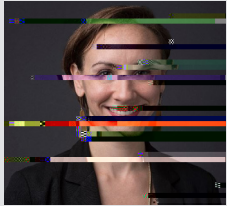


# BOISI CENTER INTERVIEWS



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cide and to current understandings of mental illness. It has been edited for length, clarity, and content.

: What do you think is the best way of navigating the idea of destigmatizing suicidal persons without normalizing their behavior?

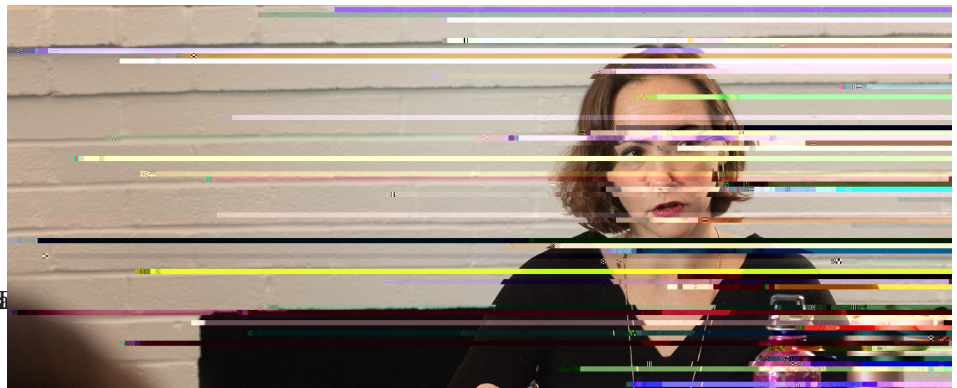
A : I think specifically within a Christian context, we are still caught up in this baggage of thinking that this person has some sort of moral fault. A lot of people know that this is not true

around because of this history. I want to really take that idea head-on and dismantle it and be very clear about that. Just deconstructing that idea is really, really important.

If someone is suicidal, it's not like they didn't pray enough or that they have pride or that they're selfish. These are ideas that have secular versions in our culture, too. So I appreciate this is not just a Christian problem, actually.

I think, then, that the piece which comes in tandem with that is actually listening to people talking about what it's like to feel suicidal and what they're asking for in terms of structures of support. There's an attitude piece and there's a structural piece, too. We all want better structural support for people who are vulnerable in this way. I don't know how to get at that as a theologian, except to just keep talking about it and forcing people to talk about it in particular.

And then again, if somebody has died by suicide, speaking about them as a human individual in a very particular way that



honors who they are, but also emphasizes the pain that they were in – I think those two pieces together would be the foundation for good policies around how we talk about this so as to not encourage it, because clustering is a problem.

: What do you think is the best way of communicating a still Catholic, but more sympathetic and realistic approach to suicide to the average churchgoer, to people of varied generations with varied generational understandings of this issue?

A : Sometimes people mistake me, with this kind of work, as saying that I'm permissive toward suicide, which

ing. I just don't think the word sin is the best language to capture what it is. I view it more as a tragedy or disease, something like that. Those are the analogies I go for. In that sense, the fact that I'm in agreement with official teaching about how this is harmful is a good foothold to start to talk about it.

When I think about suicide decedents, and I think about their pain, I think about Johann Baptist Metz's point about lament. I am also thinking about Jesus' cry to the Father on the cross – "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?"

not necessarily just supposed to be happy all the time, and we're not supposed to put sad people away, that actually life is very sad and lots of people are struggling. There are not only theological, but spiritual resources in the Christian tradition that can speak to that. So I actually view the type of suffering that's involved with



The other thing, too, is that we, as a society, need to look at why people are so sick in this way. Sometimes, people can have all the support in the world and still have a really troubling mental illness. This is