Reasons Why Not: A Critical Review of the Television Series *13 Reasons Why*
Des raisons pour ne pas le faire : examen critique de la série de télé *13 Reasons Why*

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ABSTRACT

Since its initial release as a Netflix television series in 2017, *13 Reasons Why* has caught the attention of professionals and viewers alike because of its gripping storylines and controversial content. The show's explicit nature has prompted mental health professionals to draw the public's attention to the possibility of suicide contagion, especially among adolescent viewers. This paper is a comprehensive review of the show, a review of the current research on its epidemiological impact on the public, and a guide for mental health professionals and the general public on how to respond to the current information that we know about the show and its possible effects on viewers.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis son lancement en tant que série télé sur Netflix en 2017, *13 Reasons Why* a capté l'attention aussi bien des professionnels que des auditeurs en raison de son intrigue palpitante et de son contenu controversé. La nature explicite de cette émission a poussé les professionnels de la santé mentale à attirer l'attention du public sur la possibilité d'une contagion de suicides, particulièrement chez les auditrices et auditeurs adolescents. Cet article présente un examen en détail de l'émission, un inventaire de la recherche sur ses effets épidémiologiques sur le public, et un guide à l'intention des professionnels de la santé mentale et du public en général concernant la façon de réagir à l'information dont nous disposons actuellement à propos de l'émission.

13 Reasons Why is a Netflix television series based on the young adult novel by Jay Asher (Wright, 2018; Asher, 2007). The series focuses on the life and the ultimate suicide of Hannah Baker, a teenage girl who leaves behind 13 tapes, each addressed to one of the individuals whom she blames for her death (Golin et al., 2017). With suicide being the second highest cause of death among individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 (Zimerman et al., 2018), the show is

highly relevant. However, the storyline and the content of the show have hosts of professionals concerned about the show's influence on this generation of young people and the potential for suicidal contagion (da Rosa et al., 2019; Quinn & Ford, 2018).

This review aims to synthesize the current research regarding the effects of the show and to provide guidance and direction to Canadian psychotherapists on how to respond to clients and the public with objective information about it. It also aims to help professionals working with youth such as teachers, social workers, and youth workers to gain an evidence-based perspective on the series and to help individuals make informed decisions about watching it while remaining rooted in current research evidence. This review also attempts to give a well-rounded overview of the existing literature surrounding the television show with both positive and negative aspects being considered.

This paper outlines the history of *13 Reasons Why* since its release, provides background information about suicide contagion, and reviews the current research literature surrounding it. Netflix's response to major criticisms of the show is examined, and finally, suggestions are made to Canadian mental health professionals about how to counsel their clients about the contents of this series.

The Progression of *13 Reasons Why*

The first season of *13 Reasons Why* was released by Netflix on March 31, 2017 (Golin et al., 2017). At the same time, Netflix released a 29-minute special entitled *13 Reasons Why: Beyond the Reasons* that featured the cast and the crew of the show as well as mental health professionals speaking about its intentions and the creators' reasoning for the direction they took with the portrayal of specific scenarios including rape, substance abuse, and suicide (Garcia et al., 2017–2019). Following the release of the first season, there was much backlash from the public and from mental health professionals alike, claiming that the show glamorized suicide and showed graphic scenarios that were not suited to its adolescent target audience (Arendt et al., 2019; Moran, 2017; Quinn & Ford, 2018).

In response to the backlash, Netflix announced the addition of trigger warnings to the beginning of each episode, featuring several cast and crew members, in May 2017 (Wright, 2018). On March 21, 2018, Netflix announced additional resources that were added in preparation for the release of the second season on May 18, 2018, including another 30-minute special, discussion questions for parents and teens, a pin code option to allow parents to block certain content on their Netflix accounts, as well as an information website with a directory of mental health resources for viewers (Wright, 2018).

On June 6, 2018, the show was renewed for a third season set to release in the summer of 2019. On July 15, 2019, Netflix announced that it would be removing retroactively the first-season scene in which Hannah takes her own

life (CBC News, 2019). On May 11, 2020, Netflix announced that the fourth and final season of *13 Reasons Why* would be released on Netflix on June 5, 2020 (Shaffer, 2020).

Suicide Contagion: Werther and Papageno Effects

Suicide contagion is described as the increase in suicides following the reporting or news of another suicide (Kral, 2019). This phenomenon is also known as the "Werther Effect," coined by Phillips (1974) after the book *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which resulted in several copycat suicides emulating the death of the main character (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). Phillips posited that the best possible cause of the Werther Effect is suggestion, meaning the suicide of one individual triggers the act of suicide in others.

The size of the Werther Effect also depends on exposure. The more days a story of suicide is presented on the front page of a newspaper, the stronger the reaction from others (Phillips, 1974). For example, after the suicide of Hollywood actress Marilyn Monroe, there was a significant increase in suicides around the world (Phillips, 1974). The same was found following the death of actor Robin Williams (Fink et al., 2018). The literature surrounding the Werther Effect and fictional portrayals of suicide is less certain (Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2019). Some studies suggest that fictional suicides do not have the same effect as actual reports (Devitt, 2017), while others suggest that the effect is equal if not more salient (Pouliot et al., 2011; Zimerman et al., 2018).

The Papageno Effect

The Papageno Effect suggests a complementary phenomenon to the Werther Effect. The *Papageno Effect* describes the process whereby reporting a suicide initiates an opposite response from the public (Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2010). A study by Niederkrotenthaler et al. (2010) found that media stories that focused on the mastery of crisis or on people who had found alternate coping strategies to suicide resulted in a decrease in suicide rates. The researchers also found that reports of suicidal ideation without suicidal behaviour affected suicide rates negatively. Therefore, it is possible for suicide reporting and information in the media to benefit the public, but such information must be presented carefully to avoid responses such as the Werther Effect.

Media Guidelines for Reporting on Suicide

In response to the literature on both the Werther Effect and the Papageno Effect, many health governing bodies have attempted to outline guidelines for media reporters. Such bodies include the World Health Organization, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, and the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention.

Recently, the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (NAASP, n.d.) has developed guidelines for fictional portrayals of suicide in media. The NAASP (n.d.) did not specify whether these guidelines were in response to *13 Reasons Why*, but their development is timely. Implications for *13 Reasons Why* are outlined in later sections.

Potential Risks and Benefits for Adolescents and Others

Potential Effects for Adolescents

The main issue surrounding *13 Reasons Why* is the potential effects it may have on viewers, especially adolescents. There is research that suggests some groups may be unaffected by the show's content, while others could be at risk for copycat behaviours (Ayers et al., 2017; Campo & Bridge, 2018; Zimerman et al., 2018). It is also possible that some people may benefit from viewing the show, becoming more empathic toward individuals who experience difficulties such as those portrayed in the series (Arendt et al., 2019).

There is a specific concern for adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18, as the subjects of the show are in this age group. Some of these characters suffer acts of rape, endure sexual assault, partake in substance abuse, and/or die by suicide. Additionally, as a group, adolescents are at a higher risk of copycat behaviour because, on average, they are highly susceptible to social learning (Sinyor et al., 2018); therefore, they may be strongly impacted by characters in media with whom they identify. Recent studies have begun to unpack the effect that the show might have had on young people in regions such as the United States and Brazil (Arendt et al., 2019; Bridge et al., 2020; Zimerman et al., 2018).

In a study by Zimerman et al. (2018), researchers studied bullying tendencies, suicidal ideation, and depression levels in a group of adolescents who watched the first season of *13 Reasons Why*. They found that there was a net decrease in suicidal ideation and bullying tendencies in the group. However, 16% of individuals who had a lifetime history of suicidal ideation thought about killing themselves more, and 25% showed no change in their levels of suicidal ideation. In addition, 4.7% of individuals with no prior suicide ideation history thought more about taking their own lives after watching the show. The results of the study suggest that while most adolescents were not adversely affected by the show, there are a number that may have been harmed after watching it. This study's results also reflect the ideas expressed by Notredame et al. (2018), who described the potential for suicidal content in shows to have a polarizing effect. Some individuals may have an increased sense of purpose, while others have a marked lowering in wellness. There is also evidence that increased exposure to the modelling of suicides can increase suicide risk for adolescents (Notredame et al., 2018), and exposure to intense content such as suicide has also been shown to increase distress in adolescent individuals (Pouliot et al., 2011; Zahl & Hawton, 2004).

In a study by Pouliot et al. (2011), 70% of individuals who had watched a portrayal of suicide in a film reported being distressed by the portrayal. Among these participants, 33% stated that they had felt distressed for several days to several weeks after viewing the film. In addition, 71% of these individuals reported being mentally preoccupied with what they had watched for some amount of time, and 68% of participants had experienced intrusive thoughts.

Recently, there have been more studies published on the tangible effects of the show on its viewers. Arendt et al. (2019) looked at the suicide risk and optimism of individuals who watched the second season of *13 Reasons Why* before and after the season's release (*n* = 729). They found that participants who had watched only part of the second season had significantly higher suicide risk and less optimism than those who had finished the season or had not watched any of the second season. By contrast, those who had completed the second season of the show had significantly higher optimism and lower suicide risk than those who had not finished and those who had not watched the season at all. The researchers suggested that the reason for this observation is rooted in the experience of the viewer. For those who had watched only part of the season, the reason for stopping prematurely may have been because it was distressing to them, eliminating the potential for any resolution or positive effect. Those who had finished the second season may have been able to identify with the journey of a character that ultimately had a positive outcome, thus instilling hope in the viewer.

There have also been studies looking at the epidemiological effects of the show on suicide rates and hospitalizations. A study by Cooper et al. (2018) observed a statistically significant increase in hospitalizations for suicide attempts and self-harm in one Pennsylvania hospital in the months following the first season's release. Another study by Niederkrotenthaler et al. (2019) used data on suicide rates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and found a significant increase (13.3%) in individuals between the ages of 10 and 19 in the 3 months following the release of the first season. They noted that this might not reflect the show's full negative impact, as the data did not include incidences of self-harm or suicide attempt.

In a separate study, Bridge et al. (2020) found a significant increase in overall suicide rates in the months following the release of the first season, after controlling for the time of year and the general rise in suicide rates over time. They noted a 28.9% increase in April 2017 for people between the ages of 10 and 17. They equated this percentage to about 195 additional deaths in the month after the show had premiered. Although this does not indicate causation, as this study looked at trends only in the general public and not in viewers of the show specifically, the correlation is timely. They noted a more significant effect on adolescent males than females, which is surprising as contagion is more likely to impact individuals of the same gender. Given that the main character of *13*

Reasons Why is female, it was expected that contagion effects would be more prevalent in female viewers.

Similarly, da Rosa et al. (2019) found a 24% worsening in overall mood in individuals between the ages 12 and 18 after comparing their moods in the month before watching the series with their moods after watching the series. They also noted worse effects in "vulnerable" individuals (those with a history of intense sadness, suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, and/or self-harm). They also asked respondents to describe what words came to mind when thinking about the main character of the show. There was a difference in about 20% of the responses when comparing those who had showed improvement in mood and those who had showed worsening in mood. Surprisingly, there was an 80% overlap between the two groups' responses. Top 10 words in the group that improved included "compassion" and "help." Top 10 words in the group that worsened included "despair" and "depression."

This body of research suggests that there are clear risks to consuming content containing portrayals of suicide in general and *13 Reasons Why* specifically. There is an elevated risk for teenagers in particular due to their impressionability and the influence of modelling on their behaviour. Campo and Bridge (2018) emphasized the dangers of the Netflix series, stating that suicidal contagion is fostered by elements such as simplistic explanations for suicide, presenting suicide as a method of getting revenge, glorifying the victim, and presenting a methodology option. Several critics and researchers have posited that *13 Reasons Why* ignores some or all of these cautions (Ayers, 2017; Campo & Bridge, 2018; Schrobsdorff, 2017).

With these concerns in mind, it is also important to note the helpful effects that the show may have on viewers, including adolescents. The sheer popularity of the show reflects its ability to connect with its audience, which consists mostly of adolescents (Mueller, 2019). There were mixed results in many of the studies addressing the series, with some noting an increase in self-reported compassion (da Rosa et al., 2019) and in increased optimism (Arendt et al., 2019).

In practical terms, it is also imperative to acknowledge that individual experiences are highly variable, and adolescents are not an exception to this rule. Although evidence might point toward a particular effect in one group, that does not necessarily inform individual experience.

Potential Effects Beyond Adolescent Viewers

There is evidence that the effects of *13 Reasons Why* extend beyond the adolescent demographic. In a study by Ayers et al. (2017), there was a significant increase in suicide-related searches on Google in the 12 days following the release of the first season (i.e., between 900,000 and 1.5 million more queries than expected). Some of these results reflected positive searches, such as those for suicide hotline numbers (21%) and suicide prevention (23%).

However, there were also negative searches that were significantly elevated following the show's release, including "how to kill yourself" (9%), "how to commit suicide" (26%), and "commit suicide" (18%). This study's results are a cause for alarm as suicide trends are linked to suicide Internet search statistics (Ayers et al., 2017). The format of the show's release is concerning, as streaming services often release whole seasons at a time, allowing viewers to binge-watch content and immerse themselves fully in the story (Quinn & Ford, 2018). In an editorial by O'Brien et al. (2017), the concern is raised regarding this immersion, as these scholars note it could have substantial effects on adolescents "whose brains are still developing the ability to inhibit certain emotions, desires, and actions" (p. 1418).

Overall, the results of the literature surrounding suicidal contagion and viewing fictional suicides are worrisome. There is evidence that exposure to such content may have a disproportionate influence on adolescents, on individuals with histories of suicidal ideation or mental illness, and on female viewers. As noted earlier, the effects of exposure may not be fully apparent because some behaviour—such as self-harm, suicidal ideation, and depression—may not prove to be lethal. In the study by Niederkrotenthaler et al. (2019), they noted that the main character in the show used cutting to end her life, an act that has very low lethality. Therefore, direct copycat behaviours may not have resulted in death. Niederkrotenthaler et al. also noted that there are discussion boards about the lethality of the method chosen by the main character.

Finally, it is important to consider the methodological issues present in the research thus far, including ecological fallacies and the limitations of using aggregate data. *Ecological fallacy* describes the notion that the presence of a correlation in a group does not necessarily reflect a correlation on an individual level (Blood & Pirkis, 2001). Therefore, these studies' results should not be used conclusively to infer individual responses to the show. Using cross-sectional data and convenience samples of individuals who have watched the show creates methodological issues that open further questions about longitudinal effects. Issues surrounding the character traits of viewers and the representativeness of the sample are also important to consider.

Assessment of Netflix's Response

In response to the backlash of the show, Netflix made several attempts to appease its critics by adding the *Beyond the Reasons* (Garcia et al., 2017) docuseries, implementing trigger warnings at the beginning of three episodes, creating a website with references to distress hotlines, adding parental features to the streaming service, commissioning a global study on the effects of the show, releasing media statements about the service's intentions and actions (Wright, 2018), and removing the scene depicting the main character's death in the first season. However, it is unclear whether the steps made by Netflix resolve the concerns about the series.

Trigger Warnings

After the negative feedback on the explicit and mature content of the show, Netflix added trigger warnings to the beginning of three of the show's episodes, featuring members of the cast cautioning viewers with a history of mental illness against watching the series. Taken at surface value, these trigger warnings seem helpful. However, there is evidence that trigger warnings do not decrease the desire to view content. A study by Bushman (2006) found that trigger warnings increased interest in programs containing violence in individuals between the ages of 9 and 77. However, information labels on media content did not increase or decrease interest levels across all age groups.

In another study, evidence suggested that television rating labels have a small enticing effect rather than a deterring effect for viewers as young as 11 years old (Bushman & Cantor, 2003). In their study on increased suicide risk and *13 Reasons Why*, Arendt et al. (2019) noted that their results also suggest that the trigger warnings enacted by Netflix had an enticing effect on viewers. Therefore, it is unlikely that these trigger warnings were effective in preventing vulnerable viewers from watching the series.

***Beyond the Reasons* and Website Release**

In addition to the 13 episodes of the first season, Netflix released a 29-minute special entitled *Beyond the Reasons* (*BTR*) and launched a website at 13reasonswhy.info (Netflix, 2018; Wright, 2018). The special featured several cast and crew members of the series as well as mental health professionals who spoke to the main issues presented in the show (Garcia et al., 2017). The website provides resources for individuals in distress, including phone numbers for suicide and distress hotlines, information about the show, and a series of videos about topics such as bullying and sexual assault created by Netflix. Arendt et al. (2019) noted that about 27% of their participants visited the website but controlling for this variable did not result in a significant change in the data for participants' risk for suicide, suggesting that the effect of the show was stronger than the impact of the website.

BTR covered several areas that the show addresses, including sexual assault, rape, substance abuse, and suicide. Although the intentions of the show's creators may have been honourable, there are several inconsistencies and discrepancies in the special, which may make viewers increasingly puzzled. The overall tone of *BTR* is one of encouraging conversation about the difficult concepts portrayed in *13 Reasons Why*, yet one of the executive producers of the show admits that "our job is mostly to entertain" (Garcia et al., 2017).

Perhaps one of the most confusing messages from *13 Reasons Why* is the way it portrays and talks about the character of the school counsellor. *BTR* highlighted the downfalls and mistakes made by the school counsellor, who brushes off the main character after she discloses that she was sexually assaulted. Such a portrayal

seems counterproductive, as both the streaming service is advocating for individuals struggling with thoughts of suicide to seek professional help through *BTR* and the website.

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Kathy Cowan (spokesperson for the National Association of School Psychologists) said the portrayal "sends the message that school mental professionals are not a trusted source for help. And all kids need to know that adults are there to help them and they can be trusted" (Balingit, 2017, para. 17). Such contradictions make statements such as "one of the goals was to represent everything as authentically and as truthful as possible" (Garcia et al., 2017) difficult to accept.

Netflix has also claimed that the show's producers and writers have worked closely with mental health professionals to ensure the show represents difficult topics such as suicide and assault in a sensitive manner (Garcia et al., 2017). However, Dan Reidenberg, executive director of Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, said that he advised the producers not to release the series after being asked by Netflix to review the first season. When asked about their response, he reported that, "that wasn't an option.… That was made very clear to me" (Eisenstadt, 2017, para. 4). In July 2019, Netflix announced that it would be removing the scene in which Hannah takes her own life, nearly two years after the release of this episode. To many, this was seen as a triumph in response to the recent evidence of the adverse effects of the show (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention [AFSP], 2019). However, other critics were not convinced, claiming that the main issue is within the premise of the entire story and that Netflix should stop making future seasons or even remove the series altogether (Tassi, 2019).

Northwestern University Study

In a media release by Netflix, Brian Wright (vice president of original series) stated that the streaming service had commissioned a global study on how *13 Reasons Why* influenced conversations between parents and children about the topics covered in the show (Wright, 2018). However, the validity of this study is questionable. It is beyond the scope of this review to assess every result found in this study, but the main concerns and points of contention from the U.S. and global report are discussed.

Data was collected from the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand. The study had more than 5,000 participants globally, which included teenagers (between the ages of 13 and 17), young adults (between the ages of 18 and 22), and parents of adolescents (Lauricella et al., 2018). The results of the study showed that 71% of teens found the show relatable. They also reported that 63–79% of teens who watched the show found it beneficial to them. Across the four regions, teens and young adults reported that the show had helped them to understand difficult topics (59–88%) and that teens and young adults had found the graphic nature of the show appropriate for their

age group. The study used standardized measures to assess characteristics such as resiliency, loneliness, self-esteem, and social anxiety. In their results, the authors acknowledged that there were differences in how viewers responded to the show based on these scores but did not provide any statistical data or validity and reliability measures of these scales apart from the Social Anxiety Scale for Children (Lauricella et al., 2018).

This study focused on understanding why the show resonated with many young people and whether the show opened a conversation between parents and their teens. While these are important topics worthy of investigation, the major concerns about the series, including effects on depression, suicidal ideation, and possible suicide contagion, are not addressed. Perhaps the most salient downfall of the report is that it is not published in a peer-reviewed journal and thus has not been sent through a peer-review process, which raises questions regarding the validity of the findings. The results of the study are stated in general terms without descriptive statistics, confidence intervals, or other statistical information common in such data-heavy studies (Norris et al., 2015). In addition, the report seems to fit a specific message—that *13 Reasons Why* is a safe and potentially enriching program for young people around the globe. Such an interpretation stands in contrast to several peer-reviewed studies that suggest that the show has adverse effects on at least a portion of viewers (Arendt et al., 2019; Bridge et al., 2020; da Rosa et al., 2019). In addition, although the results of the Northwestern study showed that adolescents had found the show to be relatable, those results do not address whether these individuals believed viewing it affected their or their peers' mental well-being. Finally, the study claimed that young people thought the depictions of troublesome topics such as suicide and rape were appropriate for their age group. Still, the study did not report on how parents felt about these depictions.

There are other fundamental concerns about this study, such as the fact that the authors did not disclose the funding sources for the study and make no mention of potential conflicts of interest. The study was initiated by Netflix, which suggests that the company paid for the research to be conducted. Based on the evidence shown, it is questionable whether the study provides a complete and unbiased assessment of the effect *13 Reasons Why* has on its viewers.

Adherence to Guidelines and Research Evidence

In a paper addressing suicidal contagion and *13 Reasons Why*, O'Brien et al. (2017) stated that it is "imperative that producers and broadcasters demonstrate that they are ethically and socially responsible by adhering to safe messaging guidelines" (p. 1418). Unfortunately, there has been a lack of regulation to guide individuals in the entertainment industry on how to approach topics such as

suicide. However, the NAASP (n.d.) has recently developed guidelines for depicting suicide:

1. Convey that suicide is complex and often caused by a range of factors, rather than by a single event.
2. Show that help is available.
3. Portray characters with suicidal thoughts who do not go on to die by suicide.
4. Connect viewers to resources.
5. Portray everyday characters who can be a lifeline.
6. Avoid showing or describing the details about suicide methods.
7. Consult with suicide prevention messaging experts and people with personal experience.
8. Depict the grieving and healing process of people who lose someone to suicide.
9. Use non-judgmental language (such as "died by suicide" rather than "committed suicide").

When holding the content and statements from the creators of *13 Reasons Why* up to the guidelines of the NAASP, it is generally unclear as to whether they satisfy these criteria fully. Because the guidelines are general and may apply to different portrayals in different ways, individuals must contemplate to what extent *13 Reasons Why* satisfies these guidelines. With the creation of the website and the release of the *Beyond the Reasons* docuseries, the creators of the show met Guideline 4. However, this guideline was not fully satisfied until the development of the resource website in 2018, almost a year after the release of the first season. Although the NAASP's guidelines were not developed until 2019, there are several other guidelines from groups such as the WHO (2017) that emphasize providing resources to the public when addressing suicide in media.

Guideline 1 is satisfied in the first season, as Hannah describes many factors that led to her decision, and Guidelines 2, 3, 5, and 8 were met but not until the second season of the show, which some viewers may not have watched. Guideline 9 is met throughout the series. Guideline 6 was not satisfied, as the show portrayed Hannah's death in graphic detail. However, as previously stated, the scene was removed in July 2019. Finally, Guideline 7 was satisfied as the creators consulted with mental health experts. However, it seems that they did not fully incorporate the advice of these experts into the show (Eisenstadt, 2017).

Issues for Psychotherapists in Canada

The first season of *13 Reasons Why* was one of the most popular shows of 2017 (Zimerman et al., 2018). Because of its popularity and the controversy surrounding the show, it has become imperative that the Canadian counselling community become informed regarding the issues presented in the show and the

potential negative effects it could have on our clients. We must not merely ignore the show or the issues surrounding it, lest we unintentionally reinforce or validate the characterization of the school counsellor in the series. One of the goals of this review is to guide counsellors in reaching an informed stance on the series and to continue the discussion regarding how we should respond to it as a profession.

A qualitative analysis examining the themes arising from a discussion group of individuals who read the novel upon which the show is based noted a significant difference in the main concerns expressed by the teens and by the parents who participated in the group (Walter & Boyd, 2019). The teen respondents (who were between the ages of 12 and 18) were concerned mainly that the story was relatable to them and that it addressed important topics they were facing in their everyday lives. The parents of the group were focused primarily on the repercussions and risks associated with youth reading content that seems to romanticize suicide, while also acknowledging that it is an important topic to talk about with youth. A critical takeaway for Canadian counsellors is to notice that there are many different perspectives and concerns when it comes to topics such as suicide and that such concerns raised by clients or loved ones should be met with nuanced and sensitive responses. Additionally, studies such as this one point to the importance of honouring the insight and wisdom that adolescents have into their own experiences. It is beneficial and even necessary to speak to them as equals and as experts on their generation rather than speaking *at* youth about important issues such as suicide, sexual assault, depression, or substance use. As counsellors, we must balance listening with genuine empathy and with providing accurate information about suicide and about portrayals of suicide in the media.

Netflix has included settings that allow parents to block shows such as *13 Reasons Why* from their accounts in order to prevent underage individuals from watching the series, and it added discussion questions to help parents talk to their adolescent children about topics such as suicide, bullying, and sexual assault. The issue with such resources is that they assume that parents will have the foresight to use them, and this is not the reality for many parents. As a society, we recognize that parents or guardians do not always monitor their children's viewing habits, and many are likely unaware of the adverse effects of viewing media that address things like suicide, self-harm, substance abuse, and/or sexual assault (Truscott & Crook, 2013). Therefore, we place some responsibility on the public to protect vulnerable persons such as minors and on professionals such as psychologists to educate and inform the public (Truscott & Crook, 2013). As counsellors and psychologists, we can offer resources such as the discussion questions provided by Netflix or more general guides to parents or guardians of young people to help facilitate positive and meaningful conversations about the topics presented in shows such as *13 Reasons Why*. External organizations outside Netflix have also developed discussion questions that can be accessed online (Mielke, 2017).

The research outlined above demonstrates that there are possible risks to consuming content presented in *13 Reasons Why* such as suicide contagion, intrusive thoughts from distressing content, and increased suicidal ideation (Ayers et al., 2017; Campo & Bridge, 2018; Zimerman et al., 2018). However, there seem also to be potential benefits such as increased awareness and intrigue to talk about difficult issues positively (Ayers et al., 2017; Zimerman et al., 2018). Psychotherapists cannot push the government or the media to remove such content altogether as it would impede on freedom of speech and infringe upon the autonomy and respect for the dignity of all Canadians, not just those who are underage or vulnerable to such content. If there is to be a collective agreement that content such as *13 Reasons Why* should not be available to the general public, it must start by allowing individuals to make informed decisions about the show, which may be assisted by mental health professionals.

Although it is of the utmost importance that we protect the autonomy of our clients and of the greater community, we can encourage individuals to consider the facts and research carefully before watching *13 Reasons Why*. We can also encourage clients who have a history of suicidal ideation or mental illness or who have been sexually assaulted to refrain from watching the series. As psychotherapists in Canada, we can influence and inform Canadians by helping governing bodies such as the WHO and the CPA create sound guidelines based on research literature and by adding to our understanding of suicidal contagion and of fictional portrayals of suicide in future research. Although the Netflix series has been the subject of scrutiny, there is also a question of whether the book the series was based on may produce similar distress and increased suicidal behaviour among readers. Therefore, further research on the effect of books on suicidal contagion may be warranted.

Campo and Bridge (2018) recognized *13 Reasons Why* as an attempt to help individuals and groups wrestle with difficult topics in positive ways. However, they also asserted that the show was not grounded in the research literature surrounding media effects on suicide. They posit that if such a show were presented to a regulatory body, it would not have been released even on a trial period. Future filmmakers may consider closer, genuine collaboration with mental health professionals when addressing topics such as suicide in films to ensure they are presented responsibly and in a way that brings creative understanding to these complicated matters. In addition, we can encourage individuals in the entertainment industry to access guidelines such as those created by the NAASP. Perhaps more than anything else the results found in this review highlight the need for more research on the Werther Effect and on other influences that fictional portrayals of suicide may have on viewers, as we know little about the longitudinal effects of such content or about how to prevent adverse effects from shows such as *13 Reasons Why*.

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