

IPA analysis: A Diary extract by Amanda Green

Abstract

This study was looking at self-harm and the risk factors that lead to self-harming. The study was analysed using IPA on diary extract. The diary called “My Alien Self: My Journey Back to Me’ was written by Amanda Green. The study showed that the main factor that lead to self-harming was a sexual assault which later led to self-harming because of different emotions etc that she may face in her life

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to look at self-harm. During this study a diary extract was used from an online blog entitled ‘My Alien Self: My Journey Back to Me’ (Green, 2012). and the factors that can be linked to the reason why young people have the highest risk factor of self-harming. This is important to look at as Skegg, (2005) study suggests that 5–9% of adolescents in western countries report having self-harmed within the previous year. Suicide prevention is important to mental health policy in multiple countries (Taylor et al,1997; Department of Health, 2002). Self-harm rates are highest in adolescents and suicide are the biggest cause of death in young people worldwide, this is a major public health problem in adolescents especially, (Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012). In England and Wales there is approximately 25,000 cases of self-harm in hospitals every year (Hawton et al., 2000). °din 2011). As many as 1 in 15 adolescents self-harm in the UK, this is highest rate in Europe (Burton, 2014). Deliberately self-harming is one of biggest predictors of later committing suicide, (Sakinofsky, 2000). Self-harming can be done in many ways not just by cutting themselves, there is many ways in which someone can be self-harming e.g. burning themselves, taking to many tablets, punching themselves etc. Given that self-harm typically

originates in adolescence years (van der Kolk et al., 1991) and can become a lifetime habit (Simeon and Favazza, 2001). Self-harming is commonly seen in women who have experienced some time of childhood sexual abuse in the past, (Herman, Perry, & van der Kolk, 1989; Romans, Martin, Anderson, Herbison, & Mullen, 1995). A study by Van der Kolk, Perry and Herman (1991) found that childhood sexual and physical abuse was a high predictor in later leading to the individual to deliberately self-harming or attempt suicide. This could be linked to the need to take back control as they feel they did not have control of the previous events or the need to feel a relief the feeling by self-harming, (van der Kolk et al., 1991). This can become their way of coping with their feelings or unwanted memories, (Connors, 1996). (Crick and Zahn-Waxler, 2003; Leadbeater et al., 1995) states that a female is more likely to hurt themselves on purpose than males as they are more likely to turn their emotions inward. Taylor (2003) states that men are more likely to engage in risky behaviour e.g. punching windows in a wall to deal with it, however research by (Nordstrom studies (Nordstrom et al, 1995; Sakinofsky, , 1995; Sakinofsky, 2000; Suokas 2000; Suokas et al, 2001) that males are at more risk of suicide than females. Previous research done in adolescents and adults have found that individuals use it to express, distract and reduce a feeling or to punish and realise anger and retain control (Osuch et al., 1999; Rodham et al., 2004; Suyemoto, 1998). As previously mentioned, self-harming is one of the biggest predictors that a person may later commit suicide (Sakinofsky, 2000). Despite that there has been a lot of interest in this subject lately there is little empirical evidence on self-harming in adolescence. It is important for health officials to know triggers and factors that lead to adolescents to self-harm.

The aim of this research is to look at factors that could be linked to self-harming in adolescents.

Methodology

Design

A non-experimental, qualitative approach was taken. A diary extract was analysed using IPA.

Participants

The researcher was a level 5 Applied psychology student from a university in South West Wales. An extract of a diary entry was taken from the public domain. The diary extract was written by Amanda Green called 'My alien self: My journey back to me'.

Materials

A diary extract (see appendix 1)

The procedure (see appendix 2)

Ethical considerations

No consent was needed as the diary extract from a public domain. There was no risk to participant as the dairy extract was taking from a public domain. If researcher is effected by the sensitive content of the diary extract and will contact my supervisor

C.Greenway@uwtsd.ac.uk and will contact Samaritans at

<https://www.samaritans.org/wales/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

Discussion/Results

Summary Table

Table 1

The following table shows the superordinate and subordinate themes of diary extract analysed using IPA.

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes	Quote Keyword	Page / Line Number
Superordinate (Cluster) Theme 1: Emotions linked to self-harming.	Subordinate Theme 1: Relief	"Every time I made another cut, I liked the way it felt".	Page 1, line 16

	“Sharp, scratching, pain, self-inflicted relief. It gave me relief – the enjoyment I was looking for”.	Page 2, line 34
	“The cut, the blood, the soreness, all had the power of relief for me”.	Page 2, line 49, 50
Subordinate Theme 2: Self-blame	“I wasn’t a virgin when Vinnie raped me, but I didn’t deserve that”.	Page 1, line 5, 6
	“I phoned him, and he said he was sorry. I felt dreadful, and grabbed the knife from the bread board in the kitchen”.	Page 2, line 44, 45
Subordinate Theme 3: Need for Love	“The word love featured quite a lot in my life. Not because I was told I was loved by my parents, because I wasn’t, only in birthday and Christmas cards, but because I wanted love”.	Page 3, line 57, 58
	“Next and last the knuckle of my little finger, an E. LOVE. Marvellous!”.	Page 2, line 38, 39
	“I wanted to love my body”.	Page 2, line 56
	“In my diary under miscellaneous I came across	Page 3, line 59

	something I'd written. It said please love me".	
	"When I think about it now I was shown love. I just didn't always feel it".	Page 3, line 60
Subordinate Theme 4: Rejection	"I'd been going out with a guy called Zack for a week who didn't ring or come round and he said he would that evening. I phoned him and he said he was sorry".	Page 2, line 43,44
Subordinate Theme 5: Denial	"I was raped but of course it couldn't hurt me then because I had pushed it to a place so deep I couldn't retrieve it".	Page 1, line 9,10
	"I was only an amateur at that form of self-harm: not a real cutter with my measly thirteen holes and a few knife or compass flesh wounds"	Page 1, line 11
Subordinate Theme 7: Satisfaction	"I threw myself onto my bed. My little ritual didn't satisfy me".	Page 2, line 26
	"A word will soon be etched across the hand, and then I will be satisfied".	
	"I put cotton wool and plasters over it, after squeezing the	Page 2, line 35

luscious red liquid
out for a moment
and tasting it, then
rolling my sleeve
back down”.
Page 2, line 50,51

Superordinate (Cluster) Theme 2: Psychological	Subordinate Theme 1: Body image	“I didn’t want to ruin my looks too much and I was very much into how my body looked”	Page 2, line 54
		“deep enough to bleed but not so deep they would scar, although a couple did very slightly”.	Page 2, line 42
		“I wanted to love my body. It was one good thing that I had that men wanted”.	Page 2, line 55
	Subordinate Theme 3: Mum and Dad	“Christmas has always been a time for celebration and family”.	Page 1, line 8
		“When I showed Mum she wasn’t amused and nor was Dad”.	Page 2, line 40
		“the one shaped as a gun that my mum had bought me”.	Page 1, line 20
		“Mum and Dad came home later and I stayed up with them and watched Top Gun”.	Page 2, line 52

		“Not because I was told I was loved by my parents”.	Page 3, line 57
	Subordinate Theme 4: Her bedroom	“I felt dreadful, and grabbed the knife from the bread board in the kitchen and headed upstairs to my bedroom with it”.	Page 2, line 45
		“placed it on my chest of drawers in my bedroom. I closed my bedroom door”.	Page 1, line 17,18
		“watching in my bedroom mirror all the time”.	Page 1, line 22
		“headed upstairs to my bedroom with it”.	Page 2, line 45
Superordinate (Cluster) 3: Control	Subordinate Theme 1: Need to take back control	“three months after I was raped but of course it couldn’t hurt me then because I had pushed it to a place so deep I couldn’t retrieve it. Not yet. I guess that’s why I made the cuts”.	Page 1, line 9
		“He couldn’t hurt me, but I could hurt myself.”	Page 1, line 15
		“I’d been going out with a guy called Zack for a week who didn’t ring or come round and he said he would that evening. I phoned him and he said he was sorry. I	Page 2, line 43

felt dreadful, and
grabbed the knife
from the bread board
in the kitchen”.

Superordinate (Cluster) Theme 1: Emotions linked to self-harm.

Amanda finds a relief when she is self-harming, she describes feeling of relief when she sees the blood for example in line 49, she says “the cut, the blood, the soreness, all had a power of relief for me”. This seems like this is her way to escape her own thoughts when she’s alone or to deal with a negative feeling she has in the moment. Deliberate self-harming is a way to help an individual when coping with the overwhelming affect and remembering upsetting memories (Connors, 1996). This can link back to the rape as before this she did not self-harm it only started “3 months after the rape” (Osuch et al., 1999; Rodham et al., 2004; Suyemoto, 1998) research showed that self-harming was found to be a motivation to distract from feelings or punish themselves. Amanda seems to self-harm to escape negative feelings she has. She also seems to blame herself when her boyfriend doesn’t phone her, and she phones him she states “she felt dreadful” and then later self-harms she also states that “she wasn’t a virgin” when she was raped which lead to her first self-harming. Victims can feel self-blame after the attack leaving her with a negative view of herself and low self-esteem and body image. “Self-blame as a maladaptive psychological mechanism is generally related to harsh self-criticism and low evaluations of one's worth” (Janoff-Bulman, 1979, p. 1799). The importance in the role of body image in self-harm may help suggest why some studies report that more women are likely to self-harm (Zlotnick, Mattia, & Zimmerman, 1999). Amanda also frequently speaks of love during this diary extract, she even scratched it into her knuckles Amanda said wasn’t told she was loved by her parents and she had written “Love

me please”, if she did not feel loved which could be why this played a big part in her life.

When Amanda must deal with a negative emotion like rejection from her boyfriend it leads her to self-harm, this is where Amanda seems finds satisfaction, she started with piercing her ears when this no longer satisfied her, she started cutting herself.

Superordinate (Cluster) Theme 2: Psychological

Amanda frequently speaks about her mum and dad in this dairy extract stating that she didn't feel loved by them research has showed that it is important to have feel a connection with your parents in adolescents years (Brooks et al. 2015b; Cava et al. 2014; Levin et al. 2012; Rothon et al. 2012), also found a link between self-harm and having positive communication with parents previous studies that adolescents who self-harm don't feel like they have anyone to when I comes to problem (Evans et al. 2005), this was found in mostly adolescents growing into adults. (Bifulco et al. 2014; Claes et al. 2015; Burton 2014) states it is an important factor to adolescents who self-harm and highlights the importance when it comes to connections with adults in their life. Amanda seems to feel safe within her bedroom, which is where she goes to self-harm. This could be where she feels safe in her own world safe behind her bedroom door.

Superordinate (Cluster) 3: Control

After the rape Amanda states “he couldn't hurt me, but I could hurt myself” this may be linked to the feeling of not being able to control the rape, so she is trying to regain control in other ways by self-harming. (van der Kolk et al., 1991) states that deliberate self-harm can be either an attempt to control a previous situation. This can be a reaction to the rape, Amanda had the feeling she had lost control over her life (Bard & Ellison, 1974; Bryant & Cirel, Note 1). If a woman is questioning herself then She wants to feel a sense of control (Hilberman, 1976), as after the rape she could believe if she did not have a control over things the same situation can happen again if she did not have control.

There was a few limitation within this study the first is that it was based on a small part of a diary extract from when she was adolescent, future studies could use more recent diary extract and look at multiple individuals and not just one person this will give a more broader view on this subject and not one person's view a bigger sample size is needed using males and females, Also there wasn't much research from the individuals point of view more the researchers. More recent research needs to be done also looking at a bigger sample size with both males and females as I did not find much research when it came to males

Reflective account

This topic area really interested me, and I learnt that there are more factors that can lead to self-harming. People don't self-harm just to hurt themselves and is not a straightforward topic. Someone can be self-harming to try and gain control where they think they may have lost it. By reading the diary extract I felt I could see that the rape was the first big risk factor that lead her start harming herself but also that her family, boyfriend and emotions were a big risk factor with dealing with these emotions was to try and gain some control through self-harming. It interested that there can be so many factors that can be linked to self-harm. I would be interested into looking at this topic area more and learning more about self-harm and the risk factors linked to an individual self-harming.

Conclusion

The risk factors mentioned in the introduction were found during this study there was a significant link between Amanda feeling like by self-harming she is taking back control, which could be a way of her coping as (Connors, 1996) stated This can become their way of coping with their feelings or unwanted memories or a way to distract herself. Another significant link to Amanda self-harming was the feeling of wanting to be loved, although clearly from the diary extract the biggest factor in her life that led her to self-harming was the rape. As (Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012) stated self-harming is the biggest risk to

adolescence with suicide being the second so research is important for health professionals, parents and teachers can see the factors that can lead to self-harming but also research has shown adolescents who self-harm don't feel they have anyone to talk to and by understanding this topic it could lead to a better understanding of the individuals that are self-harming and the best treatments.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Self-harm and cutting – an excerpt from my memoir 'My Alien Self: My Journey Back to Me'

An excerpt from my memoir....

It was a whole seventeen years later, in 2006, I rediscovered the rape as I searched through my diaries while undergoing therapy for my depression. I felt uneasy about myself when I read about this incident with Vinnie, as if I were reading the diary of someone else, with her dirty little secrets and self-destructive behaviours, not a fifteen-year-old version of myself. I wasn't a virgin when Vinnie raped me, but I didn't deserve that.

Not long after that, I cut myself.

Christmas has always been a time for celebration and family.

I remember Christmas 1989 very well, three months after I was raped but of course it couldn't hurt me then because I had pushed it to a place so deep, I couldn't retrieve it. Not yet. I guess that's why I made the cuts. Of course, I was only an amateur at that form of self-harm: not a real cutter with my measly thirteen holes and a few knife or compass flesh wounds – unlucky for some? Thirteen holes in my ears. I never questioned why I did it. Or why I did any of the things I did. I suppose I just did it. But when I think of it now it must've been a reaction to what happened. The memory of Vinnie I had shut away. He couldn't hurt me, but I could hurt myself.

Every time I made another cut, I liked the way it felt

I got a small gold stud ready to put in the new hole in my flesh and placed it on my chest of drawers in my bedroom. I closed my bedroom door. Using a ball point pen, I made a small mark on my ear where I wanted the next piercing to be. I burnt the end of the needle with one of my collection of novelty lighters; the one shaped as a gun that my mum had bought me.

I pulled my ear lobe out with my fingers, to make it taut and ready for a new hole, watching in my bedroom mirror all the time. I placed the needle onto the pen mark and pushed onto it to pierce the skin, using fairly hard pressure. Once it pierced the skin, I jabbed it right through the thick flesh and took it out quickly, replacing it with the gold stud and fastening the back in place; finished with a good dab of surgical spirit.

I threw myself onto my bed. My little ritual didn't satisfy me. Twiddling with my thumbs and wiggling my toes, I stared at the ceiling, struggling with my brain to think of what to do next. I didn't have any more spare earrings to fill new holes with. Then, I had an idea. I leapt up, grabbed my pencil case out

of my college bag and took out my compass. I burnt the compass point using one of my Zippo lighters, enjoying the smell of petrol it emitted. All ready.

Using the sharp compass point, I began to scratch the knuckle of my left index finger. One line down, about one centimetre in length. One line across, about half centimetre. An L shape. Several times needed going over the same lines to make it bleed and make the letter clearly defined on my skin. Sharp, scratching, pain, self-inflicted relief. It gave me relief – the enjoyment I was looking for. And it was something different. A word will soon be etched across the hand, and then I will be satisfied. Next knuckle, scratching, digging with the compass point. Circular. An O. Needed to be more careful with the O. Next knuckle, a V. The pain, very nice, scratching and digging, bright red blood and jagged edges to the letters. The taste, lovely, natural, as I sucked on the cuts. Next and last the knuckle of my little finger, an E. LOVE. Marvellous!

When I showed Mum, she wasn't amused and nor was Dad. So after that instead of carving something they could see, I resorted to using the bread knife sawing little lines into my forearms – deep enough to bleed but not so deep they would scar, although a couple did very slightly.

I'd been going out with a guy called Zack for a week who didn't ring or come round and he said he would that evening. I phoned him and he said he was sorry. I felt dreadful, and grabbed the knife from the bread board in the kitchen and headed upstairs to my bedroom with it.

Everyone was out.

I rolled up the left sleeve of my sweater and with the knife in my right hand I rested the blade on my left forearm before pressing down and sliding the blade down. The serrated edges caught my skin and dragged it, so I had to saw up and down a couple of times before drawing blood. The cut, the blood, the soreness, all had the power of relief for me. I put cotton wool and plasters over it, after squeezing the luscious red liquid out for a moment and tasting it, then rolling my sleeve back down. Mum and Dad came home later and I stayed up with them and watched Top Gun.

I cut myself just a few times. I wanted to do far bigger cuts and bleed much more, fantasising about it regularly, but I resisted. I didn't want to ruin my looks too much and I was very much into how my body looked. I wanted to love my body. It was one good thing that I had that men wanted.

The word love featured quite a lot in my life. Not because I was told I was loved by my parents, because I wasn't, only in birthday and Christmas cards, but because I wanted love. In my diary under miscellaneous I came across something I'd written. It said please love me. When I think about it now I was shown love. I just didn't always feel it.

Appendix 2

Procedure

First the researcher printed the diary extract of the internet and over the course of a couple of days read and re-read and made notes in the margins. as the researcher was doing this, recurring themes were seen for example she spoke about her parents frequently. These were then separated into superordinate themes, and subordinate themes which were emotions, psychological and control once these were separated sections using (Willig 2013) IPA analysis and the researcher was sure they hadn't missed anything. The research began writing up the qualitative report.

Ethic form

Jemma APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

Full Name:	Jemma Louise Collins		
Tick all boxes which apply:			
Member of staff:	☐	Student:	☒
Honorary research fellow:		☐	
Faculty/School/Centre:	Yr Athrofa - Psychology		
Campus:	Carmarthen		
E-mail address:	1704061@student.uwtsd.ac.uk		
Contact Telephone Number:	07456161004		
For students:			
Student Number:	1704061	Undergraduate	☒
Programme of Study:	BSc Applied Psychology	Taught Postgraduate	☐
Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Charlotte Greenway	Research	☐

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☐	NO	☒
				Date
If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known):	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
	Faculty Research Committee	☐		
	Other school ethics board	☐		

Approval in principle **must** be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval.