

WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

Cut: Teens and Self Injury at the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival

The intimate documentary screened Sunday at the Historical Society

Kristian Knutsen on Monday 04/16/2007 01:04:45.

"It's important that I produced this film to be really accessible to educators, parents and teens, that it does not exploit the behavior," says Madison musician, filmmaker, and arts advocate Wendy Schneider about Cut, her documentary about teens who engage in self-injury.

It was for this reason that the film, which made its world premiere Sunday afternoon at the Wisconsin Historical Society, started with a disclaimer informing viewers that the documentary does not include footage of self-injury, but does focus on an intensely emotionally sensitive issue. "This is about the underlying behavior, the underlying issues" behind cutting as a means of venting emotional frustration, explains Schneider.

Indeed, *Cut* explores the issue in a very intimate way, built around a series of interviews of numerous young persons sharing their self-injury experiences. Together with images of art and writing about self-injury contributed by more than 50 people, these women and men directly explain the varied circumstances and emotional motivations that contributed to their actions, an approach that helps strip away the mystery and misunderstanding surrounding the behavior.

Three of these personal survival experiences form the heart of the documentary. The first is the story told by Garbage singer Shirley Manson, who couldn't explain exactly why she started cutting, but could discuss the feelings of emotional release that it gave her, and her cessation once she started playing in a band. The other two were a pair of stories by a mother and daughter, who offered complementary perspectives on the cycle of emotional misunderstanding and alienation that can give rise to self-injury, along with challenge of facing recovery together.

Also revealing were the experiences shared by the two men interviewed in *Cut*, both relatively rare exemplars of a behavior that is demographically concentrated in female who are primarily white and middle or upper class. Manson said self-injury more prevalent with women because it's unacceptable for females to release aggression in sports or even as violence and is therefore turned inwards. "We're so pushed to be so perfect, and we're not, there's very different people out there, and I believe we're just pressured," she explained. "We're under so much pressure," says another survivor.

In the end, *Cut* is a call to action, something that was an explicit goal of the film. The post-screening question and answer session focused on how one should respond to friends and family who self-injure, with health care providers and other audience members discussing how to approach the issue. Six persons featured in the documentary attended the screening, in fact.

Cut has rapidly progressed from modest beginnings. Inspired to make a film about the issue after learning that a friend's daughter was injuring herself, Schneider created a short version for the Wis-Kino Madison 150 collection released in 2006. Now with the world premiere of the complete version under her belt, she is taking the documentary on the road.

There are upcoming screenings for students, educators and academics at conferences in Madison, Green Bay, and Milwaukee, and Schneider is currently booking a national college tour. She is also looking for a distributor to release the film on DVD. More information is available at cutthemovie.com and its MySpace page.

"I wanted to create an effective tool, a piece of media that was very humanizing and not clinical with respect to this issue," Schneider says. "After one woman did her first interview, she wrote to me explaining that she felt like a survivor and not a victim, that it was helpful to walk through the process of telling a part of their story."

Related Articles:

[Your source on the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival](#)

Article Tools:

Share this Article: