

# NSSI and Suicide



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## What is NSSI?

- NSSI stands for Non-Suicidal Self-Injury. Or NSSID, Non-suicidal Self-Injury Disorder.
- Prior names included suicidal gesture, self-mutilation, deliberate self-harm and self-injury.

# What Is NSSI ?

As founding members of the ISSS, Dr. Kim Gratz and I fought to keep Non-Suicidal out of the name .

Concerns :

Minimization

Payment (US)



## What Is NSSI ?

That said, research does lead us to believe that suicide and NSSI , while highly correlated, are distinct for both research and clinical purposes.

# ISSS Definition

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) has been defined by the International Society for the Study of Self-Injury (ISSS) as the deliberate, self-inflicted destruction of body tissue without suicidal intent and for purposes not socially sanctioned (ISSS, 2007)

# DSM 5

Non Suicidal Self–Injury Disorder (NSSID) has been added to the DSM-5 as a disorder of it's own:  
Section III of the DSM-5 includes non-suicidal self-injury and suicidal behavior disorder as “conditions for further study.” In the DSM IV NSSI was classified as a symptom of Borderline Personality Disorder.

# Symptoms of Suicidal Behavior Disorder

According to the DSM-5, there are five proposed criterion Suicidal Behavior Disorder, with two specifiers

- The individual has made a suicide attempt within the past two years.
- The criterion for non-suicidal self-injurious behavior is not met during the aforementioned suicide attempts.
- The diagnosis is not applied to preparation for a suicide attempt, or suicidal ideation.

# Symptoms of Suicidal Behavior Disorder

According to the DSM-5, there are five proposed criterion Suicidal Behavior Disorder, with two specifiers

- the act was not attempted during an altered mental state, such as delirium or “confusion”.
- The act was not ideologically motivated- e.g. - religious or political.



# Symptoms of Suicidal Behavior Disorder

Other specifiers are:

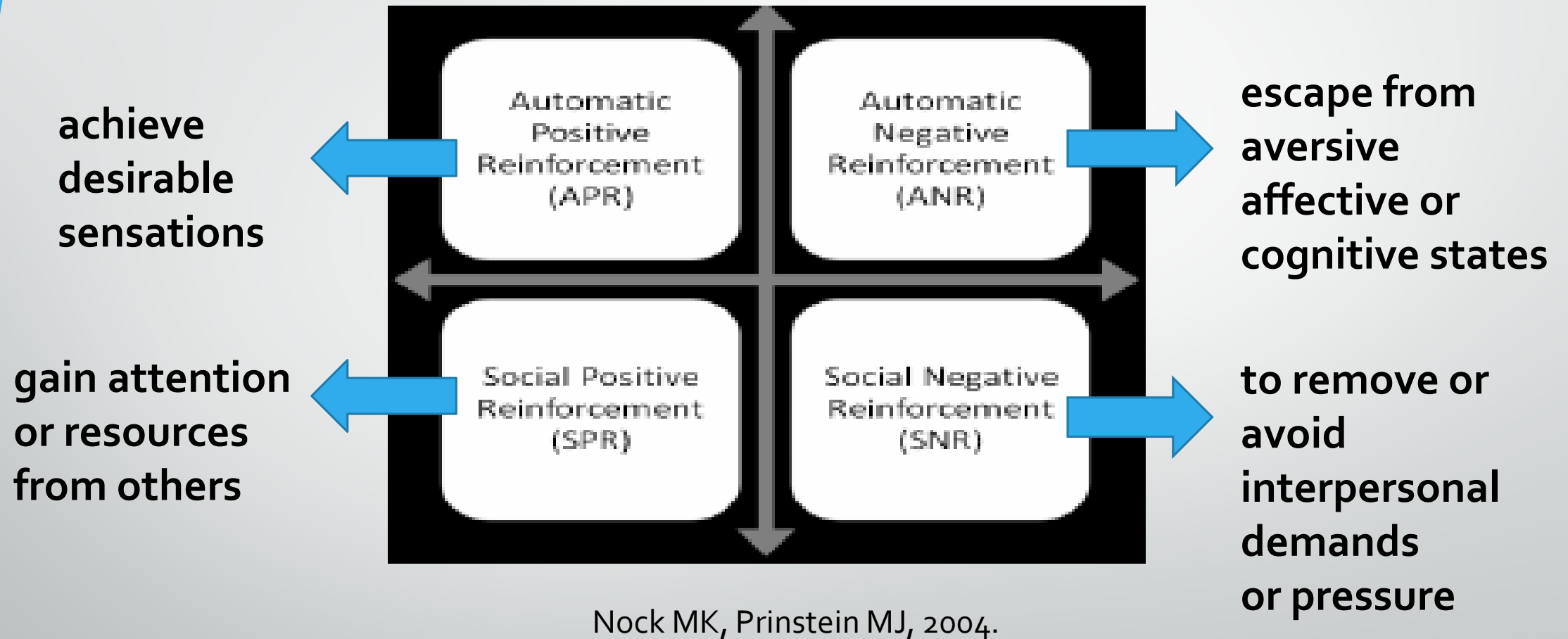
- Current- Not more than 12- 24 months since last attempt.
- In Remission- more than 24 months since last attempt. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

# DSM 5

Criteria for NSSI include:

- five or more days of self inflicted harm over the course of one year without suicidal intent
- the individual must have be motivated by seeking relief from a negative state, resolving an interpersonal difficult, or achieving a positive state.

# Functions of NSSI



Nock MK, Prinstein MJ, 2004.

# Function of NSSI

The main reason people self-injure as supported by numerous research studies is for:

## EMOTIONAL REGULATION

### Intrapersonal Function

In other words, to help themselves feel better emotionally  
.....not for the attention of others (social function) or  
to “get high”



# PREVALENCE

Of NSSI

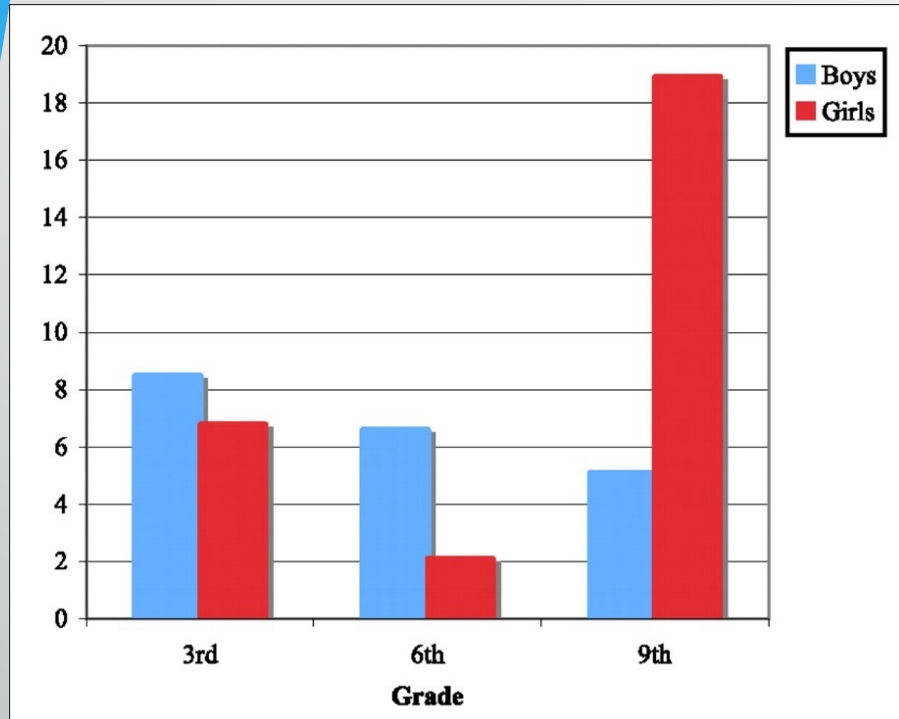
# New Zealand

Lifetime history of NSSI in the sample of students 16 and older (N=1162) was 48.7 % (females 49.4 %, males 48 %). Consistent with previous international research, NSSI was associated with higher Alexithymia, depression, anxiety, bullying, impulsivity, substance abuse, abuse history and sexuality concerns as well as lower mindfulness, resilience and self-esteem.

- Garisch and Wilson .Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health (2015) 9:28 DOI 10.1186/s13034-015-0055-6
- \* Correspondence: Marc.Wilson@vuw.ac.nz School of Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington, P.O. Box 600 Kelburn Parade, Wellington, New Zealand



# Youth



**Grade by gender interaction of lifetime rates of NSSI engagement. Percentage x Grade**

- A study of 665 youth ages 7-16 found that 8% reported engaging in NSSI: 9% of girls and 6.7% of boys
- Significant grade by gender interaction: girls in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (19%) reported significantly greater rates of NSSI than 9<sup>th</sup> grade boys (5%)

Barrocas, Hankin, Young and Abela, July 2012

# College Students



A study of 14,372 U.S. college students showed an overall lifetime prevalence of 15.3%.

..... 18.9% for females and 10.9% for males. (Whitlock, 2011).



# NSSI and SUICIDE

People who engage in NSSI are nine times more likely to report suicide attempts than non self-injurers. (Whitlock et al, 2011)



# NSSI and SUICIDE

Any history of NSSI prior to Suicidal Thoughts/Behaviors (STB) nearly triples the risk for concurrent or later STB and.....

# NSSI and Suicide

shows a dose-response relationship (Whitlock et al., 2012), consistent with the habituation hypothesis; that is, that practicing NSSI leads to reduced inhibition to suicide action (Joiner, 2006).

# NSSI as a Gateway to Suicide



Whitlock's longitudinal study (3 years) of 1,466 students at 5 colleges on the relationship between NSSI and suicide found that NSSI preceded or co-occurred with suicide in 61.6% of cases. (Whitlock, 2012)

# NSSI & Suicide

Klonsky (Klonsky et al. 2013) suggests that NSSI has a strong relationship with suicide attempts for two reasons:

- NSSI correlates with variables, such as depression, known to increase risk for suicidal ideation; and
- NSSI facilitates habituation to self-inflicted violence and pain, which in turn increases the capacity to attempt suicide (Joiner, 2006).

# NSSI and Suicide

- ❖ Is NSSI the “Anti-Suicide?”
- ❖ Self-injurers can kill themselves accidentally. This is the number one reason given for motivation to attend the S.A.F.E. program
- ❖ Self-injurers can become hopeless when their coping strategy fails to work or their stressor is perceived to be too large. They can then choose suicide as an option.

# NSSI and Suicide

Characteristics of NSSI associated with making suicide attempts included

- a longer history of NSSI,
- use of a greater number of methods, and
- absence of physical pain during NSSI. (Choice to feel or not to feel).


(Nock, et al. 2006 Psychiatry Research vol. 144, Issue1)

# Correlates to Suicide

**Research shows that NSSI is a stronger predictor of suicide than any of the risk factors listed below:**

- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Impulsivity
- And preliminary research on military indicates that it might even be stronger than a past suicide attempt.



A person is sitting on the floor, hunched over with their head buried in their hands, suggesting a state of stress or despair. The background is a bright, out-of-focus interior space.

# **Stress, Health and Connectivity**

(American Psychological Association Report  
2015)

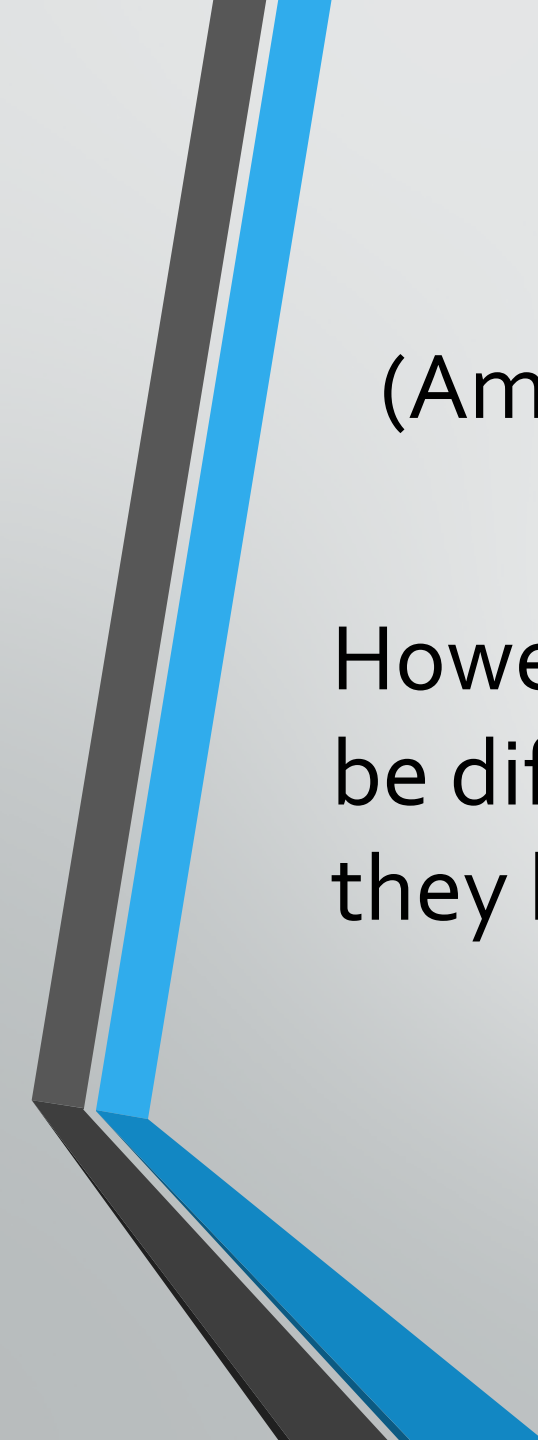
While the connection between stress and health is clear, both appear to be affected by the social and emotional support we perceive in our lives.



## **Stress, Health and Connectivity**

(American Psychological Association Report 2015)

Survey findings show that Americans who say they have emotional support — specifically, that they have someone they can ask for it if they need it, such as family and friends, report lower stress levels and better related outcomes than those without emotional support.



# **Stress, Health and Connectivity**

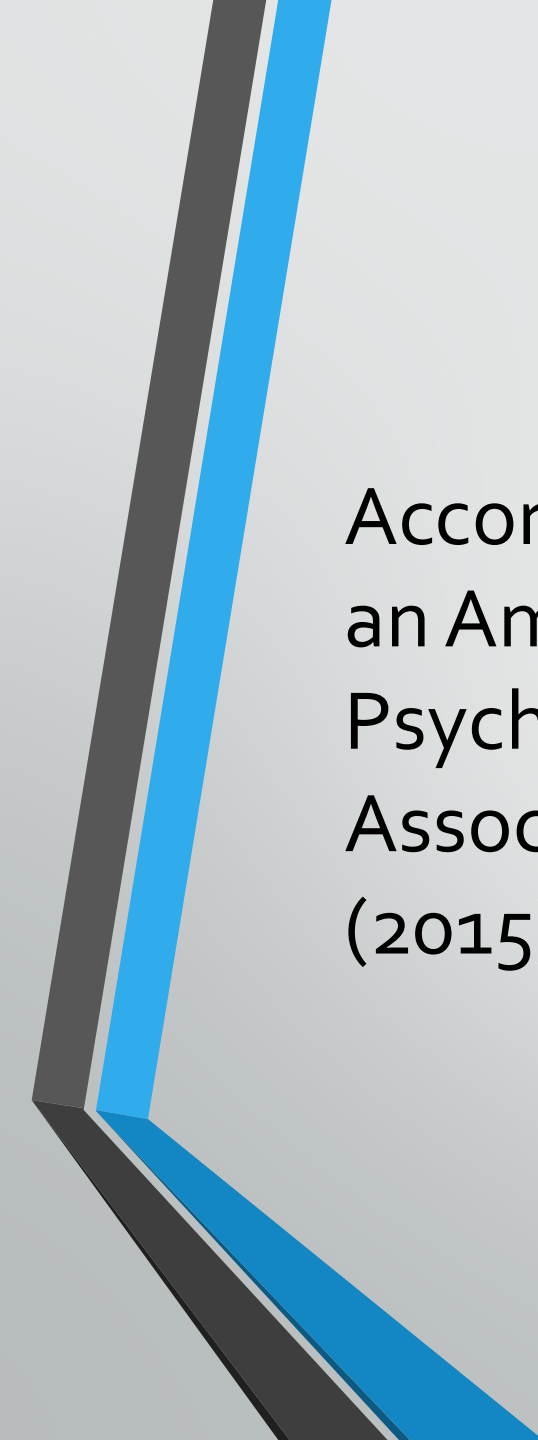
(American Psychological Association Report 2015)

However, finding that support when you need it can be difficult: One in five Americans (21 percent) say they have no one to rely on for emotional support.



## According to an American Psychological Assoc. Report 2015)))

A similar percentage of Americans (18 percent) **say**  
**money is a taboo subject** in their family and more  
than one-third (36 percent) say that talking about  
money makes them uncomfortable.



According to  
an American  
Psychological  
Assoc. Report  
(2015)

Millennials and Gen Xers report **higher levels of stress about money** compared to Americans overall (Millennials: 5.4 on a 10-point scale; Gen Xers: 5.5; all adults: 4.7).



# Risk for Suicide

Research suggests that those at risk for concurrent or later STB have a higher lifetime NSSI frequency and feel less socially connected to critical supports (such as parents). (Whitlock, 2012)



# Indirect Communication

What would one expect to happen when internal experiences build but they are unable to identify and communicate what they are feeling to others, to feel connected and understood?

# Indirect Communication

Perhaps they discharge through action, using their bodies, their “bulletin boards” to “spice up the cover” so that someone might take the time to read the book .... That is to listen , understand and help.



# Internet : As Precipitant to NSSI?

Self-Injury Sites, Chat Rooms, Blogs

Sexual Predators

Cyberbullying

# Relationship between Bullying and NSSI

Children who are bullied are 3x more likely to self-injure by the time they are 12 yrs. old

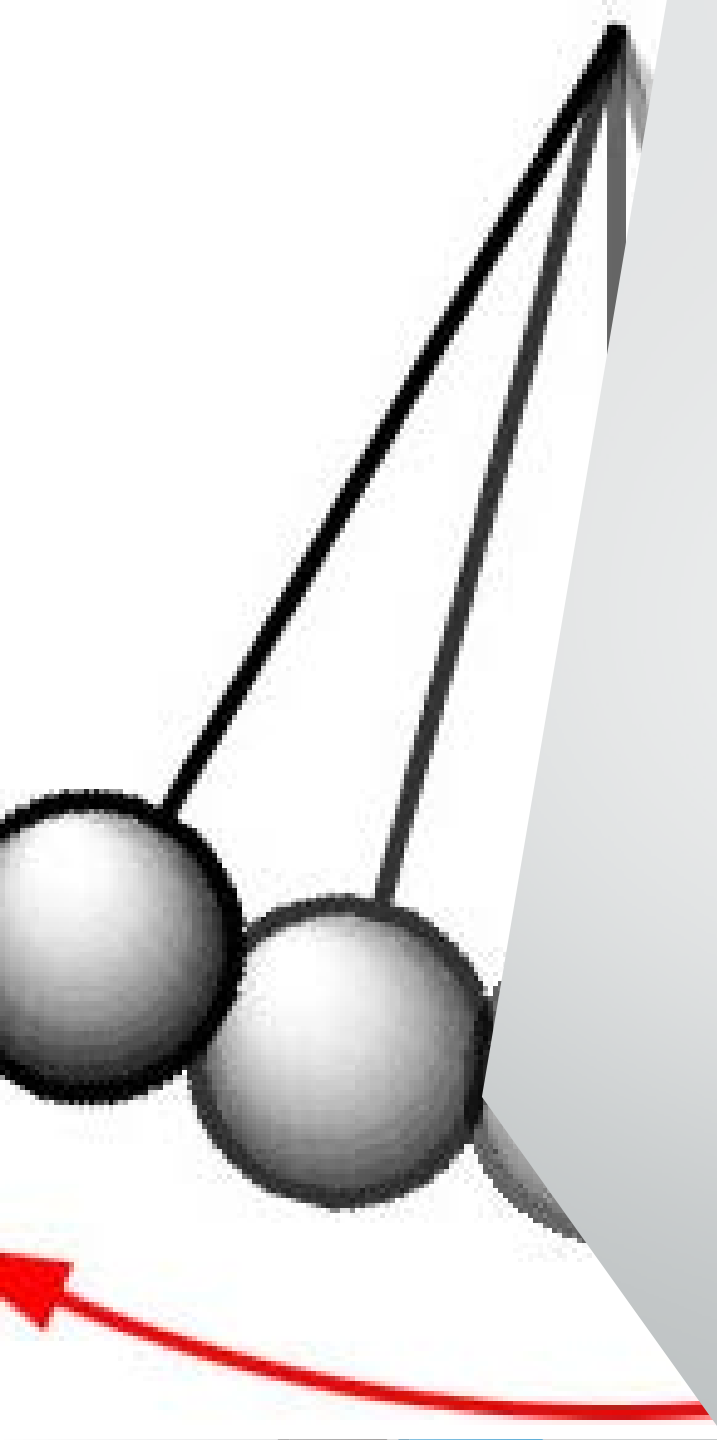
# Relationship between Bullying and NSSI

A study of 399 Canadian adolescents grades 8-10 indicated that involvement in cyber bullying, as either a victim or a bully, uniquely contributed to the prediction of both depressive symptomatology and suicidal ideation, over and above the contribution of involvement in traditional forms of bullying (physical, verbal, relational).

## Self-Injury 35 years ago

At that time, there was no research on the connection between suicide and NSSI as the two were often used interchangeably.

When we began S.A.F.E. In 1985, our average client had been hospitalized for years at a time, or at the very least, were admitted every time they had an impulse to injure (often hundreds of times).



## 35 Years Ago

- The behavior was little understood and viewed as extreme. Psychiatrically it was taken very seriously and clinicians rarely encountered the behavior in outpatient practice.
- The pendulum has swung from taking the behavior very seriously and perhaps being overly cautious, to minimizing the behavior as attention seeking.

# Differentiating NSSI from a Suicide Attempt

What do they tell you about their intent?

Where did they injure?

Did they use their usual method of injury?

# Differentiating NSSI from a Suicide Attempt

It's important to note that 98.6% of people who die by suicide use methods other than cutting. (e.g., Guns, hanging, overdose, jumping)

(Statistics from the CDC as reported in Walsh 2006)



# Minimization and Misunderstanding

**“You suck at suicide”**





# MORAL: NSSI IS A NEON SOS...

IF WE WANT TO PREVENT SUICIDE, IDENTIFYING AND  
TREATING THOSE WHO ENGAGE IN NSSI MIGHT  
PRESENT AN IMPORTANT INROAD