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Harm, Interrupted: Narratives of Self-Injury and Same-Sex Attraction

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This presentation explicates a recent study that was conducted to deepen understanding of why same-sex attracted men self-injure. Self-injury is predominantly considered to be a problem for women. Despite high incidences of self-injury among same-sex attracted men, what motivates and shapes their self-injury is unclear. The literature explores health implications and public health strategies around certain risk behaviors in same-sex attracted men but what tends to be neglected are the contexts and meanings of self-injury as it is mediated by sexuality.

A narrative inquiry approach enabled exploration of same-sex attracted men's self-injury through attending to their experiences in context. By attending to a narrative landscape of time, context, experiences and interaction, rich stories of a life lived with self-injury emerged. Even though some men self-injured in similar fashion to other populations, their stories evoked unique experiences, profound personal accounts and unexpected themes that both confront and extend understanding of self-injury. Foregrounding same-sex attracted men's experiences of being someone who self-injures and theorizing its relationship to sexuality allowed a moral narrative of self-injury to emerge. The moral narrative served as a means to capture the nuanced and deeply relational features embedded in these men's acts of self-injury.

Dr Estefan is assistant professor at the University of Calgary Faculty of Nursing. He is a mental health nurse with particular research interests in the ways that gender and sexual orientation mediate experiences of mental health problems. His current research uses narrative to explore the nexus of masculine identity and eating disorders. Dr Estefan teaches research methods to undergraduates and philosophy and qualitative research approaches at the masters and doctoral levels.