

# Media and Youth Suicide:

Through the Lens of TH1RTEEN R3ASONS WHY

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Stanford Adolescent Mental Wellness Conference

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# Disclosures

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- Nothing to disclose

# Agenda

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- TH1RTEEN R3ASONS WHY as a case study
  - A brief introduction
  - Why so controversial?
  - What do we know from the research?
- What can we learn from this?
  - Reimagining the relationship between media and mental health

# TH<sup>1</sup>RTEEN R<sup>3</sup>ASONS WHY

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# The 13RW Controversy

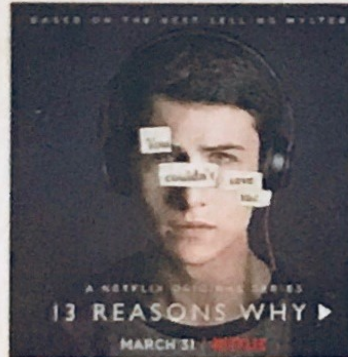
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## Thirteen reasons why not

*'13 Reasons Why,' a popular Netflix series on teen suicide, is cause for concern*

Last week, Netflix announced its intention to release a sequel to "13 Reasons Why," the controversial series that depicts a fictional teen suicide. This occurs only one week after 27 of the world's most renowned suicide researchers gathered in Pittsburgh for a two-day conference in recognition of the 30th anniversary of the Services for Teens At Risk, or STAR Center. The STAR Center was co-founded in 1986 by David Brent and Mary Margaret Kerr with the intention to address the issues surrounding youth suicide through research, intervention and education.

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the STAR Center, I feel compelled to speak out. Just



Furthermore, this impact is intensified when suicide is presented in the absence of information about mental illness.

2) It focuses on blaming oth-

ers for the suicide.

6) There are fights and beatings that are gratuitously violent and likely emotionally distressing, especially for bullied and traumatized youth.

7) The school's post-suicide intervention strategy doesn't come close to following national evidence-based guidelines or standards. For instance, allowing Hannah's locker to become a long-term mini-shrine inadvertently creates an emotionally charged reminder of the suicide, which experts warn could be internalized by particularly vulnerable youth as a means to gain recognition.

8) It villainizes the school leadership as primarily being concerned about the legal implications of the suicide, as opposed to

effective.

12) The way the series is produced and publicized, teens are clearly the target audience, and yet the content is presented in a way that is very adult. Netflix responded to concerns of mental health advocates by updating the trigger warnings to carry additional advisories. Unfortunately, in all likelihood, many adolescents are watching the show unaccompanied by the adults needed to reinforce these warnings.

13) This series had real potential to make a difference, destigmatize mental illness, promote mental health care and inform the public about the signs and symptoms of adolescent depression. But it fell short. That does not mean that we as a commu-

# Th1rteen R3asons to be concerned

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1. Suicide contagion
2. Lack of mental health information
3. Fails to make a connection between suicidality and treatable mental illness
4. Suicide as a logical decision
5. Graphic imagery
6. Triggering content
7. Postvention guidelines ignored

# Th1rteen R3asons to be concerned

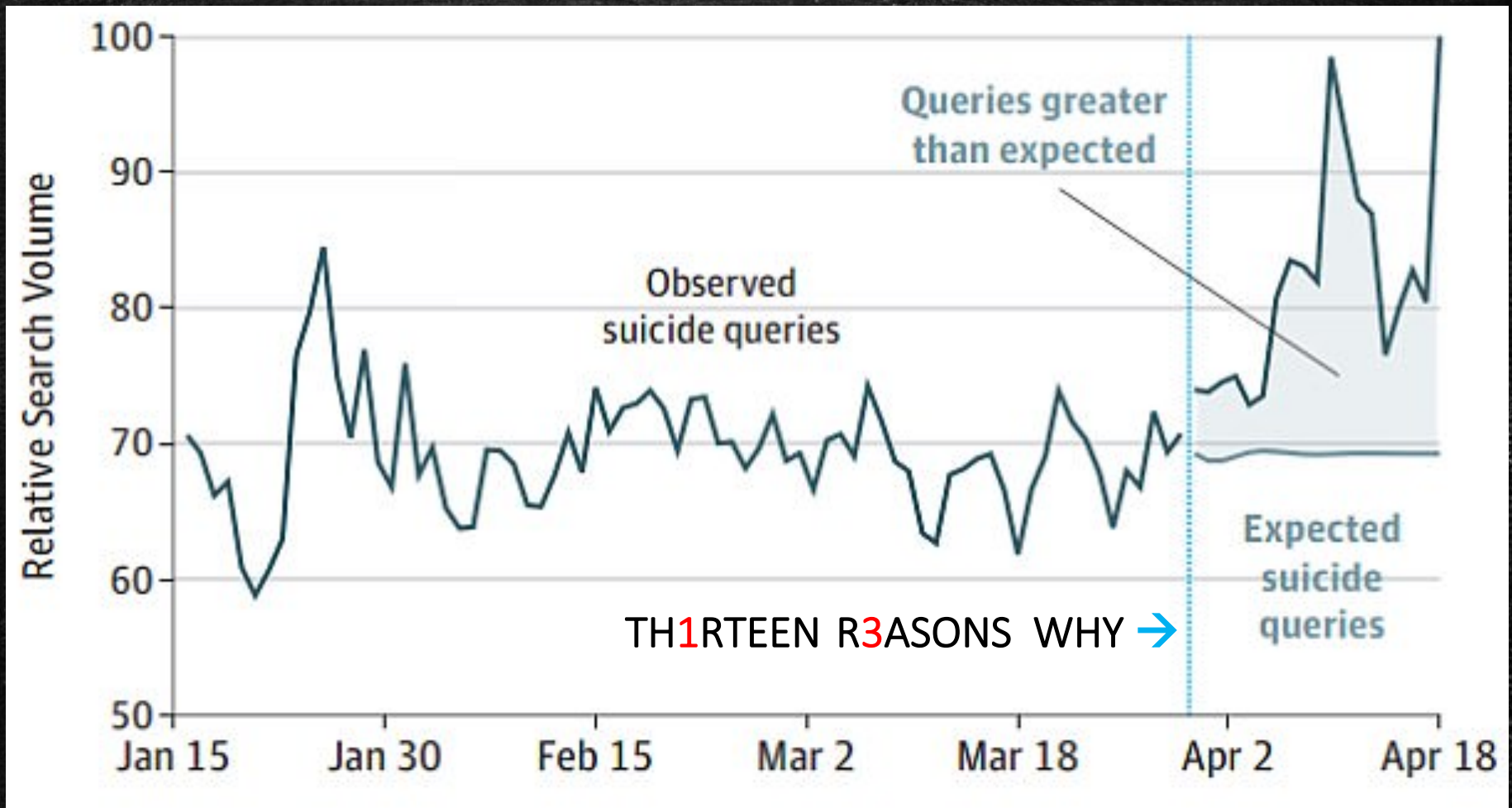
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- 8. Fails to recognize school as natural support
- 9. Mocks mental health interventions
- 10. Unrealistic depiction of depression
- 11. Undermines the role of the concerned parent
- 12. Enhanced warnings are too easily ignored
- 13. A missed opportunity

After the release of 13RW...

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# Daily trend for Google searches with the term “suicide” following the release of 13RW



# Increase in Pediatric ED Visits following the release of 13RW

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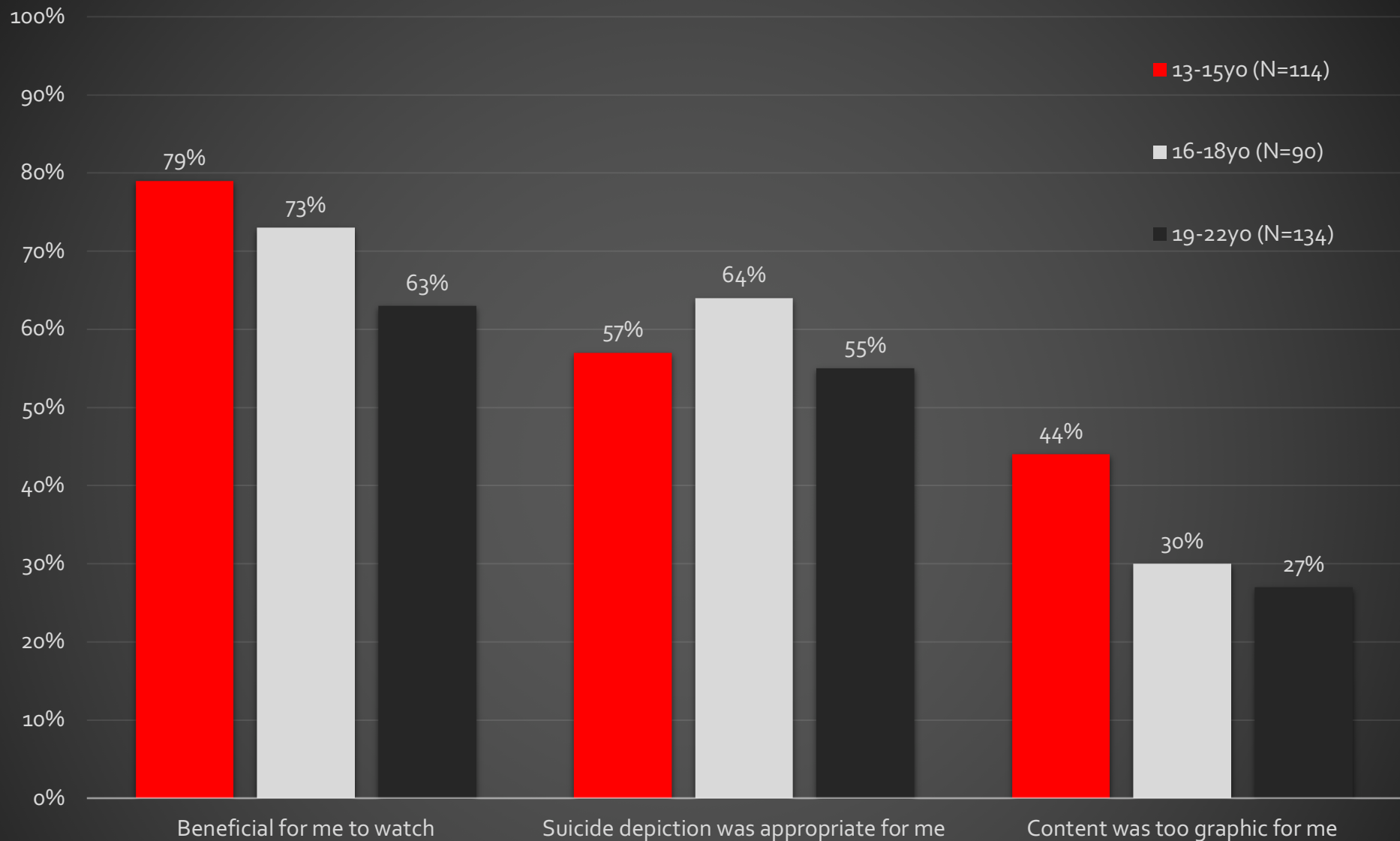
- Feur, 2017
  - 13 out of 14 ED sites had an increase in pediatric psychiatric volume compared to previous year
  - 40% reported 13RW copycat gestures or attempts in the first month
- Salo, 2017
  - Increase in teens presenting to the ED with depression/mood/suicide (94 vs 68) in the 41-days following 13RW release

# Northwestern Study on 13RW

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- Online national survey of 1700 individuals
  - Parents (203 viewers)
  - Teens ages 13-17 (219 viewers)
  - Young adults ages 18-22 (252 viewers)
- Limitations
  - Doesn't capture high-risk
  - Self-reported "understanding" may represent "misunderstanding"
  - Sample not generalizable

# Northwestern Study on 13RW



# Northwestern Study on 13RW

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- Watching habits
  - 18% of teens admitted that their parent did not know they were watching the show
  - 58% of parents watched with their teen at least sometimes (18% always)
- 13RW viewers requested:
  - Cast to come out of character at the end
  - Info on how to help those who may be suffering
  - Mental health professionals to provide resources

## 13RW Season 2

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- Expected to release within a month!
- Teasers (>3 million views) suggests content to include suicide as well as a school shooting
- Netflix Pre-video
  - Cast members come out of character
  - Warns those who are struggling not to watch or to watch with a trusted adult
  - Urges viewers to “reach out for help” and “talk to someone” if needed

# A National Conversation

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- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
- American Academy of Psychiatry (AAP)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)
- JED Foundation
- Numerous other foundations, advocacy groups and academic institutions

How do we reimagine the  
relationship between mental  
health and media?

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"Our society tends to shame or ignore those with mental illness, and I want to change that."

— Demi Lovato



# Local Grassroots – What to do?

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- Film nights (e.g. Wonder as a platform to teach about upstanding and anti-bullying)
- Teen viral video contests to promote health-seeking behaviors
- Alternate ending script-writing, slam poetry and performance art events to combat stigma
- Art shows with cartooning and other mixed media graphic art to reach younger audiences
- Book clubs and roundtable discussions to educate on mental health themes

Thanks!

**LOGIC**

FEAT. ALESSIA CARA & KHALID  
NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

1-800-273-8255  
1-800-273-8255  
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*Remember: Asking about suicide does not increase the risk of suicide. It is silence that is dangerous.*