

EDST 590: THE USE OF TV SHOWS TO EDUCATE ABOUT SEX: THE CASE OF *13 REASONS WHY*

By

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## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction**

In Europe and in the Americas, interested parties have increased their attention and interests regarding sexual education over the years by developing standards and tools to implement it at school (UNESCO, p.12). Multiple research projects have proved how important it is to make sure that young people have the knowledge and the skills to manage their future relationships and their sexuality in a healthy way (UNESCO, p.12). However, the way sexual education should be taught is still a controversial debate. There is a gap between what young people want to know and what is actually taught. Studies have noted that young people are most interested in learning about pleasure – a topic typically excluded from formal sexuality education which is more focused on the “physical aspects of reproduction, puberty, and scientific information about STIs and unwanted pregnancy” (McKee, 2012, p.502). Young people must have information about sexuality presented in an appealing way and which is relevant to what they are experiencing and what they like (McKee, 2012, p.503). Furthermore, youth (ages 8 to 18 years old) spend a lot of time in front of a screen (an average of 3.5 hours a day) as it is something that they relate to. Television (TV) shows could be used as a tool to create an open discussion about sensitive topics related to sexuality.

This paper takes up a particular TV show as a tool for sexuality education. The paper’s first part will focus on Entertainment Education (EE). It is one strategy that uses TV shows to provide healthy sexual education in an appealing manner. Scull, T. M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J. B. and Suellentrop, K. (2015) explain that “recent research and theorizing suggests that the persuasive effects of EE derive from its engaging narrative structure. Thus, viewers become so absorbed in the narrative that they accept embedded health-related messages without any resistance and without even noticing that they are

receiving these messages” (Scull, T. M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J. B. and Suellentrop, K, 2015).

The EE approach opens the discussion about the “innocence” of children and teenagers who should be protected from “the bad media” (Grace, 2005, p.503). There is still a current concern about the idea of protecting young people from information and images about their changing bodies and sexuality. As Grace (2005) explains, in this context “the provision of sexuality education becomes increasingly controversial” (Grace, 2005, p.504). In this graduating paper, I will open the conversation about the use of media at school to educate about sexuality. I will raise the question of the innocence of children versus the responsibility to give those young children answers and information. Indeed, young people with or without the consent of adults can have access to the TV shows they want to see and that their friends have watched (Aranjuez, 2018). Consequently, I will claim that young people need to have the tools to understand them. The classroom could be this space. I will review the literature on EE, summarize the main advantages of this approach for sexual education and address any criticisms.

The paper’s second part will look closely at a particular case: the TV show *13 Reasons Why*. *13 Reasons Why* is based on the best-selling books by Jay Asher. The plot follows teenager Clay Jensen who discovers a number of cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker, a teen who committed suicide a couple of weeks before. In this audio diary, she explained the thirteen reasons why she decided to end her life. Among young people, this TV show became viral very quickly. With the Netflix platform, teenagers are able to watch this show very easily and without the supervision of any adult (Aranjuez, 2018).

A lot of other TV shows could have been chosen to talk about sexual education. However, I have decided to use *13 Reasons Why* for two main reasons: the enormous

popularity of the show particularly among teenagers and the diversity of the topics tackled. Indeed, this series was released on March 31, 2017 and quickly became the most watched series on Netflix. It was in the top three of the most popular shows on the Netflix platform across 32 countries in 2017 (Carmichael, & Whitley, 2018) and has been watched by millions of young people across the globe (Jenney, Exner-Cortens, 2018, p.410). It became the most tweeted series of 2017. Just in the month following its releasing, the show was tweeted about 11 million times. It was the most talked about shows on the year because it was rated high via social media among teenagers (Osborne, 2018, p.101). Furthermore, Aranjuez (2018) explains that “it has already permeated youth culture, with teens posting homages and even parody videos” (Aranjuez, 2018).

The show incorporates sensitive topics such as bullying, slut-shaming, heterosexism, sexual abuse, consent, and suicide. In some schools in Canada, it was even forbidden to talk about the show. I would like to discuss if and how a very popular teen TV show could both open a discussion about very sensitive sexual health topics that students identify as relevant today while using everyday language and create a balance between humor and seriousness. I will discuss why some schools in Canada have banned talking about it, and what the NW University survey which looks at how teens and parents responded to the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* said about such bans. I will also look at the TV show and all the debate surrounding it. I will particularly look at the two discussions (for and against the show) after the two seasons that Netflix has produced which is used as a way to explain to the audience the sensitive topics displayed in the show. I will examine these discussions to see if the debate around suicide in this show could be a barrier to use this TV show for sexual education.

Finally, the largest section will focus on how *13 Reasons Why* could be used for EE. I will look at specific episodes, scenes, and characters, which could educate youth, in an EE manner, about sensitive topics that they should know about and which are strongly related to

their own teenager experiences such as bullying, slut-shaming, consent, depression and “first times”.

To conclude, my graduating paper I will try to answer these following questions: Can EE improve sexual education for young people? And what does a case study of the series *13 Reasons Why* tell us about this?

## Chapter Two:

### **Entertainment Education (EE): another appealing way to educate about sexual education.**

#### A) Definition and origins.

Entertainment-Education (EE) is “a popular strategy to use or create entertainment media in order to convey an educational message and positively influence awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviours” (Moyer-Guse, E, 2008, p.408). It is a tool to change the behaviour on topics related mostly to health instead of a theory of communication. Messages have to be engaging and appealing to avoid resistance from the audience (Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K., 2015, p.2). In other words, Singhal (2004-2003) defines EE as “a process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience knowledge about an issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behaviour” (Singhal, 2004-2003, p.6). Most of the messages concern HIV prevention, condom use, awareness of domestic violence, rape, and other social issues. Message uptake is measured mostly through surveys and by studying the differences between a group that has watched and another that has not.

Two types of EE exist. In one case, the storyline of the TV show is created and developed with the intent of influencing defined behaviour. Multiple shows have been created in order for their impact on the population to be studied by researchers. For instance, in India, Jasoos Vijay, watched by 125 million people and one of the top ten of TV program in India has been produced to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, to change social norms about it and to reduce stigma. It has been estimated that 5.6 million (16%) had a positive change in their sexual behaviour four months after the TV show was released (Singhal, 2004-2003, p.5)

In the other case, the TV program can exist firstly for an entertainment purpose, but nonetheless incidentally promote healthy behaviours. This is true of the TV program I have chosen to study: *13 Reasons Why*. It was not created by specialists and academics to change the behaviours of teenagers toward bullying, rape, and suicide. However, through the storyline, these themes are raised. Consequently, the program could be used at school to change behaviour. A difference between the two cases is that in the second case, to influence the behaviour, the intervention of an adult is necessary. Indeed, if the TV show has not been produced in order to change behaviour, a discussion with an adult or with a peer is needed to raise the important points.

In the case of *13 Reasons Why*, a lot of sensitive topics such as bullying, rape, and suicide are questioned. Cohen (2001) explains that “if identification involves internalization, it is likely that repetitive internalization of powerful and seductive images and alternative identities of media characters may have some long-term effects. This is especially true for adolescents who are in the process of forming their own identity and are susceptible to influence by media characters” (Cohen, 2001, p.249). A conversation is required, and ideally with an adult, to ensure that only the positive messages are internalized. However, young people with or without the consent of adults can always have access to the TV shows they want to see and that their friends have watched (Aranjuez, 2018). They can not be always supervised by an adult. Consequently, I will claim young people need to have the tools to understand them. They must have the right to have a person or space where they can talk about them. The classroom could be this space.

The first EE programs were launched on the radio with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s *The Lawsons* (in 1944), then with the BBC and the *Archers* in 1951 and on television with *Simplemente María* (in 1969), a Peruvian telenovela. However, in the process

of designing or evaluating the effects, scholars were not involved (Singhal and Rogers, 2002, p.117). Then, the sociocognitive model of EE was pioneered by Miguel Sabido, a creative writer-producer-director in 1981. Sabido studied it for two years to develop a theory for creating successful prosocial soap operas (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). His model TV series is a long-running EE series show. Singhal (2003-2004) explains that “each episode tries to depict the daily lives of people, some with adverse life-course trajectories, while others model resiliently effective ways to improve their quality of life. The characters become guides and provide incentives for personal and social change” (Singhal, 2003-2004, p.82). Sabido’s formula for a successful EE program includes five elements that Singhal (2003-2004, p.119) defines as “(a) a circular model of communication (b) social learning theory, (c) dramatic theory, (d) Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious” (Jung, 1970), and (e) the concept of the triune brain<sup>1</sup> (Singhal, Rogers, & Brown, 1993). Consequently, Sabido developed soap operas that involved the whole body (intellectual, emotional, and physical) (Singhal, 2003-2004, p.127). These criteria can be used to evaluate if *13 Reasons Why* could be assessed as an effective EE program.

To study media as both agents of entertainment and persuasion, EE represents a valuable and unique area (Singhal and Rogers, 2002, p.119). Piotrow et al. (1997) define “nine advantages of EE and that make it an effective way to promote healthy behaviour:

- Popular: People like entertainment, seek it out, and enjoy it.
- Passionate: Entertainment stimulates the emotions, such as sadness when a character dies or something bad happens to him/her; excitement to know what will happen next;

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<sup>1</sup> The theory of triune brain is about the way individuals process messages cognitively, affectively and physically through three separate brain centers. To transmit effectively a message, the three centers have to be involved.

happiness when a comic scene is showed. Emotions prompt people to remember, talk to others, and people become more inclined to take action.

- Personal: People identify with dramatic characters as if they were personal friends.
- Participatory: People participate by singing, dancing, and talking about entertaining characters, stories, and activities.
- Persuasive: People can be persuaded to identify with role models, and then see the consequences of sensible or foolish behaviour and imitate what works.
- Practical: Entertainment infrastructures and performers are already in place and always look for good dramatic themes.
- Profitable: Good EE helps pay its own way and generates sponsorship, collateral promotions, and, sometimes profit.
- Proven effective: Messages from entertainment can change the way people think, feel, and behave” (Piotrow et al, 1997).

These advantages are possible thanks to different techniques which can allow the viewers to change. They have multiple ways to respond. They can like or dislike the characters; or feel close to them; find similarities or differences between the characters and themselves; find the characters sexually or romantically attractive; or, by desire to imitate them (Cohen, 2001, p.252). The most common one is identification. By identifying themselves with a character, the audience changes its opinions and behaviours. Furthermore, readers experience strong emotions and motivations through the characters, even when they know what they are viewing is not real. Consequently, they will reflect on the decision and actions of the characters and what could have been done to change the end (Green, M. C., Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C., 2000, p.702). This applies to both positive and negative influences. This involvement and reflection can open deep debate and change behaviours. Indeed, they can try in real life to not make the same mistake, which may save someone’s life.

EE can teach individual self-efficacy, which is defined as “the perception of someone of his or her capability to deal with and control a situation” (Singhal and Rogers, 2002, p.128). Indeed, viewing people similar to themselves and changing their lives, or relationships, for the better by using strategies they view, raises in viewers a sense of efficacy of how they too can succeed in life. They come to admire and get attached to the characters. The process involves four dimensions that Moyer Guse (2008) defines as: “empathic (shared feelings with the character); cognitive (sharing the character’s perspective); motivational (internalizing the character’s goals); and absorption (the loss of self-awareness during exposure)” (Moyer Guse, E, 2008, p.410). For instance, in the study by Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K. (2015), teenagers were asked to watch episodes of the reality show *16 and Pregnant*. Adolescents enjoyed the experience overall and reported that they would recommend the experience to friends. These adolescents also reported learning that teen parenthood is harder than they had imagined. Furthermore, post-viewing discussion with friends (among others) is always resulted after the participation in this experience (Moyer Gusé, E., Chung, A. H., & Jain, P, 2011, p.8).

Indeed, as Cohen (2001) explains:

When reading a novel or watching a film or a television program, audience members often become absorbed in the plot and identify with the characters portrayed. Unlike the more distanced mode of reception—that of spectatorship—*identification* is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside as if the events were happening to them (Cohen, 2001, p.245).

Wolheim (1974) provided another definition of identification: “It allows the viewers to develop their self-identity” (Wolheim, 1974). Self-identity is related to the perception of others and how they view us. Through fictional characters, the audience gains another perspective. Bettelheim (1976) defines the concept with the example of children’s tales. He argued that by identifying with the hero of the tale, children experience the triumph of good

over evil and learn which behaviour will lead them to happiness. Melodramatic embellishments and music are used which give intensity and drama to the episode to involve the audience and bring identification (Singhal, 2004-2003, p.83).

The greatest advantage of EE thanks to identification is to be able to model socially responsible behaviour without explicitly advocating it, which allows EE to avoid resistance in the audience, and particularly among teenagers (Collins, R.L., Elliot, M.N., Berry, S.H., Kanouse, D.E., and S.B. Hunter. 2003). Indeed, research suggests that “identification with efficacious characters can also reduce counterarguing. Individuals often scrutinize threatening messages, especially those that attempt to change their behaviour” (Moyer Gusé, E., Chung, A. H., & Jain, P, 2011, p.392). The identification with characters allows avoiding the straightforward message that sensitive audiences such as those made up of teenagers could reject. In other words, they will change more through the influence of a character like them than through an impersonal lecture.

B) EE is an innovative and efficient way to talk about sexual education.

Finally, EE has been proved to be efficient. Since 1982, the Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Communication Programs created “more than 100 entertainment-education productions worldwide designed to improve public health and tested their efficiency” (Singhal, 2003-2004, p.39). They have shown that EE is an efficient way “to change knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and norms because they evoke emotions, create models, and lead to discussion among viewers and show the consequences of both healthy and unhealthy behaviour” (Singhal, 2003-2004, p.39). In the same way, Moyer-Guse (2008) explains that “the E-ELM Extended elaboration likelihood model focuses on the unique ability of entertainment-education to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behavior by reducing

message counterarguing, a form of resistance characterized by the generation of thoughts that dispute or are inconsistent with the persuasive argument” (Moyer-Guse, E, 2008, p.412). For instance, the study of Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K., which studied the effectiveness of watching *16 and Pregnant* have proved that the teenagers have appreciated the experience and would recommend to friends. It has launched conversation on teenage pregnancy and condom use. In that sense, the program has been efficient. However, the researchers also realize that “a three-day media exposure may not shift adolescents’ intentions and perceptions sufficiently enough that they are visible in the short term. A longer-term follow-up might have revealed that this intervention resulted in some kinds of behavioral change” (Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K., 2015).

Furthermore, adding to EE’s potential effectiveness is that youth (ages 8 to 18 years old) spend an average of 2.5 hours a day with media as it is arguably something that they relate to. The report of Eurodata TV (Eurodata TV, 2004) showcases that “daily TV viewing time of 15-34 years olds depends on the country and varies widely, ranging from 1 hour 24 minutes in Sweden to 3 hours 18 minutes in the United States. Young Americans tend to be the only ones to spend over 3 hours a day watching TV, followed by Italian young viewers (2 hours 54 minutes) and Dutch ones (2 hours 37 minutes).”

Media are one of youth’s primary sources of information about sex and how to talk with romantic partners directly (Scull, Kupersmidt, Malik, & Keefe, 2018, p.166).

Sexual education is an integral component of basic human rights. Loeber, Reuter, Apter, van, Lazdane, & Pinter (2010) define sexuality as “a central aspect of the human being throughout life and which encompasses sex, gender identities, and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction” (Loeber, Reuter, Apter, van, Lazdane, & Pinter, 2010, p.2). Sexuality education is designated by the International Planned Parenthood

Federation (IPPF) as “education about all matters relating to sexuality and its expression.” Sexuality education covers the same topics as sex education but includes issues such as relationships, attitudes towards sexuality, sexual roles, gender relations, and social pressures to be sexually active. The aim of a sexual education approach is to decrease negative effects of sexual activity and to enable people to have safe and satisfying relationships (Loeber, Reuter, Apter, van, Lazdane, & Pinter, 2010, p.2). Sexuality education is also used to address the complexity of gender stereotypes (Szirom, 1988, p.XIV). It should include aspects such as biological and physiological characteristics but also the sexual feelings and the perception of our own sexual behaviour (Szirom, 1988, p.45). It is particularly important during puberty because romantic relationships start at that period and launch youth into a lifelong pattern of intimate partnerships (Adams, & Williams, 2011, p.1875). It is also a way to prevent domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking (Ortiz, & Shafer, 2016; 2017, p.22). Consequently, it is important to teach youths how to have healthy and stable relationships but also what is consensual sex.

However, most of sex education programmes are oriented toward science or are biology-based. Reproduction, pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS are the topics most often covered. Even though these are fundamental topics, it has been shown that teenagers wanted more diversity in the topics and more topics related to what they live (Szirom, 1988, p.102). There is a gap between what young people want to know and what is actually taught. Studies have noted that young people are most interested in learning about pleasure – a topic typically excluded from formal sexuality education which is more focused on the “physical aspects of reproduction, puberty, and scientific information about STIs and unwanted pregnancy” (McKee, 2012, p.502). Studies show that youth want to learn more about the formation of healthy relationships, especially when it is a positive message (Adams, & Williams, 2011, p.1876). Furthermore, it has been proved that sexual education, instead of “hastening or

increasing sexual behaviour, actually contributes to delaying sexual activities and increases their stability and safety” (Loeber, Reuter, Apter, van, Lazdane, & Pinter, 2010, p.4).

Young people want and need information about sexuality presented in an attractive way which is relevant to them (McKee, 2012, p.503). Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K. (2015) explain that “most teenagers (60 per cent) in the USA reported learning something helpful from sexual scenes on TV, such as how to say no to an unwanted sexual initiation and how to talk to a partner about safe sex” (Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K, 2015). For instance, Collins, R.L., Elliot, M.N., Berry, S.H., Kanouse, D.E., and S.B. Hunter (2003) have noticed that teenagers who saw an episode of the TV show *Friends* that is about an unplanned pregnancy “could more accurately remember the effectiveness rate of condoms than those who had not seen the episode.”. Sexual education is a sensitive topic which can be difficult to approach with teenagers. TV shows are a way for educators to make them involved and to avoid embarrassment. Instead of talking theoretically or about them directly, the teachers can use the different characters.

Indeed, EE is an appropriate method to teach sexual education because, as we have already seen, it involves the emotions. Adams & Williams (2011) explain that “given the centrality of emotional experiences during adolescence, providing youth with healthy coping and negotiating strategies within sexual education curricula may be especially timely” (p.1876). Ortiz, & Shafer (2016; 2017) reveal that their campaign for sexual education and consent was successful because they made it appealing. Through the analysis of different experiments, it has been shown that it is difficult to reach and engage students with educational messages about sexual consent and sexual harassment (Ortiz, & Shafer, 2016; 2017, p.24). Furthermore, children and teenagers, even more than any audience, need to be

motivated to be involved in any class. When people are motivated, they process the message centrally which means that they will think carefully about it, elaborate and critically evaluate it. This central process leads to “a stable and sustained attitude and behavioural changes” (Singhal, 2004-2003, p.127).

## Chapter Three

### **Presentation of the show *13 Reasons Why*, of the debates around it, and the results we have.**

We have seen how sexual education is important. Teenagers are looking for answers. They want to talk about topics which concern them. Using media is a way to make them interested.

*13 Reasons Why* is a popular fictional Netflix show depicting a group of American teenagers in a high school. Based on Jay Asher's best-selling novel, it tells the story of Hannah Baker, an adolescent girl who commits suicide after a following of a series of traumas such as bullying and rapes and disappointments (Campo, Bridge, 2018). While all the school is struggling to understand the motivations behind her suicide, Clay (portrayed as the "good guy") mysteriously receives a box with 13 cassette tapes that Hannah recorder prior to her death. The cassettes, each addressed to a different person, explain the thirteen reasons why she took her own life and reveal her truth (Osborne, 2018, p.101). Unlike the book, the TV show allows the audience to see the consequences of the contents of cassette tapes on these different people in the aftermath of Hannah's death. Osbourne depicts the TV show as a "more serious and darker teen drama than those that have preceded it and the previously unknown actors/actresses that make up its cast do an excellent job portraying their characters" (Osborne, 2018, p.101).

Every episode represents one tape and focuses on one of the characters, which are: Justin, Jessica, Alex, Tyler, Courtney, Marcus, Zach, Ryan, Bryce, and Mr. Porter. In the seventh tape, Hannah claims that Jessica and Justin "broke [her] heart ... Alex, Tyler, Courtney, Marcus ... each helped destroy [her] reputation ... Zach and Ryan ... broke [her] spirit, and Bryce Walker ... broke [her] soul" (Yorkey, B (2017), S1, EP 7) (Osborne, 2018,

p.102). Justin, the first on the list, was Hannah's first kiss. The event was embellished by him and caused rumors to circulate around the school about her. Jessica, the first and best friend of Hannah ended their relationship in a very painful way. Later on, she was raped by Bryce. Justin and Hannah do nothing to stop Bryce. Alex was the third friend of Hannah with Jessica. He started to date Jessica and put Hannah on a list of "the Best Ass." Tyler was the school photographer. He stalked and spied on Hannah from outside her bedroom, and took pictures of her for his own pleasure. Courtney, the very popular girl, pretended to be Hannah's friend but ended up spreading rumors about her. Marcus had one date with Hannah where he tried to touch her without her permission. She shoved him away, and he called her a tease in front of the entire restaurant. Zach stole Hannah's encouragement notes from the Peer Communication class which was her last hope. Ryan betrayed her and published her poem anonymously without her permission. Bryce was the most popular guy in high school. He raped Jessica when she was drunk and unconscious. He also pressured Hannah to have sex with him in a hot tub at Courtney's house and was the first person to assault Hannah following the release of Alex's list. Mr. Porter, Hannah's guidance counselor, is another key character that she turned to for help in one final effort to save herself. He ended up telling her to go on and forget about what happened. Most of the debates and criticism of the TV show have been focused on the Mr. Porter character and how it could denigrate counseling services at school. Aranjuez (2018) explains that "the show interweaves guilt and blame, trauma and shame among its key characters, distending to incorporate themes as multitudinous as bullying, slut-shaming, heterosexism and sexual abuse" (Aranjuez, 2018).

Knopf (2017) explains that "when Netflix came out with its *13 Reasons Why* series this spring, many parents did not even know about it until their children had already seen it. They turned on the radio or TV and heard about this show, or got a concerned email from the school warning about the program. The young people had already seen it" (Knopf, 2017). A

study on internet searches after the airing of *13 Reasons Why* found that “Google queries such as “how to commit suicide” and “teen suicide” rose 20 per cent in the 19 days after it first aired” (Gilbert, 2017).

The TV show, from an artistic perspective, is really persuasive because of the realistic characters, the engaging narrative and the directing. Consequently, it is understandable that teenagers enjoy it (Jacobson, 2017). This series has the advantage of tackling a lot of sensitive topics which concern teenagers closely. Indeed, as Campo and Bridge (2018) says:

The show’s creators hoped to inform, educate, and provide opportunities for a wider conversation about bullying, depression, sexual assault, and suicide by virtue of an emotionally engaging, powerful, and sometimes graphic presentation intended to make suicide and other negative behaviours appear disturbing, frightening, and ultimately unappealing (Campo, Bridge, 2018).

Furthermore, the show depicts the consequences of slut-shaming, substance use, the ineptitude of mental health awareness and the impact of toxic masculinity. It tackles also how sexist high school can be. Then, it allows the teacher to address all these sensitive issues that a lot of teenagers are experiencing themselves. Osborne (2018) recommends *13 Reasons Why* for “shedding light on topics such as sexual consent and rape for its teenage audience” (Osborne, 2018, p.103).

*13 Reasons Why* was largely “acclaimed by the entertainment community” (Campo, Bridge, 2018). However, it has attracted a lot of attention from health professionals and organizations. Indeed, people have debated if teenagers should be allowed to watch it and how they should have access to it. Some have called it a glamorization of suicide that will lead to copy-cattng. Before using it as an educative tool, it is important to review the debate and the concerns around this TV show and to know which recommendations should be followed. The show’s critics believe “the detail around the topics it takes up was too

excessive, detailed and graphic and might inspire suicide contagion. Supporters believe that it encouraged and helped good discussions between adults and teens” (Walters, 2018).

Most of the debate about the show’s suitability for young audiences was surrounding the depiction of the suicide of Hannah Baker. Indeed, the series can be difficult to watch particularly some events where “no detail was spared from the eyes of spectators” (Osborne, 2018, p.101). Some studies indicate that media can be a positive force and raise awareness around suicide-related issues. However, other studies show that some media still simplify issues around suicide which may lead to misunderstandings and even copycat suicide contagion. Put another way, the ambivalence parallels the division around suicide prevention: action or silence? Is it better to talk about it or not? (Carmichael, & Whitley, 2018).

In fact, following its release, the show has received a lot of complaints from concerned parents, school officials and mental health professionals regarding the series’ graphic nature. Indeed, the suicide and some scenes are particularly graphic. Jenney and Exner-Cortens claim that “graphic scenes are known to increase the risk of imitation” (Jenney, Exner-Cortens, 2018). Some specialists such as Osborne (2018) declare that “although *13 Reasons Why*’s depiction of suicide as a response to feelings of anomie is accurate and admirable, by presenting Hannah’s tapes as a source of revenge, the series heedlessly romanticizes suicide and implies that others are to blame for her suicidal behaviour; often overlooking Hannah’s agency in her own death” (Osborne, 2018, p.102). Jenney and Exner-Cortens, in their article, contend that teenagers should not watch it. They insist on the fact that the “the prolonged rape scenes, which are frankly unnecessarily detailed and potentially traumatizing, or the numerous of fights and beating scenes which could be emotionally distressing for traumatized youths and because it is primarily for entertainment uses” (Jenney, Exner-Cortens, 2018). They add that “it mocks the role of the counselor, once again suggesting that adults are somehow incapable of really listening to youth at risk” (Jenney, Exner-Cortens, 2018).

Concerns like these have led some mental health organization to strongly advise parents to prevent their teenagers from watching, especially those who may be fragile and unstable. For instance, Knopf (2017) insists on the fact that teens should not watch alone. He says that: “If your child is isolated, struggling, or vulnerable to suggestive images and storylines, it is particularly important to help them process the series, according to NASP” (Knopf, 2017). Indeed, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2017) indicates that its psychologists “do not recommend that vulnerable youth, especially those who have any degree of suicidal ideation, watch this series. Its powerful storytelling may lead impressionable viewers to romanticize the choices made by the characters and/or develop revenge fantasies.” The Canadian Mental Health Association (2017) warned parents that “the series may glamorize suicide, and that some content may lead to distress in viewers” (CMHA, 2017).

Following these recommendations, educators have acted. The principal of an Edmonton elementary school ordered students to refrain discussing *13 Reasons Why* in an email sent to the parents:

Dear Grade Six parents, It is has come to Miss Ciezki's and my attention that some students are watching a Netflix series called *13 Reasons Why*. The discussion that is unfolding at school is troubling. This series is rated Mature and the theme is the suicide of a high school student. This show includes graphic violence (rape) and gore, profanity, alcohol/drugs/smoking, and frightening/intense scenes. Of course what your child watches on television is completely your choice, however, I wanted to let you know that many students are watching and discussing this at school. The purpose of this email is to provide you with this information. Please let your child know that discussion of *13 Reasons Why* is not permitted at school due to the disturbing subject matter. Should you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about this show, please feel free to contact Miss Ciezki, who has watched the series. (Bellefontaine, 2017)

This statement is in line with the position of keeping silent to protect the child. This vision of the children originated from the eighteenth century and more particularly “from the French writer Jean Jacques Rousseau, in whose work children are imagined as “pure” and “innocent” in contrast to the violent and ugly adult world from which they should be protected” (Valentine, 2010, p.23). This discourse, called Apollonian, constructs the child as

less knowledgeable, less competent than adults, and consequently, as vulnerable and in need of protection from adults and their world (Valentine, 2010, p.24). Likewise, Jenney and Exner-Cortens (2018) complain that “all the comments (about the show) have almost exclusively been adults discussing their concerns. The teenagers are at the center of the debate and the discussion, but their opinion have never been asked for” (Jenney and Exner-Cortens, 2018). Again, in an Apollonian vision, the teens need to be protected. It implies that they are too young, innocent to understand the problem. The two researchers claim that “by displaying cultural humility in social work practice with adolescents, we may begin to repair our current, adult-centric systems of intervention, making them a place where youth can expect to find themselves supported instead of further victimized” (Jenney, Exner-Cortens, 2018, p.415).

Indeed, some researchers claim that *13 Reasons Why* can open a meaningful conversation with teenagers. Campo and Bridge (2018) hope that “a media-based intervention would generate a productive dialogue about suicide, bullying and sexual assault and ideally reduce the likelihood of such harms in the lives of youthful viewers. Even though, for these authors, the series’ creator exceeded accepted knowledge regarding suicide contagion in favor of artistic intuition and personal experience” (Campo, Bridge, 2018).

As a response to the criticisms, Netflix commissioned a research project with 5,000 parents, teens, and young adults in five countries (Australia/New Zealand, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the United States) after the last season of *13 Reasons Why*. The purpose of this study was to examine adolescent, young adult, and parent responses to *13 Reasons Why*. The researchers were wondering if following the program, the adolescents who had viewed were engaging in conversation with friends, parents, teachers, and counselors or seeking information about these sensitive topics. They examined five individual difference variables: social anxiety, happiness, loneliness, self-esteem, and resilience. They examined whether adolescent and young adults’ perceptions of the show, reported communication about the

show, and reported behaviour change after viewing differed as a function of each of these individual difference variables. They found that “there were many differences in the outcome variables as a function of high versus low social anxiety” (UK report, p.8). After analyzing all the data, they found out that *13 Reasons Why* resonated with teens and young adults in all five countries and they felt it was beneficial for them and people their age to watch. The TV show provided teenagers, young adults, and even parents in all regions with information about various difficult topics. In all four regions, adolescents and young adults reported to have sought for information about difficult topics. While there were graphic and intense scenes in the show, 63% to 74% teens and young adult viewers in each region “were generally not opposed to the way the show dealt with these tough topics”. In all four regions, around 80% viewers of *13 Reasons Why* reported “helping others and engaging in other compassionate behaviours after watching”. Watching *13 Reasons Why* helped the conversation in all regions. Approximately half of parent viewers in Australia/New Zealand, the UK, and the US who talked about the show with their children reported that “the show made it easier for them to have conversations about tough topics with their children” (56% in all three regions) (Global Report). The researchers have also found that *Beyond the Reasons* was a good start but parents and teenagers have requested further support<sup>2</sup>. One researcher in the American report concludes by saying that “the results for the majority of teens and young adults are promising”. These findings suggest that “‘tough topic’ programs like '*13 Reasons Why*' may be able to help adolescents talk about these stressors in their lives” (US report, p.3).

Furthermore, despite all the warnings and interdictions from the adults, it is highly likely that the teenagers who want to watch *13 Reasons Why* will find a way. Currently, because of streaming services, there is no way to police efficiently such viewing behaviour. As an anonymous adolescent interviewee asserts in *Daily Review*: “It’s not about banning

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<sup>2</sup> All these results can be found in more detail in the Global Report on their website.

Netflix [...] I think adults underestimate kids' ability to watch stuff (Aranjuez, 2018)". Consequently, Aranjuez (2018) claims that "it is imperative to equip ourselves with knowledge, resources and a willingness to engage with – rather than evade – these heavy topics" (Aranjuez, 2018). We can argue that all the parents do not necessarily feel comfortable and prepared to talk about these issues. Consequently, every child will not have the same preparation and tools to deal with the content of the show.

It could be argued that it is the responsibility of the school to open the conversation with children, who, as we have already seen, have viewed the show. This would come with the authorization of their parents. Through *13 Reasons Why*, the teacher could open discussion about sexual consent, bullying, addictions, or suicide. Furthermore, the conversation should not be focused on the suicide, but on the reasons that led the Hannah Baker character to suicide. In that way, a large part should be focused on misogyny: "It has to get better, the way we treat each other and look out for each other; it has to get better somehow," says Hannah's friend Clay, in the last episode of the show (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP13).

## Chapter Four:

### *13 Reasons Why* and Sexual Education

As we have seen in the other sections of this paper, it is necessary to teach sexual education to teenagers. Indeed, the formation of gender stereotypes and sexual scripts occur during adolescence (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014). EE can be an effective and innovative way to teach sexual education without being totally focussed on facts, but rather “including the three levels of learning: knowledge, values, and concepts” (Szirom, 1988). Studies claim that “any sex education programme should deal with the lifestyle, self-image and communication mode, and personal value system of the audience at which it is aimed” (Szirom, 1988, p.66). In that sense, *13 Reasons Why* is totally embedded in teenagers’ world. It depicts a typical high school with a broad range of characters that teenagers could recognize from their high school – from the geek outsider Tyler, to the popular guy Bryce, or the intellectual Courtney.

In this part, I will take some examples from *13 Reasons Why* and show how it could be used by teachers to teach in an EE way sexual education.

Audience identification with the characters could be used to make students think more deeply about other categories that could be found in a high school:

- Those who assist: They do not start the bullying behaviour, but they encourage bullying and occasionally join in. The perfect example could be Justin and the photo that caused shame for Hannah (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 1, 44 min). Indeed, the first person called out by Hannah is Justin. One night, they decided to join each other in a playground for a romantic date. They ended up kissing. However, Justin took a photo of Hannah sliding which revealed her underwear. Back at school, Justin showed this photo off to his friend, with the

photo by implying Justin and Hannah had sex. Bryce took his phone and sent the photo to all the students. To preserve his masculinity, Justin did do anything to restore the truth or to protect Hannah. The slut shaming and bullying started with this photo.

- Those who reinforce: They are not directly involved in the bullying, but they are part of the audience, sometimes laughing or supporting the bullying, giving power and encouragement to the person doing it. Hannah could be used as an example. Indeed, a person could be a bully and be bullied. In S2, EP10, the school's lawyer wants to convince the court that Hannah wanted to make the people listening to her tapes suffer — just like a bully would do. Another person in pain is Sarah, who, as suspected, was bullied at Hannah's old school.
- Those who are outsiders: They do not encourage the bullying behaviour, but they also do not defend whoever is being bullied.
- Those who defend: They come to the defence of the person being bullied, tell an adult, or offer comfort. The best example would be Clay or Tony. In Justin's case when he was little, Bryce was the one who defended him (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP 12). The worst bully can also be the protector, as we can see in the EP 12 S2 were Bryce, the bully in the TV show protects his friend from other bullies.

In a high school, some clips from *13 Reasons Why* could be watched with a teacher. This approach has already been proven to be positive in studies such as the one conducted by Scull, T.M., Ortiz, R., Shafer, A., Brown, J., Kupersmidt, J.B., Suellentrop, K. (2015) about *16 and Pregnant*. As they showed, teenagers enjoyed this experience and would recommend it.

However, British Columbia teachers using *13 Reasons Why* need to attend to three types of challenges: they must make sure to have the parents agreed and involved in the

undertaking; they must choose the appropriate scenes; and they must make sure to still teach what the British Columbia curriculum asks for.

Firstly, as we have already seen, *13 Reasons Why* is a controversial television show. The parents have to be fully involved in the process, firstly because it is the school's obligation to involve them, but also to have better results. Indeed, Adams and Williams (2011) recommend parents "to be involved in the teaching by including a parent education component. It covers how and not just what to talk to teens about, as well as a wide range of topics including the timing of sexual activity, the use of contraceptives, STIs, sexual pressure, and choosing sexual partners. It is also recommended that parents learn how to be open, warm, honest and to approach their children in a manner that validates their experience" (Adams & Williams, 2011, p.1883). Adams and Williams are referring to sexuality education in general; however EE sexual education being a part of that, it is also recommended that no matter the method used, parents need to be part of the sexual education of their children.

Then, the chosen scenes must be appropriate to be shown in a classroom. In *13 Reasons Why*, the three scenes of rape (Jessica, Hannah, and Tyler) and the scene of suicide are all very graphic, lengthy, and do not spare any detail. It is possible that most of the students would have already watched it. These kinds of scenes are unforgettable, and it is unnecessary to show them again.

Furthermore, as the show has not been produced in order to change behaviour, an adult is needed to raise the important points and open the discussion in a controlled way. In the case of *13 Reasons Why*, a lot of sensitive topics such as bullying, rape, and suicide are questioned. The identification with a character such as Hannah can be extremely dangerous. Cohen (2001) explains that "if identification involves internalization, it is likely that repetitive internalization of powerful and seductive images and alternative identities of media characters may have some long-term effects. This is especially true for adolescents who are in the

process of forming their own identity and are susceptible to influence by media characters” (Cohen, 2001, p.249).

Finally, the teacher should make sure that even if the class is different and go further, it still respects the curriculum. In the British Columbia curriculum, Sexual Health Education, for Grade 10 and Grade 11 are about “healthy sexual decision making, sources of health information and their trustworthiness” (BC Curriculum and Sexual Health Education in Central Okanagan Public Schools, 2017-2018). A sexual education class using a TV show could open a discussion on the limits of the media to provide sexual education. However, not just any TV show can be used to deliver information on health or sexual education, because the show used must enable teachers to address the curriculum. The BC Curriculum (2017-2018) recommends that: “Students are to learn strategies to protect themselves and others from potential abuse, exploitation, and harm in a variety of settings. They also have to propose strategies for avoiding and/or responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, or exploitive situations. The curriculum gets teachers to develop their students’ skills for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict, including communication skills, negotiation strategies, and conflict resolution techniques” (BC Curriculum, 2017 2018). Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt (2014) explain that “the current findings support the notion that curricula promoting alternative discourses about gender and sexuality may encourage both boys and girls to be more accepting of a wider range of gendered behaviours and ultimately engage in healthier sexual behaviours and relationships” (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt 2014).

In an EE way of teaching, the role of emotions will be promoted. Indeed, *13 Reasons Why* has been created to trigger emotions within the audience. Melodramatic embellishments and emotive music aim to give dramatic intensity to episodes to create a stronger possibility

of full involvement (Singhal, 2003-2004). In *13 Reasons Why*, the music is fully involved in setting the scene. For instance, the song *The Night We Met* (Lord Huron, 2015) is used as the Hannah/Clay song. It is strongly associated with grief themes. It has rapidly become a very popular song. In the same way, for instance *Kill Em with Kindness* (Selena Gomez, 2015) is a popular song from one of the producers of this show from a pop singer who is very well-known to teenage audiences and who has recorded multiple songs used in *13 Reasons Why*.

The teacher should be aware of the different music techniques used by the show and should make the students aware of them. The music aims to be close to what the teenagers are listening to in their daily lives. This makes them more involved in the TV show and facilitates the process of identification. As we have already seen, the main advantage of EE approach is “to trigger identification with the characters which leads to less counter-arguing to the messages the teacher wants to transmit” (Moyer Gusé, E., Chung, A. H., & Jain, P, 2011, p.392). Indeed, after watching the show, the students can respond “by liking or disliking characters, or feeling close to them, finding similarities or differences between the characters and themselves, finding the characters sexually or romantically attractive or desiring to imitate them” (Cohen, 2001, p.252).

The most common response is identification. By identifying themselves with a character, the audience has the potential to change its opinions and behaviours. For instance, by seeing how Hannah in *13 Reasons Why* is bullied at school, a bully teenager can realize the impact of his or her attitude and change in consequence of the 45 minutes he or she has been in the victim’s shoes. Furthermore, transported readers experience strong emotions and motivations through the characters, even when they know the action is not real.

There are a couple of specific examples and themes that could be used in *13 Reasons Why* to drive classroom discussion about slut shaming, consent, and rape. Indeed, the theme of misogyny and slut-shaming is present throughout the two seasons. As Jenney, A., & Exner-

Cortens, D. (2018) argue “the show provides a very real commentary on what it means to be a young woman in Western culture in the 21st century, as it fully embodies how gender-based violence is a key risk factor for mental health problems”. These following scenes could be a good start to open a discussion on the violence towards the women in high school and the place of the body in the school years. For instance, there is a scene that shows a wall full of insulting, misogynistic comments. These include “Jane is such a basic bitch”; “Megan is a whore” (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 9, 22 min). The scene shows how little respect girls can have for each other and how their sexuality is used to criticize each other. In Season 2, the threats received by Jessica show the same sort of thing. They are: a doll hanged, with “slut” written on it, and photos of a drunken Jessica with the words “Who would believe a drunk slut?” (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP1 and EP3).

The list of best/worst bodies (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 3) with great dialogues around it could be used to illustrate how the female body is over presented and sexualised in high school Hannah: “You think I am taking the situation too seriously. You have never been a girl” (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 3). Because of the list, the guys are looking at her, and showing, her pictures of “her butts.” This ends up with Bryce touching Hannah’s bottom. In the same way, the male teenagers do not respect Hannah’s body. Tyler takes photos without her consent (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP4). Marcus tries to touch her without her authorization (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP5). Tony says: “I was apparently the only guy at Liberty who did not grab her ass or stare at her tits.” (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP8, 30 mins). It is particularly important to discuss and analyze through this example the pressure that women experience “to conform to particular versions of so-called empowered female sexuality” (Powell, 2010, p.14) and how women’s bodies do not really belong to them. Powell (2010) claims that “these notions of sexuality are reinforced, according to some authors, by marketing and advertising

deliberately representing girls and young women as sexual objects for male consumption” (Powell, 2010, p.14).

Jenney and Exner-Cortens warn educators who would like to use *13 Reasons Why* as a pedagogical tool, “to be ready to disrupt and deconstruct myths and stereotypes around masculinity and violence” (Jenney, Exner-Cortens, 2018, p.415). This discussion is particularly important and it is required in Grade 6 in British Columbia: “The students have to demonstrate an understanding of the harmful effects of stereotyping and discrimination and identify the school, local, provincial, national, and international strategies for preventing and responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying” (BC Curriculum Central Okanagan, 2017-2018).

Different scenes in *13 Reasons Why* could help to identify what it is to be bullied and how to react to it. To feel compassion towards the characters will lead to avoiding the same behaviours. Furthermore, if teenagers are experiencing slut-shaming or bullying, they could see how the different characters try to reach for help; or, what they do not do and should have done. For instance, Hannah never told any adult about her experience at school. She never told anyone (except on the tapes) about the scene in the grocery shop where Bryce touches her bottom: “for what it is worth that list got it right. It seems like nothing. Until the hurricane hits. Because when you put my name on that list, you put a target on my, well it was not just my ass. You made it open season on Hannah Baker” (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP3, 42min).

Through EE, the students can also see, through the experiences of three characters, (Jessica, Hannah, and Tyler) what rape is like and what being a rape survivor is like. Szirom (1988) has found from the comments in his study made that “both females and males share a number of myths and misconceptions about rape, including the motivation of rapists, that rape

occurs mainly in the street and that rape is mainly a problem for girls to deal with.” The fact that the three rapes in the television show have been made by classmates of the victims serves to change the misconception that “rape by strangers is the only form of sexual violence” (Szirom, 1988, p.115). Powell (2010) explains that “rape myths also include tendency to minimize women’s experiences and blaming women for sexual violence against them. The beliefs also include that rape requires physical force; rape requires physical resistance by the victim; and the rapist is ordinarily a stranger” (Powell, 2010, p.). Rape myth acceptance is particularly high among students who are involved a lot in partying (e.g. binge drinking) (Ortiz, & Shafer, 2016; 2017, p.22). However, studies show that “most sexual assault occurs between people that know each other and it is the negotiation or lack of negotiation of consent that poses most problems” (Carmody, 2005, p.478). The three rape scenes in *13 Reasons Why* are deconstructing myths and reinforcing more realistic understandings of rape. By including a rape on a man (Tyler), the producers are deconstructing another myth rarely mentioned, that rapes concern only women victims (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP13).

The conversation in Episode 12 Season 1 could be really helpful to identify misconceptions around consent. Bryce, a classmate of Hannah, rapes her in the hot tub at a party. In this conversation after the event, Clay attempts to get a confession from Bryce. He discovers that Bryce does not consider it a rape but as consensual sex, because Hannah had not said no directly – even though she tried to escape and she never positively stated she wanted to have sex.

“C: did she want it?” B: “I assume so. She came to my party. Mine. She got in the hot tub with me, without a suit on. Right? And she made eyes. I know that is hard for you to hear, that your crush wasn’t pure and clean. But she fucking wanted it”. Clay: “she got in a hot tub with you. It means she wanted it.” B: “yeah she did”. C: “but she didn’t tell you so” B: “she didn’t have to. Girls play games. She never said no”. C: “and that is not rape?” B: “you wanna call it rape, call it rape. Same difference.” (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 12, 51 min).

This scene raises the misconception that “a lot of male teenagers have still: the clothes wearing by the girl, her eye, her attitude, is an invitation to have sex” (McMahon, 2010). Seeing the scene, where the camera focuses on Hannah’s face, makes the audience feel her pain and empathize deeply with her. She is not able to say anything to say no or to stop Bryce. Her reaction is really common. Powell (2010) explains that “many victims freeze, are feeling too afraid or are physically unable to resist, not least because it might invite more force against them” (Powell, 2010, p.19). This is the case for all of the rape scenes in *13 Reasons Why*.

The rape of Jessica denounces the excuse of alcohol. Jessica has drunk a lot and she finally passed out on her bed when Bryce came into the room and raped her (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP9). Consequently, the students, thanks to the discussion around these scenes and their compassion around the victims, will be aware of what it is not sexual consent and will see the consequences of rape. It could help to change the misconceptions around consent and potentially reduce the numbers of sexual assaults by shaping adults with a healthy and consensual sex life.

Indeed, relationships depicted in *13 Reasons Why* can be used to define consent and how to ask for it. Ortiz, & Shafer (2016; 2017) found that “students articulated that they knew consent ‘when they saw it’: but their examples of non-consensual were the most extreme, such as individuals being so intoxicated they can not stand or when they clearly and consistently say “no” ” (Ortiz, & Shafer, 2016; 2017, p.22). It is particularly important to show scenes where a boy clearly asks for consent before having sex. For instance, in Season 1, Ep 11, Clay asks Hannah: “Are you okay with doing it?” She answered while they are kissing: “More than okay.” Hannah’s voice on the tape was saying: “I wanted you to do everything you were doing.” (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 11)

The relationship the show depicts between Hannah and Zach could also open a discussion about consent, the “first time,” and sex in general regarding how to discuss our partner, pleasure, and emotions. Szirom (1988) claims that “one of the major problems in designing programmes that include more than the biological facts is the need for a framework or model within which to develop concepts” (Szirom, 1988, p.65).

The point of the discussion is to help the students “to have a healthier relationship and ‘better sex’ by promoting open communication between sexual partners, and not about demonizing anyone based on gender or student group affiliation” (Ortiz, & Shafer, 2016; 2017, p.25). Indeed, usually, sexual partners often avoid discussions of sexual history or safer sex options prior to engaging in sexual behaviour. One primary reason couples avoid sexual discussions is that “they lack a social script for how to discuss this taboo topic” (Moyer Gusé, E., Chung, A. H., & Jain, P, 2011, p.387). However, recent research in EE suggests that a television program with characters discussing sexual health could be an effective way to transmit these “social scripts” (Moyer Gusé, E., Chung, A. H., & Jain, 2011). For instance, in Episode 6 of Season 2, Hannah and Zach are discussing their prior sexual experience (or the lack of it): Hannah says: “It is weird cause of my reputation, like people calling me a slut and everything, it made sex seem bad, like this negative thing. But I don’t want it to be. I want my first time to be how I want it, not how everyone says it’s been .... I want to lose my virginity and I want it to be great. Like I wanna do it on my terms and with someone that I like. Would you be interested in having sex?” (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP6). They are also discussing during intercourse. Their conversation illustrates what it is consent and a healthy relationship where both partners are listening to each other and are trying to please each other:

H: “I hate my body”. Z: ”Why it is beautiful!” H: “You have to say that”. Z: “No, I look at your body every day and I think it is perfect”.

When they are starting: Z: ”Does it hurt?” H: “Just pressure; keep going.”

After the sex: Z: "Was that okay?" H: "Yeah it was good." Z: "I could probably do it better if you wanna try again". H: "We could try again".

H: "So I have practiced masturbation. Figuring out what I like. I had to get past the initial "this is wrong. God's gonna punish me and all women feeling of shame but now it is like literally the only thing I wanna do."

After practicing multiple times. Z: "It is making sense now. Hey, do you think we are doing it too much? Are you okay with all of this?" H: "I'm good". (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP6)

Just after the scene, another dialogue could be used from a scene between Justin and Zach, where Justin gives him advice about sex. "What do you wanna know? It is hotter when a girl likes what you are doing and she feels good" (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP6). It shows that it is okay to have a discussion with your friends about sex and it is normal to feel embarrassed. These different scenes show that sex could be enjoyable if both partners are willing to do it and are communicating. Adams, & Williams (2011) explain that "the initiation of romantic relationships in adolescence is a significant milestone that launches youth into a lifelong pattern of intimate partnerships" (Adams, & Williams, 2011, p.1875). These scenes can be used to teach them how to communicate more efficiently with the other sex and what consent should look like. The difference between Hannah with Zach, laughing talking and asking directly to have sex is totally different from Hannah in the hot tub, who is unable to talk or to move.

As in *13 Reasons Why*, teenage suicide can be related to emotions and sexuality. The show could be used to connect sexual education to suicide prevention for this reason. For example, in *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah killed herself in the end. Viewers are likely to actively think about what could have happened to save her life. The following is a conversation between Clay and Tony (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 10, 46 mins):

“C: “Did I kill Hannah?” T: “We all let her down.” C: “That not what I have asked. Did I kill Hannah Baker?”

T: “No, she took her own life, Clay. That was her choice. But you, me, everyone on these tapes, we all let her down. We didn’t let her know that she had another choice. Maybe we could have saved her, maybe not. It is impossible to know.”

C: “Answer the fucking question. Knowing what you know, believing what you believe, knowing me, knowing her, and what’s on these tapes, did I kill Hannah Baker?”

T: “Yeah.”

This scene could be used to reflect on the responsibilities of each character and if they could have saved Hannah. Consequently, they will reflect on “the decision and actions of the characters and what could have been done to change the ending” (Green, M. C., Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C., 2000, p.702). Identification can be used by teachers to keep students involved and to make them more receptive to the messages. However, the attachment towards Hannah may be an important determinant to raise awareness about suicide among teenagers. She could be what Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000) describes as an “internal” source of information (Green, M. C., Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C., 2000, p.702).

Attention could also be paid to the impact of suicide and particularly how each character grieves. Each individual will have to grieve at one point in his or her life. Seeing different ways of grieving could help young people to learn that it is a normal process, and everyone reacts differently in that process. In *Beyond the Reasons* Season 1, the experts explain “the statistic that for every suicide there are at least 6 people who are very intimately impacted”. A scene in *13 Reasons Why* illustrates in Season 2 that statistic as well. Clay in Season 2 asks Hannah’s ghost why she took her own life. He tells her it was an “evil thing” that she did, ending her own life. Did she not know whom she was leaving behind, whom she was hurting? (Yorkey, B (2018) S2, EP 8). In Episode 3, the character Alex jumps into the

swimming pool at a moment where he is very depressed because of Hannah's tapes (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP3). In Episode 13, he tries to take his own life. Hannah fairly said that; "everything affects everything" (Yorkey, B (2017) S1, EP 13, 51 mins). It is particularly the case with suicide.

## **Chapter five:**

### **Conclusion**

*13 Reasons Why* could be used as an innovative and effective way to teach sexual education through an EE approach. This approach involved to use media to teach about sexual education. Multiple studies have shown that it is an innovative and efficient way to teach it. Indeed, by the process of identification, the health message are better received and assimilated by the teenagers. It is a method that could be easily used in a classroom. Teenagers are asking for learning about romantic relationships, differences between males' and females' behaviour and expectations, how to communicate more effectively with the other sex, and they wish they had been more aware of the level of commitment necessary to maintain a relationship. From a perspective of physical desire, adolescents want more information about pregnancy, sexual intercourse, and about their bodies (Adams, & Williams, 2011, p.1878). All these themes could be found in *13 Reasons Why*. The TV show could really facilitate the discussion and make it more appealing for students. The identification process will also facilitate the transmission of the sex education related messages that the school system wants to transmit to them. It will also give them more tools and a better ability to talk about these sensitive topics with their parents, their peers, and their partners. A lot of young people are binge watching *13 Reasons Why*. It is part of their world now. To educate effectively and teach them what they also want to know, we need to enter this world. What a better way than a television show?

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