suicide studies and practitioners are doing now may not be fully recognized for its full potential until some point in the future:

> Sometimes, you could spend 20 or 30 or 40 years studying suicide or anything, and the purpose isn't to accomplish something super comprehensive in that period of your life. It might be to prepare the ground for someone 40 years coming after you. You know? So you might have to sit on those boards and talk about policy and talk about this and try to be an advocate for 10 or 20 or 30 years. And it might seem impossible and all these other things, but what you're doing is. . . you could be preparing the ground for your, you know, your mentee or protege or future researchers or future applied researchers. So, keeping that in mind is really important. *Colin*

The project of critical suicide studies has also been envisioned as a task of unearthing new connections. For example, even if someone's practice or research focus is not specifically on suicide per se, there are still ways to make links across projects that are concerned with social justice, population health, and community-building. As a program evaluator, Brigid is very interested in identifying the conditions that support mentally healthy places and spaces:

> And if that person's, you know, kind of focus isn't suicide, suicidality, or, you know, pieces around that, like at all, it's gone. Um, so that's part of what I want to unearth in the evaluation is this idea of, you know, like trust and champions and like what it takes to be able to build those spaces in places. *Brigid*

Conceptualizing critical suicide studies through metaphors of desire lines and ditches, earth and ground, highlights their organic, 'under construction' quality. It is a project that is yet to be fully imagined but one that has the capacity to grow in multiple directions and where important seeds are being planted for the future.

3.4. Critical Suicide Studies Is a Yearning

When considering the future possibilities of critical suicide studies, participants spoke about the need to be creative and to engage with multiplicity and complexity. There was a clear yearning for a different kind of future. We present evidence in support of this theme through two metaphors: (1) creation and (2) collectivity.

3.4.1. Metaphors of Creation

There is a clear desire to move forward in multiple and creative ways. Participants spoke about the need to move beyond decontextualized, apolitical, and sedimented conceptions of suicide and suicide prevention. This involves an embrace of the unknown and a willingness to spark new conversations.

Kim, a practitioner with lived experience of suicide, talked about the mainstream approach to suicide prevention and highlighted the need to come up with creative solutions. Thinking creatively and 'outside the box' may be a better way of supporting those who are suicidal:

> We talk with the clinicians about, um, how to be creative about the resources that they help people connect with, outside-the-box thinking, you know, not just giving somebody a bunch of hotline numbers, because that can be very alienating. *Kim*

Another participant reflects upon the broader culture of academia, where much of the knowledge about suicide is produced in colonial institutions. Brigid understands that the spaces are often restrictive and get in the way of thinking of suicide otherwise.

> Academic spaces are incredibly colonized. Like spaces that without being completely deconstructed and torn down, I don't know that anything is ever going to look different. *Brigid*

Creative visioning was also present in Tyler's narrative. He shared hopes for the future, with a desire for spaces where people are open to new conversations and open to listen and learn from other experiences, in a posture of "wonder and generosity", as articulated by Jaworski (2020).

> I hope that we can have those very open minded and heartfelt conversations that will be rich and productive and to not become defensive when people start bringing some new ideas. And, um, because those conversation feels like life and death matter. And it is, like, for real, and I just feel like sometimes we lack compassion in our critical studies field, regardless which field it is. And I really hope that critical suicide studies will learn from so many other critical studies field where there is sometimes a lack of listening. . .And so, yeah, I hope we can develop this as a field to, to welcome each other. *Tyler*

There is also a sense of palpable excitement about how critical suicide studies might open up new spaces for re-thinking suicide and building new worlds, as evidenced here by Ishmael and Brigid:

> I am excited and really animated by how this critical turn is really opening a space for having those discussions. And that's exciting to me and why I find it so interesting how, uh, there seems to be a growing interest, at least in the US, right? In really interrogating the discourse of suicide. *Ishmael*

> And that's where I am excited and hopeful that I can hear a bunch of other critically minded people that are trying to do what I'm doing, where they're trying to find the cracks where like maybe that flower, maybe that daffodil could grow, um, you know, like, is there a space? *Brigid*

3.4.2. Metaphors of Collectivity

In making sense of critical suicide studies, Lily talks about the value of being in a community that can hold contradictions, which is open to sharing and creating together, but that is also open to disagreeing and discussing.

> The prospect of being, or the possibilities of developing things together, or writing things together with other people that I can draw on other people's experiences. But also to, to sort of contribute to the international community, this possibility of collaborating. But also just to be able to discuss and reflect together with people

> that, that, I mean, are sort of on the same page. Not necessarily agreeing on everything. That's not a good thing, I mean, then that won't bring us further, and it's completely okay to disagree, but to have an atmosphere where it's actually possible to disagree and we can still be friends and we can still discuss. Because that's difficult in other sort of communities, you're just shut down. You may be invited, but then uninvited. And if you have an opportunity to forward some of your arguments you're met with complete silence and then some other people change the topic or just continue. *Lily*

The future of critical suicide studies is also related to welcoming and embracing complexity. Many participants made sense of critical suicide studies as a community that is in constant development, challenging and critiquing dominant discourses, and looking for multiple and diverse ways for looking at the problem and asking new questions (that might not have unique answers).

> We are now several people around the world who are trying to look at this (suicide) from other directions. And, there are other ways of looking at this. And since this, I believe this is still a field where we have more questions than answers, we should start questioning all these established truths and try to look at things differently. *Lily*

Critical suicide studies was frequently conceptualized as activism, advocacy, and social action. In other words, it is not just a home where one can experience safety and comfort, or a place to do battle with those who do not share your views. It is also a site for imagining a different world and for engaging in social and political action.

For example, Tyler elaborated on his understanding of the social justice goals of critical suicide studies. He draws parallels between critical suicide studies and other activist movements and anti-oppressive practices:

> I would say that this kind of social justice goal of critical suicide studies is what distinguishes it from a more traditional social approach in sociology that is more quantitative. Um, so for me, this kind of commitment to social justice, political analysis, anti-oppressive values and perspective, it's really key and central to critical suicide studies. I would say that a little bit like anti-oppressive studies, it's a field where people are both kind of activists and scholars, uh, and the both are, both of those roles are kind of linked and interlocked, at least for many of them. *Tyler*

Lily elaborated on the idea of being both a researcher and an activist, signaling that to her, critical suicide studies is more than an intellectual community.

> I certainly feel like one [an activist] and I think it's important and I do believe it's possible to be both a researcher and an activist. You may be, you need to be, you need to be conscious of when you are what and to what degree. You can be both at the same time, but maybe, in one place you need to be more researcher than activist, but in another place you can, you can allow yourself to be more of an activist. *Lily*

Likewise, Kim spoke about being a practitioner and an advocate based on her own living and lived experience.

> I became interested in doing mental health advocacy, um, in part, because of my own lived experience, but also, folks close to me that struggled with thought of suicide. . . As a suicide attempt survivor, one of the things that I'm interested in is helping to make the suicide prevention approach less punitive towards folks that have thoughts of suicide. *Kim*

Each of these metaphors provided participants with an opportunity to express their work in critical suicide studies as a dynamic collectivity, reflecting diverse and sometimes competing, personal, political, and ethical desires and commitments. Far from being neutral

descriptions, the metaphors that participants used to describe the work were often highly affect-laden and emotionally charged, highlighting that critical suicide studies is so much more than an intellectual interest or focus of academic study. As one of our participants, Joe, remarked, "It was never just a neutral academic interest. It was professional and personal as well, in a good way".

4. Discussion

In response to our research question "How do those who draw from critical suicide studies perspectives make sense of it?", our participants have shown that critical suicide studies is a deeply personal, creative, interdisciplinary, and collective site of knowledge generation, practice, and activism. There is a strong desire to make space for different voices to be heard and to recognize the value of conflict and disagreement in the process of coming to know and do things differently. If the field is to move beyond critique towards taking actions that create ethical and meaningful worlds where all can flourish, we need new frameworks and vocabularies to think with.

The metaphors we heard convey the idea that critical suicide studies is more than an intellectual exercise. They are both a home for those who identify with their radical possibilities and ideas and it is also a site of ongoing struggle against more conservative, neoliberal imperatives and mainstream approaches. In this way, critical suicide studies resembles a social movement more than a site of scholarship.

We have found it useful to draw from Freire's critical pedagogy to deepen our understanding of critical suicide studies as a site of respite and struggle. Positivistic and biomedical explanations (of suicide and suffering) reflect the ontological assumption that "reality" is static, compartmentalized, and well-behaved (Freire 1987). Working under this positivist logic, our role as human beings (and researchers, practitioners) becomes one of observing, understanding, and reproducing the status quo, leaving very little room for creativity, transformation, or envisioning alternatives, and, ultimately, no space for hope. This invokes Freire's concept of conscientização, or critical consciousness, asserting that thinking critically, questioning, and harboring doubts about taken-for-granted realities are powerful tools for political action. Doubt is key to critical consciousness; when there is no room for questioning, there is no way of imagining alternatives (Freire 1987. We argue that this is especially true when we are thinking about suicide. We should embrace the uncertainty of it, as it is such a profoundly human, complex, and subjective matter. In the same sense, critical suicide studies invites us to accept that suicide might never be completely understood, and that sitting with uncertainty and discomfort is part of the collective work (White et al. 2016). Inspired by Freire (1987), we argue that we need to counter a static vision of reality and ongoing relations of dominance by mobilizing more meaningful, passionate, deeply personal, and collective social actions.

In that sense, critical suicide studies has to create a meaningful community, be subversive, and move towards transformation to resist the distancing expert and scientific discourses that maintain social order. As we learned through this study, critical suicide studies is personal, embodied, and collective. It needs to be this way because the work of social justice praxis can never be alienating and reproductive. Critical suicide studies provides a home for those who share the goal of emancipation, epistemological diversity, and equity. It is through communication that human life makes any sense, and it is through communion and solidarity that we are able to create possibilities for transformation (Freire 1987).

As our participants' accounts have illuminated, critical suicide studies serves as both a refuge and a battleground—an arena where opposition is fierce. Reflecting on Freire's (1987) assertion that oppressive systems are at ease when people conform to the world, and threatened when they question it, we understand the tensions confronting practitioners, scholars, and activists in critical suicide studies. Their interrogation and defiance of oppressive and inequitable structures such as racism, colonialism, and patriarchy—which make life unbearable for many—directly threatens those who benefit from such injustices. When we challenge the system of privilege, the privileged often feel disadvantaged, as

Freire poetically describes, because previously they could eat, study, travel, dance, and listen to Beethoven, while thousands did not eat, did not study, and did not travel, much less dance or listen to Beethoven (Freire 1987). Any attempt to address this inequality or promote equitable lives is perceived as a profound violation of their rights—rights that were sustained by the suffering of those who died by hunger, pain, sadness, and loss of hope. As a site of counter-hegemonic activism and a platform for social change, critical suicide studies is often in a disruptive mode, while also attempting to construct a community of shared meaning among their members.

As a relatively new and transdisciplinary site of scholarship and activism, critical suicide studies is not a static field. It is organic, open-ended, and dynamic. It is constantly creating new and unexplored pathways. Through its commitment to complexifying the discourses of suicide and suicide prevention, critical suicides studies exists at the intersection of multiple critical social movements and theorists. In the fast-changing and complex world we live in, it would be rather simplistic to address suicidality and matters of how we live and die as detached from issues related to politics, neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, ableism, and environmental injustice.

Indeed, there is a growing body of scholarship both within and outside of suicidology or the psy-disciplines contributing to our understanding and responses to suicide. For instance, feminist and gender studies discuss the ways in which gender and power dynamics contribute to suicide, illuminating how gender differences in suicide rates are linked to societal expectations of masculinity and femininity, patriarchy, and reproduction rights (Jaworski 2016; Canetto 1993; Fullagar 2003). Queer studies shed light on the unique experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, discussing the impact of discrimination and heteronormativity, while providing a more nuanced account of the conditions that make suicide an alternative (Cover 2016; McDermott et al. 2018). Critical mental health scholarship and Mad studies challenge the medicalizing, pathologizing, and simplistic understanding of mental health, emphasizing the social and political factors that contribute to mental distress and suicide (Baril 2023). Critical disability studies make visible the power relations between disabled and non-disabled people, addressing the social constructed aspect of disability and the impact of ableism on livability and suicide (Wendell 1996; Baril 2023). Critical race theory recognizes the impact of systemic racism and historic oppression on mental health and suicide (Wexler and Gone 2012). Indigenous studies and decolonial scholarship expose the disproportionately high rates of suicide among Indigenous peoples, as a consequence of the ongoing violence of racism, colonialism, and imperialism. These scholars denounce the risk of 'settler suicidology' (Cardon 2022), which reproduces colonial violence by centering narrow, Western, and individualist worldviews in suicide prevention protocols (Cardon 2022; Ansloos and Peltier 2022; Kral and Idlout 2016). Finally, in a cutting-edge example of merging multiple critical frameworks, Baril (2023) draws from crip, queer, trans, and Mad studies to conceptualize the oppression of the suicidal person, giving rise to a new approach to understanding and responding to suicidality that includes harm reduction, radical inclusion, and in some cases, assisted suicide. It is truly remarkable how multiple critical social and activist movements can be brought together to address pressing social issues, showing the intersections and sites of solidarity between them. Critical suicide studies need not exist in isolation. Baril's work highlights how there are new terrains, understandings, and alternatives to be created when we creatively transgress the territorial boundaries of disciplines and practices.

Similarly, there is an invitation to transgress the boundaries of the conventional vocabulary used to describe, understand, and address suicide. Given suicide's unfathomable quality (Jaworski and Scott 2016) and its complex entanglement with other social problems and structures of inequality (Fernández et al. 2021), it is not surprising that participants turned to metaphorical and embodied language to express their understandings of the social relations constituting suicide, suicide prevention, and critical suicide studies. By using the affective vocabularies of loneliness, home, yearning, joy, wonder, fear, enchantment, embodiment, and collectivity, we provide a stark contrast to the sterilized evidence-based

practice language of objectivism, rationality, science, measurement, control, targets, and outcomes. In this way, critical suicide studies challenges the imperatives of neutrality and objectivism found in dominant quantitative and biomedical framings of truth, knowledge, and science (Hjelmeland 2016), opening the door for more creative discourse in science and practice.

Our participants also challenged the assumption of objectivity and neutrality by sharing rich stories about their excitement of being together as a community to reflect on and challenge what suicide is and how it could (or if it should) be prevented. Through metaphors of creativity and collectivity, they made visible the yearning for a different kind of future. Getting together to dream about better worlds, and worlds worth living in for all, can be hopeful, exciting, and, at times, joyful, based on more "care-centred politics" (Gottlieb 2022). We believe that by reflecting critically on suicide, we create space for more lively, interesting, and robust debates about life, agency, fight, transformation, re-creation, and emancipation, and that is when it becomes exciting to be a part of this community. To further reflect upon the role of joy in the fight for political and societal change, below we draw from the arguments of the political theorist and feminist activist Emma Goldman (1931).

Within many academic spaces and some activist communities, there can often be a heaviness in discussing suicide, as if to take the topic seriously, one must inhabit a mode of joylessness, fearing that joy and beauty would lack seriousness or hurt the severity of a cause. While this is not universally the case, and we know of many activist communities that are fueled by joy and hope for more just, bright, and better realities—one example is queer and trans studies' current call for a rise of queer joy (Persaud and Crawley 2022)— it can sometimes be challenging to express joy and delight when addressing a phenomenon like suicide. But Goldman (1931) argues that art, community, joy, and beauty give people energy to keep resisting, and become a source of nourishment (like critical suicide studies has become). A cause which stands for a beautiful ideal/future, for worlds worth living in for all, should not demand the denial of life and joy. Joy is a part of the dream of a beautiful future, and it becomes an inspirational force that acts to make visible a better world (Goldman 1931). Goldman (1931) reminds us, and we agree, that everybody is entitled to "beautiful, radiant things" (p.58).

In accordance with Goldman's ideas, we suggest that critical suicide studies wholeheartedly embraces this excitement. Excitement does not minimize the severity of the oppressive and unjust conditions we fight against, and it does not belittle the sadness, violence, and pain that surrounds suicide. Rather, it is a remarkable testament to people's strength and creativity—a form of resistance often overlooked or underestimated (Thompson 2009). We contend that, in a world marked by inequity, social injustice, and pervasive violence, coming together as a community to create a sense of home, hope, desire, and yearning is an act of resistance in itself.

Our study investigates the movement of critical suicide studies from the perspectives of those actively participating in their unfolding, showing that they are an ongoing site of scholarship, activism, and practice, which need continuous reflexivity and nourishment to move beyond crystallized conceptions and sedimented vocabularies. We call for an intentionally personal, passionate, creative, and emancipatory practice and, ultimately, we take the beautiful metaphors used by our participants as an opportunity to make visible the complexities, contradictions, and ambivalences of suicide. Critical suicide studies can be a matter of life and death; it can be respite; it can be fight; it can be profoundly sad and somehow joyous. And overall, it has the potential to resist simplistic, reductionist, decontextualized, and one-size-fits-all approaches, advocating for a more just, caring, beautiful and inclusive world.

Finally, we reflect upon the limitations of our study. First, all of our participants were located in North America and Europe, showing the continued dominance of white, Western, Global North perspectives in the field. Second, even though we are not seeking to create distance or produce neutral knowledge, we acknowledge that both authors are

affiliated with critical suicide studies, which positions us as insiders in the community. By acknowledging that, we make visible that our biases as insiders shape our data collection and analysis. Lastly, the methodological and conceptual choice of centering participants' metaphorical language, while a creative and evocative approach, might also limit the depth of the analysis by neglecting the material realities of participant experiences. More than merely representational, participants' affective language speaks to the embodied and material realities that characterize the social, political, and affective relations constituting critical suicide studies. We invite future researchers to explore and increase the engagement of critical suicide studies with other social movements, and to work to develop new and creative language and practices that will allow us to understand suicide otherwise.

5. Conclusions

This qualitative study was designed to provide us with a deeper understanding of how practitioners, scholars, and activists are making sense of critical suicide studies, the ideas and frameworks that guide them, and the world-making practices that animate their vision of the future. As a critical, questioning, and reflexive community, critical suicide studies often raise more questions than answers. We welcome such incompleteness. To acknowledge and embrace the incomplete is to fuel critical questioning, for it is only where there is uncertainty that there is room to re-examine, re-create, transform, and seek out alternatives (Freire 1987). We also found that critical suicide studies shares many features with other critical social movements and theorists and there is clearly an opportunity to build even stronger solidarities across diverse fields of scholarship and practice that share a vision for a more just, ethical, and sustainable world. As a relatively new site of scholarship, practice, and activism, there is an evolving community that fosters complexity, self-reflexivity, excitement, ambiguities, and hopes for a creative future. Critical suicide studies' future viability as a serious intellectual and social movement requires the ongoing development of robust theorizing, building communities of solidarity, and the close examination of the discursive and tactical practices that create the conditions for shared meanings across its adherents.

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