“The telling is a burden”
Collective Narrative Practice around experiences of ongoing suicidality

Introduction
• One person dies by suicide every 40 seconds worldwide (WHO, 2017)
• Many more live with suicidal thoughts, feelings and acts (McManus et al., 2016)
• Narratives around suicide can be stigmatising and othering and situate suicide as an individual act (White et al., 2016)
• There are few available resources exploring suicide as an ongoing experience and what this means for people

Research Questions
This study sought to explore:
1. How do people live with suicidal thoughts, feelings and acts?
2. How do people want to share their narratives, and to whom do they wish to speak?

Methods
• 3 Interviews & 2 workshops
• 12 contributors
• Informed by witnessing practices (White, 2007)
• Co-creating a film on “living with suicide” with a London Mental Health Arts Charity
• Dialogical Narrative Analysis (Frank, 2012)

Narrating Burden
- “Being a Burden” as Common Suicide Narrative
- Often implicit in our policy and prevention narratives (e.g., economic cost of suicide)
- “Burden” present in these narrations as a story of suicide (not deserving help/life), of survival (death as a burden on others or to relieve burden) and of silence (telling as harmful/damaging to others)

Paradox of Telling as Burden/Generative
• Careful nature of dialogue in interviews/workshops
• Dialogue opening conversations with loved ones/each other that have never been had before
• How to co-create “space in society and space to feel the way you feel” through further acts of telling?

For Discussion
How can we honour the dialogical and paradoxical in creation and sharing of collective resources?

Email: u1147607@uel.ac.uk; twitter: @schmoobrain; researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cheryl_Hunter
“I remember deep cleaning my room making everything spotless. I tried to write a suicide note and I was just like no one will even care, I’d just got to the point where there’s nothing I can say that will change the way people feel about me because I was so convinced that no one liked me and I was a burden on everyone in my life and that actually it would be better for everyone if I wasn’t there.” – Adele*

“the enduring aspect is a sense of shame. It’s the most potent [emotion] for suicide. The most basic shame that no one wants you as a child, no one validates you, you get horribly treated, no one to comfort you. As you grow, feeling marginalised and persecuted for your marginalised status that you can’t help, it piles on.” – Leonard*

“I guess the thing that came to my mind is the silence of having the feelings and feeling like you can’t say. And like it feeling like a very sort of silent time. And that fear of if you say it to, if you do go to a doctor [...] what are they going to do? Like are they going to section you? Are they going to tell you it’s not true? Like, what are going to be the consequences of speaking?” - Celine*

“The burden of telling people. The world to me seems to be full of people who want to live as long as possible and have, yes have good quality of life, but to live as long as possible, life’s too short, life’s too short, and I’m going round in a constant cloud of life’s too long, I’ve had enough of this, I actually want it to end. But I can never say that, because that’s just so taboo” – Barbra*

“The telling is a burden [...] I felt like, and I still do [feel] afraid of telling partly because someone won’t understand, but also I have this feeling of like, I’m going to destroy our relationship. I’m going to destroy the affection that you have for me. Because you know, you’re someone who’s in my life and cared for me, and yet I have the, almost, like, the audacity to not want to be alive” – Celine*

* Pseudonyms