

Representing Suicide in *Cyberbully* vs. *13 Reasons Why* by Ajia Robinson



Representing a sensitive topic such as suicide can be extremely hard to do, especially in a TV show or a movie. This is because the purpose of TV shows and movies is often to entertain but when it concerns an uncomfortable subject like suicide, it takes on the dual purpose of realistically portraying the mental illness. In my opinion, *13 Reasons Why* is so controversial because people disagree on whether its portrayal of depression is realistic. When I first watched the show, I never developed any strong sentiments about whether I loved or hated it. It was just popular at the time, so I said that I would check it out. It was as simple as that. The only other media representation that I had seen that addressed suicide so directly was a movie called *Cyberbully*.

Cyberbully tells the story of a Taylor Hillridge, a teenage girl who experiences just how impactful cyberbullying can be. Taylor is being raised with her brother by her protective, single mother who seemingly only has the best interest for her even though at times it appears to be overbearing. For her 17th birthday, Taylor's mom surprises her with her very own laptop, which Taylor immediately uses to create a social media account. Although it was going well at first, Taylor soon finds out how mean people can be on social media when she begins to get slut-shamed over a rumor. Over the course of the movie, the cyberbullying worsens, even to the point

where her best friends turn on her. Taylor, overwhelmed by this, decides to commit suicide and releases a farewell video on her social media. Her attempt to overdose failed, however, and Taylor survived. After this traumatizing event, Taylor started going to a support group, reconciled with her friends, and deleted her social media.

When I first watched this movie, I was young so social media was not as big of a deal in my life. However, now, having various social accounts, I empathize with Taylor. Although personally I have never experienced cyberbullying, I can see how easy it is to say something online that you would not necessarily say in person. In comparison with *13 Reasons Why*, I think that *Cyberbully* is better for a younger audience because it is less graphic. While they both address the same topic, they approach doing so very differently. However, the common factor that both shows portray is how impactful bullying can be to a person's mental state. I think that this message is important especially for teens. In conclusion, I think that no matter how controversial the representations were, they both addressed a topic that people need to be more aware about. Therefore, while I may not necessarily agree with how graphic *13 Reasons Why* is or how unrealistic *Cyberbully* was at times, they both spread awareness, which I support.