Testing Digital Storytelling as Voice for Adolescent Females Who Self-Injure
Rhonda Goodman, PhD, ARNP, FNP-BC, NCSN, AHN-BC

Background
Self-injury behavior is defined as a non-suicidal deliberate infliction of a wound to oneself in an attempt to seek expression and relief. Adolescent females who self-injure use their skin as a canvas upon which to tell their stories. They feel trapped, unable to find voices with which to be heard, and are able to find expression in the self-inflicted injury, thereby making their voices and their pain audible and visible. Adolescents, in particular, who self-injure, describe their self-injury experiences as a way to record their history. Each scar represents a painful period of incident in the lives of adolescents who self-injure, as the pain is recorded on their skin. The scars then become visible and tangible representations of otherwise unexpressed feelings.

Significance
- 10-17% of adolescents are deliberately injuring themselves
- Cutting is the most common, but may also involve scratching, burning, pulling hair, picking at sores
- Usually begins at 12-14 years of age
- Co-morbidities may include eating disorders, low self esteem, repressed anger, anxiety, and/or depression
- May involve undiagnosed and untreated borderline personality disorder, depression, and/or anxiety

Darcy’s Story
“Cutting was an escape. Some people would argue these actions are suicidal, but I just wanted to disappear... soon, cutting became my main outlet... it felt natural, something I did almost daily, like a ritual... it was the only thing I could control... sometimes, I’d feel numb and cut just to know that I could feel... I would watch my emotions heal with the wound... the sight of my own blood created a calming feeling that I couldn’t achieve any other way... I would cut to bring my emotional pain to the surface, my inner forearms were covered in blood... I never told anybody, people were harsh enough... Looking back, I’m glad the scars are with me. They tell my story. But I can’t say I won’t cut again.”

Significance

Photo Chosen to Represent Her Loneliness
“I would feel lonely, abandoned, worthless…”

Digital Storytelling
The storyteller:
- Writes a 300 word narrative and records the voiceover
- Selects metaphorical images which represent the feelings expressed in the story
- Selects background music for the soundtrack

Storytelling Method
The participants were adolescent females who were asked to tell their stories about their self-injury experiences. This research involved the use of digital storytelling techniques, using media such as audio, music, narratives, visual images, and photographs. The intent of the research was to discover the efficacy of using digital storytelling as a voice, or an alternate method of expression, for adolescent females who self-injure and who desire a medium through which to express feelings and emotions. Storytelling gives adolescents an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and to come to terms with how the experiences have shaped their own world and how that world is perceived. Digital storytelling is a method of recording story that will appeal to adolescents who primarily learned to communicate through the use of technology. While today’s adolescents may experience frustration if asked to tell their stories with paper and pen, those same adolescents will feel a much higher degree of comfort with a computer.

Findings
Based on this preliminary research, digital storytelling may be used as both a data collection method (gathering stories) and as an intervention to promote voice among adolescent females who self-injure.