

# ***Reflections on the Influence of American TV Series "13 Reasons Why" on Teenagers***

Xiaojing Liu<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Health college, Zhuhai college of Science and Technology, Zhuhai, 519000, China

a. 1729095165@qq.com

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** With the continuous development of modern society and economy, Internet technology and mobile terminal devices have been rapidly popularized, and young people have more options for leisure and entertainment, among which movies and TV dramas are one of the most important ones, which are very attractive to young people and play a certain guiding role. Young people can learn important life knowledge from movies and TV dramas. But at the same time, some bad content and scenes of teenagers also have a negative impact on the healthy growth of teenagers. Therefore, this paper mainly discusses the impact of the TV series 13 Reasons Why on the health of teenagers. Through analyzing the content of the play and combining with the collected literature, this paper analyzes the impact on the health of teenagers and gives suggestions on how to better guide teenagers to watch the play and reduce the adverse effects.

**Keywords:** adolescent, mental health, suicide, bullying, sexual assault

## **1. Introduction**

Thirteen Reasons Why is a controversial US TV series that shows the challenges and problems faced by teenagers, such as bullying, sexual harassment, and mental health. After the broadcast of the series, it has triggered a wide social discussion and an increase in suicides in some areas, causing many researchers to explore and criticize the suicide scenes and behaviors in the series. But in the series of studies, not much has been explored outside the subject of suicide. The theme of this study is to explore the influence of 13 Reasons on the mental health of adolescents. Including potential effects on emotional state, values, etc. The study will use a literature review to try to analyze the influence and effect of 13 Reasons Why on teenagers. This paper will focus on the play's role in triggering emotional responses and changes in perceptions and attitudes. In addition, this paper will discuss the role of factors such as parent-child relationships, educational environments, and social media, and propose relevant intervention strategies to provide guidance and recommendations for parents, educators, and decision makers. Through discussion, we can learn more about the impact of this series on them, which is conducive to enabling teenagers to cope and grow in a positive and healthy way when facing similar problems.

## 2. Status quo of adolescent psychology and behavior

Teenagers are in the process of psychological and physical growth; their characteristics and performance can be divided into several levels: first, on a personal level, their psychology generally has the following characteristics, emotional instability is enhanced by emotional polarization. Teenagers in this period express their feelings directly and passionately, and are easily affected by external stimuli. It could be a sentence in someone's speech, or it could be a physical action that causes a change in your mental mood. Second, people are becoming more self-aware and willing to express themselves. Due to the gradual psychological maturity, teenagers show a strong desire to participate in and carry out many favorite social activities and crave recognition. Third, the inner thoughts are more complex. Their physical and mental development is not mature; the psychological and physical growth of adolescence is not synchronized. When psychological maturity lags behind physical maturity, teenagers often have some contradictions and conflicts in their hearts and feel helpless but ashamed to express them. They have poor self-control, mood swings, and are prone to temper tantrums and impulsivity [1]. They often resort to aggressive behavior to vent their tension and frustration without thinking about the consequences.

## 3. Plot overview and analysis of the series 13 Reasons Why

In the digital age, many teenagers now like to watch movies and TV series, which not only have strong entertainment and leisure functions, but also can kill time. Earlier, "13 Reasons" was once a concern, Imdb and other platforms scored very high. Based on Jay Isha's best-selling novel of the same name, the show was ranked No. 1 in the New York Times in 2007, which helped boost ratings and sparked a lot of discussion about the show.

The story follows an 18-year-old boy, Clay, who receives a mysterious package one night and opens it to find seven labeled tapes and a map. In these seven tapes, the late Hannah recorded 13 reasons that directly or indirectly led to her suicide, using 13 dusty exchanges to introduce what kind of identity they had in her death and why she took her own life. The series uses a unique flashback technique, and the audience follows the perspective of the teenager Clay, and gradually discovers the many unknown secrets behind the whole story through Hannah's recordings. In the story, each person's seemingly insignificant actions eventually trigger the suicide of a teenage girl and a series of tragedies at school. This drama is different from the previous campus youth themes; it is no longer warm, sweet, sunny, etc. It is full of dark elements such as suicide, sexual assault, bullying, drug use, lying, and so on, exposing the worst side of the campus. In terms of subject matter, it's basically about depression, bullying, sexual assault, racial and minority groups, drug use, and so on, and the second season also adds resistance to authority, dissatisfaction with the system, and so on, which has been called "the darkest school drama ever."

The setting and content of the story revolve around school life and the setting is realistic, so teenagers will be the main audience for 13 Reasons Why. These stories can be said to be a microcosm of some people's lives. For example: the spread of Justin's "intimate photos" in the park, Alex lying about sleeping with Hannah to anger his girlfriend Jessica, Jessica's suspicion and alienation as a friend, Taylor taking pictures of her outside her window, invading Hannah's privacy, Courtney protecting herself by making up rumors that Hannah is gay and promiscuous, Zach steals notes from Hannah's praise bag because she refuses, Ryan takes it upon himself to publish Hannah's poetry, Bryce's rape, and Kevin, as a therapist, ignores help signals in Hannah's words, and so on. The good aspect of these scenes is that they can make some viewers realize not to be such people to a certain extent, including the final fate of drug addict Justin, which will make some addicts who are not too deeply poisoned stop to reflect, but at the same time, the negative effects of the drama and suicide scenes attract attention.

## **4. The impact of 13 Reasons Why on adolescent health**

### **4.1. The emotional impact the show might have**

The dissemination of movies and TV dramas can make audiences experience empathy and empathic responses, especially realistic TV dramas. When watching movies and TV dramas, people tend to have emotional fluctuations with the ups and downs of the plot and cry with emotion and sadness because the neural mirror element in the audience's mind re-constructs the scenes in the movies and TV dramas for them. Making the audience experience the character again in the form of a mirror image is the material basis of the empathic response. Empathy is the ability to feel the inner world of others. Empathy is divided into emotional empathy and cognitive empathy, and cognitive empathy needs to be processed according to existing cognition[2]. If teens can't process information correctly, when they associate with experiences similar to their own, they may not have altruistic effects such as empathy, but may seek relief by imitating the protagonist who has the same experience as them.

At the same time, research has proved that affective empathy is imitative, and "this process can be expressed through perception-imitation-feedback-emotion" [2]. This bottom-up emotional process, guided by physiological feedback, is very effective at automatic generation. After watching the crying and angry expressions, the audience will subconsciously imitate the actions, and the emotions of the characters in the play are very full, which should affect the emotions of teenagers after watching. In particular, the suicide scene makes the audience uncomfortable, and the pain of empathy makes the audience likely to produce sadness, anxiety and other reactions.

Empathic experiences are similar, simulationism holds that in creating a mapped emotion, individuals receive relevant emotional information (such as someone being hurt, etc.) and react to this information in the same way as if these miseries had happened to them [3]. It's easier to feel the pressure of empathy when trying to imagine what someone else is going through. The scenes in the film are mostly heavy and negative: the heroine is raped, there is school violence, and there is a betrayal of her friendship. Ordinary viewers will undoubtedly have sad, depressed, and sympathetic reactions, but teenagers with negative emotions, especially those who have similar experiences in the drama, are prone to further deterioration of their mental health after watching, and the time and frequency of anxiety, irritability, depression and other emotions become longer. Finally, when teens watch scenes of violence and sexual assault, they may mimic or desensitize the behavior.

### **4.2. The impact of existing research findings**

The spread of the show has sparked heated debate over the show's portrayal of sensitive topics such as teenage suicide, self-harm, rape and bullying [4]. In an online survey published in May 2017, 23.7% of people said their mood worsened after watching 13 Reasons Why. The study found that among teens who already had more severe or frequent feelings of sadness and a lack of motivation, a higher percentage deteriorated in mood after watching the show. Similarly, more people with a history of suicidal ideation, self-harming behavior, or suicide attempts experienced a deterioration in mood after watching the episode [5]. It can be seen that its impact on emotions will further affect the behavior of adolescents. According to media reports, the show was imitated among high school students [6]. The Society for The Prevention of Youth Suicide says the show may increase viewers' sense of belonging and identification with the characters and/or scenes [7]. Educators, journalists, and parents have expressed concerns about the show, and health experts have panned the show, warning that the spread of suicide scenes could lead to contagion effects, and linking the show to self-harm and suicide threats among young people [8]. The National Association of School Psychologists stated that the series could trigger "self-harm in vulnerable viewers because it

romanticizes suicide and portrays it as the only option for coping with negative experiences " Therefore, it has been argued that "clinicians need to be aware of the impact of media on adolescent suicide and ask vulnerable young patients about possible exposure to minimise potentially harmful effects" [9]. It can be seen that the show has had an impact on suicidal behavior among teenagers.

### 4.3. The positive impact of the play

In addition, it has some positive effects: it has brought public attention to the mental health problems of adolescents; Evoking the emotional resonance and identity of teenagers may awaken the conscience of some. While specific perceptions vary from person to person, for the majority of people willing to watch, it may be a warning that we need to help those in need and give them a little light.

## 5. Tips to guide teens when watching 13 Reasons Why

The vicious influence of the play has been concerned by the public, if there is reasonable guidance and help, it will have educational significance for teenagers. This article recommends that it is carried out from the following aspects.

First of all, parents should take time to care about their children's growth, care more about their children's feelings and whether life is smooth, whether problems and disputes are solved in time, cultivate children's sense of trust and a positive attitude toward life, the ability to deal with problems, and build a strong heart, and give children appropriate emotional resonance and response when communicating, such as nodding, and find solutions with their children. At the same time, it should not directly evaluate whether the child is correct; let the child try and experience, cultivate the ability to correct mistakes, and gradually guide the child to establish a correct concept of right and wrong. Studies have shown that high frequency and prolonged family activities help to improve children's happiness, security and sense of belonging [10]. Therefore, rich and effective family activities can cultivate teenagers' good social communication ability and social adaptability. In this way, the child will not be easily knocked down by life, no matter what kind of movies and TV plays are released in the future, they will not be so easily affected by the content of movies and TV plays, and then change their behavior choices. Parents should watch such programs with their children, where adults can guide them and reflect on their own inadequacies while reducing the incidence of vicious incidents such as bullying. 2. School mental health education: schools generally conduct tests on students such as self-rating scale and Cattell 16 personality Factor Scale to establish psychological files of psychologically susceptible adolescents and psychologically normal adolescents at different levels [11]. According to the different classification results, targeted mental health education was carried out for teenagers in school, and mental health related activities were planned and organized by teachers. Students should be encouraged to engage and self-identify psychological weaknesses and avoid exposing them to these negative topics. You can play some meaningful clips of the play to other students for timely explanation and guidance. Tell them that these actions are inappropriate and that they should not be intentional or unintentional abusers. 3. On society: relevant departments should strengthen the supervision of the content of video media producers, pay attention to the Witt effect, and strive to disseminate healthy and appropriate information to adolescents[12]. Or it can be further detailed, such as indicating that do not imitate, when emotional discomfort can ask for professional help and other information.

## 6. Conclusion

In the study of this series, most researchers will pay more attention to the suicide behavior and scenes in the drama. In fact, there are other aspects that can be discussed, such as social behavior

choices and self-identity. In addition, different audiences have different experiences. If it is possible, we can do more follow-up investigations and discussions on whether people's emotional and behavioral choices before and after the drama have influence and change, and collect their experience of watching the drama. It may be a reference for the development of film and television drama and for the audience to better understand the relevant drama. Young people are not yet mature, and their healthy growth is closely related to the whole social group, and adults need to provide timely help, care, and guidance. Film and television workers should not only pursue interests and artistic effects but also consider the feelings of young people. Teachers and parents should pay attention to depressed teenagers, isolate them from such work, provide professional support to avoid negative effects, strive to combat campus violence in education, and give teenagers a good environment to grow up in.

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