

Suicide justice: Adopting Indigenous feminist methods in settler suicidology

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Abstract

White settler colonies around the world have long reported disproportionately high rates of Indigenous suicides, a consequence of the continuing violence of imperialism. This article posits a need for interdisciplinary approaches to address this crisis and therefore turns to humanist methods developed in Indigenous and feminist scholarship. I analyze texts from U.S. psychologist Edwin Shneidman to rearticulate their relationship to what I call settler suicidology. I then evoke literary critic Eve K. Sedgwick's reparative reading method to reimagine suicide prevention as suicide justice, reading the novel *There There* by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho) to advocate for distributive justice as a new approach to Indigenous suicide crises. My term suicide justice names increasing accountability between settler suicide workers and the communities they seek to serve.

Keywords

critical suicide studies, decolonization, interdisciplinary feminism, social justice, suicide prevention

A human being's self-destruction should be discussed. . .in terms of relevant words like happiness (or its absence), joy, misery, suffering, perturbation, hopelessness, anguish, unbearable pain. We should substitute the OED (*Oxford English Dictionary*) for the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*).

—Edwin Shneidman, founder of suicidology¹

To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*.

—Paolo Freire²

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Just bury me in the land of my ancestors—my own land, the one you people take away from us.

—Anonymous suicide note³

Histories of the field of suicide prevention generally position U.S. psychologist Edwin Shneidman as a founding figure. Among his contributions are the establishment of the first U.S. suicide prevention center in Los Angeles in 1958 and the creation of a major professional organization and academic journal for the study of suicide. It is perhaps surprising, given suicidology's positivist bent inherited from psychology, that Shneidman advocated for a more expansive account of suicide than the field currently offers. As quoted in the epigraph above, he advocated use of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) instead of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). From my position as a humanist working in interdisciplinary suicide studies, this is a welcome approach. It will take more than one discipline, more than one perspective, more than one method to ease the suffering that precedes suicide. I read Shneidman's reference to the OED as a gesture toward a range of approaches—including and beyond the DSM—that foreground a critical interdisciplinarity.

While Shneidman's turn to the OED invites a broader conceptualization of suicide, however, it is important to note that the OED is not a neutral text. As a settler colony, U.S. historiography generally positions itself as an heir to European, and particularly British, culture. The ongoing status of the OED as the definitive source about the English language, as well as the ongoing primacy of English as lingua franca in the U.S. and beyond, is an imperial legacy. Imperialism has had devastating effects on Indigenous peoples around the world. This article focuses on elevated rates of Indigenous suicides in many settler colonies—in some cases twenty times higher than settler suicide rates (Pollock et al., 2018). Indigenous scholars and critical suicidologists continue to remake suicide research and prevention to align with, and to be led by, Indigenous communities and culturally responsive methods. In this essay, I join this effort by reframing prevention as what I term *suicide justice*. The field of suicidology—and the broader field of suicide prevention it has shaped—have an opportunity to rename and reframe their central purpose. Rather than suicide prevention, which has recurring problems with its Euro settler roots, I offer the term *suicide justice* to name ongoing efforts to increase the accountability of suicidology to the worlds it seeks to serve.

My methods derive from humanist fields broadly and from Indigenous and feminist approaches in particular. In the first section, I outline two narrative theories that structure this article: public narratives of historical traumas and literary critic Eve K. Sedgwick's paranoid and reparative reading methods. Paranoid reading is the primary method for the second section, which critiques the origins of what I call settler suicidology. The third section turns to the novel *There There* by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho) to practice a reparative reading of suicide prevention reimagined as suicide justice. I conclude by advocating for distributive justice as a practical application and way forward for the field. In this way, the article ultimately claims that a broader scope of justice methods—including economic, political, and social—are necessary to address the Indigenous suicide crises in white settler colonies.

Public narratives of suicide prevention

I argue that *suicide justice* best names the approach advocated in this article, but it is also an imperfect naming. Perhaps an established term like *health justice* would better serve this departure from the paradigm of suicide prevention, or perhaps this is a time to invoke Jasbir K. Puar's concept of debility (2017), which I summarize for my students as the health effects of injustice. Others have suggested terms like *lived justice*, *justice for life*, *hate kills*, or *colonization kills* as more apt names (e.g. Reynolds, 2012). I use the term *suicide justice* because of its proximity to the term *suicide prevention*—such proximity eases the substitution of terms and thereby of paradigms. As made clear by the recent publication of *Suicide and Social Justice* (Button and Marsh, 2019), this burgeoning conversation is already situated around the terms “suicide” and “justice” separately. Though the alternatives listed above offer capacious frameworks, *suicide justice* is useful in part because it focuses more narrowly on self-killing and its relationship to social (in)justice.

The term *suicide justice* names a wide range of efforts that have been underway for quite some time in the interdisciplinary study of suicide. For example, Nathaniel Mohatt et al. (2014b) have written insightfully about the role of historical traumas—including colonization, enslavement, displacement, internment, torture, and genocide—on descendants of survivors:

historical trauma functions as a public narrative for particular groups or communities that connects present-day experiences and circumstances to the trauma so as to influence health. Treating historical trauma as a public narrative shifts the research discourse away from an exclusive search for past causal variables that influence health to identifying how present-day experiences, their corresponding narratives, and their health impacts are connected to public narratives of historical trauma for a particular group or community. . . . [T]he connection between historical trauma and present-day experiences, related narratives, and health impacts may function as a source of present-day distress as well as resilience. (p. 128)

Narrative is central here in accounting for a long list of health problems outlined by Mohatt et al. The way that an individual understands their own life story (and that of their community) is shaped by these historical trauma narratives—one's own hardship is understood as part of a larger pattern of hardship and survival of one's people. Empirical studies have found higher rates of PTSD, injection drug use, exposure to sexual violence, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and so on in generations born to survivors of historical trauma. According to Mohatt et al., the experience of both public reminders of historical trauma (such as symbols and structural inequalities) and personal reminders (such as discrimination and personal trauma) influence an individual's sense of the salience of the public narrative, which in turn affects individual and community health (p. 132). In other words, many people experience their own life stories in relation to public narratives of historical trauma, which can result in more suffering (the weight of past traumas in the present) as well as more resilience (being part of a community that has survived horrific violence).

This theory from Mohatt et al. about the salience of narrative brings together scientific and humanist fields, an intersection that I further develop in this essay. Because it names the ongoing shift toward community and culturally-based work, *suicide justice*

reframes suicide prevention from strict empiricism to interdisciplinarity. I use Sedgwick's methods of paranoid and reparative reading to analyze public narratives of suicide prevention. Paranoid reading is the mode of the exposé; it seeks to uncover both overt and subtle ableism, classism, homophobia, imperialism, racism, sexism, and transphobia. For Sedgwick, paranoid reading is necessary to illuminate structures of injustice but incomplete without reparative reading. The reparative reader first reads with paranoia, but then seeks to rebuild with the energy of hope: "Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did" (Sedgwick, 2003: 146). Put another way, in anthropologist Stevenson's (2014) ethnographic study of suicides in Inuit communities, "sometimes it is the truth of the possible as opposed to the actual that needs to be conveyed" (p. 14). When social scientists invoke public narratives, they invite methods developed in the study of narrative. Methods that value creativity and justice—the "truth of the possible"—deserve attention in suicide studies just as do empirical methods. My interdisciplinary framework of suicide justice uses Sedgwick's paranoid and reparative reading methods to first identify shortcomings of settler suicidology and then to reimagine the field's objective as suicide justice, privileging Indigenous and feminist interventions.

Origins of settler suicidology

Suicidology, according to one of its earliest and foremost practitioners Shneidman, is the scientific study of suicide, typically in support of suicide prevention. Many contemporary practices in suicide prevention can be traced to Shneidman—he initiated key terms and methods of the field such as psychache and psychological autopsy, co-founded the first suicide prevention center in the U.S., founded the American Association of Suicidology and the journal *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, and lent his name to an award recognizing outstanding research in the field. Shneidman is said to have coined the word "suicidology" itself. The suffix-ology, used to position the field as a science, refers in part to a method initiated by Shneidman and Farberow in *Clues to Suicide* (1957): the empirical study of suicide notes. Shneidman (1991) frequently recounted this method as part of the field's origin story, what he called the "fulcrum moment of [his] suicidological life" when he discovered hundreds of suicide notes saved by a Los Angeles coroner and imagined

that their vast potential value could be immeasurably increased if I did *not* read them, but rather compared them, in a controlled blind experiment, with simulated suicide notes that might be elicited from matched nonsuicidal persons. My old conceptual friend, John Stuart Mill's Method of Difference, came to my side and handed me my career. (p. 247)

In other published accounts, Shneidman (1999) describes the moment of epiphany thus: "I felt like a cowpoke who, wandering home drunk on a dark night, stumbles into a pool of oil and is just sober enough to realize he has found his fortune . . . I have always been attracted to excitement, and few things could be more exciting than the pursuit of

understanding in a virgin field that involved such strong and intimate human emotions” (pp. 165–166). In comparing his career in suicide prevention to a cowpoke making a fortune by extracting oil, Shneidman styles himself as a rugged hero who enables progress through science and as a naïve settler who happens upon unclaimed resources that catalyze his personal success. Cowpokes are associated with the colonization of what is now the western United States, and Shneidman’s characterization of suicide prevention as a “virgin field” evokes both the 19th century imperial propaganda of “manifest destiny” in the western U.S. and a passive, feminized backdrop for heroic masculinity. The U.S. settler colony (like other settler colonies) exists because of land and resource theft (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). In these anecdotes, Shneidman imagines the origins of the field of suicidology as parallel to the origins of the U.S.; he turns to settler colonial tropes to narrativize his suicide note discovery. In the dozens of times Shneidman recounts his origins anecdote in his publications, he emphasizes the happy accident of his discovery and the stroke of insight in selecting these notes for a scientific experiment. By casting himself as the stumbling, drunk cowpoke who got lucky, he occludes his deliberate process of extracting value—a successful career—from these intimate and emotional texts. In this way, Shneidman’s analogy presents the expansion of European scientific philosophies to new subject matter as akin to the expansion of European power to new land and resources. Like countless settlers before and since, Shneidman stakes his career and his fortune on empire.

Another founding figure of contemporary suicide research, Émile Durkheim, aspired to use scientific methodology in the service of understanding and prevention. Durkheim’s *Le Suicide* integrated statistics with philosophy in a way that has had a lasting influence on the field of sociology. Though Durkheim’s conclusions in *Le Suicide* were quickly replaced using more sophisticated statistical methods, his incorporation of statistics and classification of suicide as social rather than individual have endured in social sciences fields: “according to sociologists, people do not kill themselves. Instead, those who commit suicide are always, at least partly, killed by the social conditions in which they live” (Durkheim, 2010; Pickering and Walford, 2000⁴: 4). This perspective continues in the present especially in the work of critical suicidologists who work in a field that disproportionately privileges individualized, medicalized, and pathologized approaches to suicide prevention. Both of Durkheim’s interventions paved the way for researchers in critical suicide and Indigenous studies to identify colonization as at least a partial cause for Indigenous suicide crises (as well as to identify culture as prevention, discussed below). Yet Indigenous science differs from knowledge systems favored by the global north:

The English language concept Indigenous science broadly refers to the idea that Indigenous peoples have their own systems of knowledge for observing, collecting, categorizing, recording, using, disseminating and revising information and concepts that explain how the world works; they use their own knowledge systems to ensure the flourishing of their communities’ health, livelihood, vibrancy and self-determination. The historic origins of Indigenous sciences are unique to each Indigenous peoples and differ from the dominant scientific disciplines found in countries such as the US or Japan. (Whyte et al. 2016: 25)

Whyte et al. are primarily focused on Indigenous environmental science; however, the same approach applies to the study of suicide. The limitations of scientific practice of the

global north have also been the subject of numerous feminist critiques, for instance by science writer Margaret Wertheim who argues that “science should be presented not as an isolated activity taking place away from the rest of society, but as a profoundly human and culturally contingent pursuit” (Wertheim 1996: xiii). Wertheim’s sharpest critiques are for massively expensive scientific projects that seek grandiose explanations for physical phenomena while failing to ameliorate the vast array of problems around the world—her study focuses on physics, but it might as well be about the “grandiose explanations” attempting to explain all suicide everywhere. Though Whyte et al. and Wertheim focus their interventions into global north science differently, they are both relevant to the specific project Shneidman first undertook in the field of suicidology.

In order to apply Mill’s method of difference, Shneidman and Farberow attempted to isolate the variable of suicidality. To this end, they selected 33 notes written by men in southern California who were “Caucasian, Protestant, native-born, and between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-nine,” which they then matched “man-for-man” with 33 men of the same demographic who wrote simulated suicide notes (Shneidman and Farberow 1957: 199). Despite the clear flaws of studying suicide by reading 66 notes written only by white settler men in the U.S., these 66 notes continue to be studied for the purpose of suicide prevention more than half a century later (Grundlingh, 2018; Ioannou and Debowska, 2014; Jones and Bennell, 2007; Leenaars and Balance, 1981; Lester, 2008; Pestian et al., 2010; Shapero, 2011). In this study, as well as in Shneidman’s subsequent suicide note research, settler suicidology positions whiteness as both default and invisible. (This is clear for instance in Shneidman’s archive of suicide notes, dated 1960–1990, where normalized [i.e. white, heterosexual] identities are unlabeled while others he labels with terms including “Oriental” and “lesbian” OAC (1933–2007).) Shneidman’s career study of suicide notes culminated in *Autopsy of a Suicidal Mind* (2004) wherein he argued that reading a suicide note in the context of a life story can produce meaningful understanding of the death. While this approach improves upon the positivist and acontextual method with which he started, it nevertheless foregrounds the particulars of an individual’s personal context (and, in the case study, a straight white man) in a way that neglects broader historical and cultural context. Shneidman’s positivist approach imagines suicide to be a single coherent phenomenon separable from its historical and cultural contexts, aspiring toward the gold-standard evidence base of the randomized controlled trial (RCT). An alternative model, rooted in Indigenous science, does not aspire to the RCT as the way to intervene in Indigenous suicide crises but instead to the method of “culture as prevention.”⁵ Culture as prevention refers to Indigenous communities using their own knowledge and practices to create programs and interventions for youth. Particularly amid the ongoing harms of colonization, a narrow focus on ahistorical, acontextual modes of suicide prevention are inadequate responses to Indigenous suicide.

The failings of Shneidman’s settler reading methods are most obvious when it comes to this note, archived among his papers at UCLA, which he categorized as “From Mexican-American”:

Just bury me in the land of my ancestors—my own land, the one you people take away from us.

-R⁶

The source of the ethnicity Mexican American identifying this author is unclear. While it is true that most Mexican Americans have at least some Indigenous ancestry, it is also true that U.S. coroners often misidentify Native Americans post-mortem (Noymer et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 1996: 23; Jim et al., 2014). Shneidman did not identify any of the hundreds of suicide note authors in his archive as Native American, though at the time the notes were written (1960–1990) the Red Power movement was ongoing and Indigenous American suicide rates were increasing, ultimately reaching rates that exceed, sometimes by more than three times, the rate of all other people in the U.S. (Olson and Wahab, 2006; Wallace et al., 1996). This note represents a missed opportunity for Shneidman specifically, and settler suicidology more broadly, to see the unfolding of an Indigenous suicide crisis. Regardless of the note author's precise identity, the note clearly expresses a grievance of land theft common to many Indigenous communities in settler colonies. Perhaps most striking about this note's formal innovation into the suicide note genre is its direct address. Unlike many of the other notes in Shneidman's archive, this note is not written to a loved one, a family member, or a friend. R's note addresses an enemy, accusing "you people" of taking away land from the author's invoked community. The author recognizes that various institutional actors will read the note—police, coroners, medical examiners, suicide prevention workers, perhaps the author even anticipated researchers like myself—and that settlers are an imagined audience perhaps more realistic than notes written to loved ones. The author invokes stolen ancestral land that promises a return if only in the form of burial. As Harrison (2001) writes, "the surest way to take possession of a place and secure it as one's own is to bury one's dead in it" (p. 399). This author of this note anticipates burial on ancestral land where their ancestors have been buried from time immemorial. R illuminates histories of Indigenous genocide that form the foundation—literally, in the form of burial grounds—of U.S. institutions including settler suicidology. And yet, though the note illuminates injustices longstanding and deeply felt, though it evokes a public narrative of historical trauma to contextualize the personal devastation of suicide, it is also possible to read this note reparatively—acknowledging that some of the potential for reparation is already lost with this person's life. However harmful Shneidman's archival and interpretive methods, this note and its message have been preserved such that it can reach audiences beyond its time and place. In offering critique, R gestures toward a future different from the one built by settler suicidology. And, in anticipating burial, the author seals their claim to possession of their ancestral land.

Shneidman's legacy continues to influence suicidology. Despite many new developments, key perspectives and priorities underpinning settler suicidology remain. For example, one award-winning campaign in the U.S. and Australia called "Man Therapy" was repeatedly recommended to me after I presented an early version of this article for the 2019 American Association of Suicidology conference in Denver, Colorado. With taglines like "Trust me. Therapy will not cause you to grow lady bits," Man Therapy uses comedy to encourage men to seek mental health treatment by repeatedly disparaging women, people of color, trans folk, and men who do not embody stereotypical masculinity. In so doing, Man Therapy deploys imperial sex-gender ideology to bolster white masculine settler colonialism around the world. This is one example of suicide prevention being used to justify harmful rhetoric. Suicide justice, in contrast, moves toward

ideals of accountability and fairness as an antidote to the field's overidentification with empire, whiteness, settler colonialism, and masculinity.

Indigenous and feminist suicide justice

So far I have analyzed harmful methods of settler suicidology from its origins. As demonstrated above, paranoid reading of the language and narratives of settler suicidology reveal the way that the field continues to privilege the interests of the (white male) settler even amidst a crisis of Indigenous suicides. This section is a reparative reading of suicidology, turning to Indigenous and feminist perspectives to point toward new directions for suicide justice. To this end, I invoke Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter who identified aspirational work as the terrain of humanism: "Scholars in the humanities, and cultural workers more generally, have a responsibility for what is and is not imaginable in their lifetimes. Police brutality, the destruction of the physical environment, the theft of resources from the so-called developing world, and every other horror of our time are based on dominant and now-totalizing understanding of what life is, *a poetics of the possible*" (paraphrased in Gumbs, 2020: x, emphasis mine). One Indigenous cultural worker, novelist Orange (2018), seeks to expand what is imaginable in the field of suicide prevention in his first novel *There There*. In one scene, a fictional keynote speaker at a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration conference addresses a ballroom full of professionals:

What I'm here to talk about is how our whole approach since day one has been like this: Kids are jumping out of the windows of burning buildings, falling to their deaths. And we think the problem is that they're jumping. This is what we've done: We've tried to find ways to get them to stop jumping. Convince them that burning alive is better than leaving when the shit gets too hot for them to take. We've boarded up windows and made better nets to catch them, found more convincing ways to tell them not to jump. They're making the decision that it's better to be dead and gone than to be alive in what we have here, this life, the one we made for them, the one they've inherited. . . . But how do we instill in our children the will to live? At these conferences. And in the offices. In the emails and at the community events, there has to be an urgency, a do-whatever-at-any-cost sort of spirit behind what we do. Or fuck the programs, maybe we should send the money to the families themselves, who need it and know what to do with it, since we all know what that money goes toward, salaries and conferences like this one. I'm sorry. I get paid outta that shit too, and actually, shit, I'm not sorry, this issue shouldn't be met with politeness or formality. We can't get lost in the career advancements and grant objectives, the day-to-day grind, as if we have to do what we do. We choose what we do, and in that choice comes the community. . . . We need to be about what we're always saying we're about. And if we can't, and we're really just about ourselves, we need to step aside, let somebody else from the community who really cares, who'll really do something, let them come in and help. Fuck all the rest. (pp. 104–105)

Orange's character who hears the keynote address, Jacquie Red Feather, works as a substance abuse counselor whose personal relationship to alcohol is in part a way of coping with traumatic memories of her daughter's suicide by gunshot. Jacquie links her daughter's death and her own substance abuse to the Veho, the white man imagined as a trickster spider who demands "first you're gonna give me all your land, then your attention,

until you forget how to give it. Until your eyes are drained and you can't see behind you and there's nothing ahead, and the needle, the bottle, or the pipe is the only thing in sight that makes any sense" (p. 106). While suicide is not the primary focus of the novel's plot, which culminates in a mass shooting at an Oakland pow wow, it is nevertheless one of many traumas endured by Orange's characters alongside sexual assault and domestic violence.

I read Orange's burning building metaphor in relation to his reclamation of urbanity from the novel's nonfiction essay prologue. As an Indigenous person born and raised in Oakland, California, Orange writes in the first-person plural about his displaced community making home in the city:

An Urban Indian belongs to the city, and cities belong to the earth. Everything here is formed in relation to every other living and nonliving thing from the earth. . . . Buildings, freeways, cars—are these not off the earth? . . . Were we at one time not something else entirely, *Homo sapiens*, single celled organisms, space dust, unidentifiable pre-bang quantum theory? Cities form in the same way as galaxies. Urban Indians feel at home walking in the shadow of a downtown building. We came to know the downtown Oakland skyline better than we did any sacred mountain range. . . . We know the smell of gas and freshly wet concrete and burned rubber better than we do the smell of cedar or sage or even fry bread—which isn't traditional, like reservations aren't traditional, but nothing is original, everything comes from something that came before, which was once nothing. Everything is new and doomed. We ride buses, trains, and cars across, over, and under concrete plains. Being Indian has never been about returning to the land. The land is everywhere or nowhere. (p. 11)

This polemic serves as context for when one of Orange's characters meets a white hipster and hears him say, "no one's really from [Oakland], right?" (p. 38). By contrast, Orange and his character both claim Oakland as home because their ancestral lands are buried, "developed over. . . glass and concrete and wire and steel, unreturnable covered memory. There is no there there" (p. 39). And yet, Orange's view that "cities form in the same way as galaxies" places the Oakland skyline into a new cosmology, a legitimate home for Urban Indians. Thus, when Orange's SAMHSA keynote uses a burning building at a metaphor for the suffering and injustice that precedes or causes suicide, his message is to put out the fire and thereby eliminate the need for suicide—not to allow the building to burn to the ground.

Orange's nonfiction prologue also recounts North American Indians' centuries long experiences of genocide, land theft, displacement, and forced assimilation: "massacre as prologue" (p. 8). The genocidal process of colonization continues into the present:

When they first came for us with their bullets, we didn't stop moving even though the bullets moved twice as fast as the sound of our screams, and even when their heat and speed broke our skin, shattered our bones, skulls, pierced our hearts, we kept on, even when we saw the bullets send our bodies flailing through the air like flags, like the many flags and buildings that went up in place of everything we knew this land to be before. The bullets were premonitions, ghosts from dreams of a hard, fast future. The bullets moved on after moving through us, became the promise of what was to come, the speed and the killing, the hard, fast lines of borders and buildings. They took everything and ground it down to dust as fine as gunpowder, they fired their guns into the air in victory

and the strays flew out into the nothingness of histories written wrong and meant to be forgotten. Stray bullets and consequences are landing on our unsuspecting bodies even now (p. 10).

Thus, the suicide of Jacquie Red Feather's daughter is imagined as a "stray bullet" left over from the settler colony's violent origins, an apt example of the relationship between public narratives of historical trauma and individual suicides as explicated above. Restricted access to potentially fatal items such as guns can be effective suicide prevention (Yip et al., 2012). These policies are worth exploring in order to prevent ongoing trauma to families and communities. However, means restrictions alone are inadequate as a response to the ongoing violence—the "stray bullets"—of settler colonialism. Suicide justice demands attention to a "poetics of the possible" such as the structural change proposed by Orange's character, where funding does not concentrate on high salaries and posh conferences but on direct aid to families and communities, to people in the community who feel the urgency of assuaging the suffering that precedes suicide yet lack the resources to do so.

The "poetics of the possible" might also be understood using anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's phrase "the capacity to aspire," which sees culture as the space where "ideas of the future . . . are embedded and nurtured," a space which creates the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004: 59). Orange's novel seeks to open the field of suicide prevention to new horizons, in this case by reimagining ethical funding structures. When Orange's character proposes "send[ing] the money to the families themselves," he posits distributive justice as an economic model of suicide justice because of its long-term effects in reducing suffering. His insistence that urgency belongs to the immediate needs of the affected communities, rather than to "career advancements and grant objectives," imagines a shift in focus for a U.S. interdisciplinary academic and professional field where many people earn a living and yet where suicide rates have been rising for decades. A scientific approach to prevention that understands suicide as a unified phenomenon crossing cultures, classes and ethnic groups will struggle to justify an intervention like Orange's. How could wealth redistribution help when wealthy people also take their own lives? This is why alternative disciplines, sciences, and perspectives are needed. Orange approaches the problem willing to critique existing structures that are failing Indigenous communities while also proposing more just alternatives. In this way, he enacts both paranoid and reparative readings of suicide prevention work.

Distributive justice has been recently enacted and proposed by progressives in the U.S. For example, Los Angeles County's Measure J (November 2020) reallocated 10% of the county's funds toward health services and community programs. Former mayor of Stockton, California Michael Tubbs successfully piloted a universal basic income program for a group of residents earning less than \$50,000 per year; similar guaranteed income programs have been developed across California and are now supported with statewide funding. National U.S. politicians have proposed wealth taxes in order to combat growing inequality. These are examples of policy-level actions toward distributive justice that can be understood as overlapping with suicide justice (in addition to many other problems). In other words, while none of these policies have been proposed as interventions into patterns of Indigenous suicide, they are all models for approaching the kind of economic justice Orange proposes in *There There*. Michael J. Chandler and

Christopher E. Lalonde argue that “because suicide is so statistically rare, any and all efforts to pick out in advance those uncommon individuals who do go on to actually take their own life is statistically doomed to failure”; as a result, tracking warning signs and other individual approaches to prevention are ineffective and perhaps impossible (pp. 67–68). Justice for communities, as an alternative to pathologizing individuals, is a better way forward. Because stolen land and natural resources form a key basis of wealth in settler colonies, distributive justice is a long-overdue method for addressing the continuing harm inflicted by settler colonialism including (and beyond) suicide crises. Distributive justice also responds to the value-extraction Shneidman repeatedly used to describe his use of suicide notes as he founded the field of suicidology, analyzed above. It is a shift in focus from professionalization and career-building to ameliorating injustice, a reconceptualization of the sources and beneficiaries of extracted value.

Orange’s call for economic suicide justice invites us to expand reparative reading to political reparations. In a settler colony, reparation is embedded in the larger process of decolonization, powerfully expressed by Tuck and Yang (2012) as a literal process of unsettling those of us who have long lived on stolen land. At its core, decolonization is repatriation of colonized land for Indigenous peoples; and, since land is the “basis of wealth, power, [and] law in settler nation-states,” this is also a process of wealth redistribution and Indigenous sovereignty (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 19). These are not the only components of suicide justice in settler colonies, but they are integral to it. Without the broad structural goals of reparation and decolonization, suicide justice can only be partial and incomplete. As expressed in R’s suicide note above, the suffering caused by half a century of colonization—including genocide, displacement, poverty, and debility—calls for a scale of action beyond that currently imagined in suicide prevention. Indigenous and critical suicidologists demand accountability to the context in which suicide professionals live and work. Indigenous science and technology scholar TallBear (2013) (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) articulates the issue this way:

Both feminist and indigenous epistemologists call out the sciences that do not account for their partiality and for representing their views as universal and objective, or value-neutral. Although indigenous and feminist thinkers don’t necessarily rely on the same analytical frameworks (for example, indigenous sovereignty infuses indigenous analyses), the two intellectual worlds both push the sciences to be more accountable to the worlds (within which) they study. (p. 22)

Arvin et al. (2013) similarly argue that “Native feminist theories make claims not to an authentic past outside of settler colonialism, but to an ongoing project of resistance that continues to contest patriarchy and its power relationships” (p. 21). Likewise Todd (2016) (Red River Métis, Otipemisiwak) observes that “our interventions as Indigenous feminists are . . . necessary to hold our colleagues up to the goals they define for themselves.” Many Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) have called for research that centers Indigenous worldviews and concerns. My own position as a white settler living/trespassing⁷ in Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands)—the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Gabriolino/Tongva peoples—means that my perspective is not Indigenous. Rather, as a white settler researcher, I place my work on a continuum of settler approaches to suicide and use this space to advocate for justice over prevention.

Recently, settler suicidology has moved toward suicide justice, toward accountability to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous suicidologists formed the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) Indigenous Peoples Committee (2018) and successfully advocated for land acknowledgement and Grand Entry to open AAS conferences. This important shift in the culture of an influential suicide research organization opens further opportunities to recognize ongoing work in Indigenous suicidology, such as research by O’Keefe et al. (2021) into remarkably successfully Indigenous community mental health workers, research by Sadé Heart of the Hawk Ali (Mi’kmaq) (2018) in resilience amid inter-generational trauma, and work by Shelby Rowe (Chickasaw) involving people with lived experience of suicidality into suicide research and prevention work. Rasmus et al. (2019a) have developed a long-term community based participatory research model working with Indigenous science in the Central Yup’ik region of Alaska, a model which Allen et al. (2018) established as an effective suicide intervention. Also recently, critical suicidologists published a collection advocating for “reframing of suicide and suicide prevention [that] moves away from the usual objective and positivist approaches towards more contextualized, poetic, subjective, historical, ecological, social-justice-oriented, and political perspectives” (White et al., 2015: 2). These field developments already overlap, for instance in work from Wexler and Gone (2015) advocating for culturally responsive Indigenous suicide prevention and in work from Chandler and Lalonde (2019) situating Indigenous suicides within the abundant social injustices of settler colonies. Suicide justice fits within these contexts, privileging interdisciplinary critique of acontextual positivist science and advocating for new ways of conceiving of accountability between researchers/practitioners and the communities they serve. By reconceptualizing the goal from prevention to justice, the importance of these developments become more apparent. Unlike prevention, which has a troubled history, suicide justice aligns the field with broader calls for racial, economic, environmental, sexual, and gender justice for Indigenous peoples and settlers alike.

Conclusion

In order to move toward suicide justice, much change is needed to uproot the imperialism, both material and epistemological, that has long influenced the field of suicide prevention. As suicide rates rise in the U.S. and beyond, the field must rethink settler approaches that have shaped the field from its origins. Shneidman’s settler suicidology has long influenced the field’s orientation and deference to colonialism. In contrast, justice-oriented critical, Indigenous, and feminist suicidology offers new approaches to old problems, an interdisciplinarity that brings a broader range of perspectives to bear on a painful problem. Distributive justice is a practical way forward to address many of the harms of colonization including ongoing Indigenous suicide crises. Reparation is both a key term and method—political, economic, and social reparation is needed to rectify manifold injustices. Reparation is also a way of reading texts that can inform and even direct these necessary changes. By turning to Indigenous and feminist theories and methods, we can center justice to rename and reframe our approach to suicide. Suicide justice names an opportunity to reform settler suicidology into a field increasingly accountable to Indigenous communities.

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Notes

1. Shneidman (1993): 293.
2. Freire (2005): 88.
3. Shneidman papers, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, 6.
4. Pickering and Walford draw on the work of Luigi Tomasi to make this point.
5. See Rasmus et al. (2019b) for an explication of culture as prevention. See Mohatt et al. (2014a) on practical and cultural limitations of settler scientific research models on community-based suicide interventions.
6. Signatory initial is randomized for anonymity. My use of this archive is exempt from UCLA IRB review (#18-001641).
7. I follow Tuck and Yang (2012) in terming my position as trespasser (p. 3).

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