"THE INCOMPATIBLE TAPE:" EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF ADAPTATION IN *13 REASONS WHY*

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the ways in which a novel can experience a reevaluation as a result of it receiving a television adaptation that results in its textual and contextual elements being reexamined. Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and its Netflix adaptation written by Brian Yorkey serve as the case study for this research, with the two works and their contextual material such as the novel's paratexts and adaptation's online resources being the primary materials examined. I argue that since the premiere of Yorkey's series, the novel has experienced a reevaluation that demonstrates the limitations of translating certain narrative techniques from a novel to a television series and how the novel laid the groundwork for the therapeutic experience the show sets out to create for viewers. I examine the contextual elements of the novel and its adaptation to understand how the novel's efforts to create a community and therapeutic experience for its readers was used by the Netflix series for its own efforts to promote prosocial behavior and the formation of community among its viewers. I also explore the changes made in the Netflix series and how the novel's epistolary narration was altered to accommodate the narrative standards of a television series.

DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad, for always believing in me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within the discourse of film studies, the adaptation has been a consistently popular mode of storytelling. For television and film studios, adaptations come with a built-in audience that makes narratives based on already existing works a safer investment than original stories. A studio deciding on whether to hedge its bets on an adaptation or an original narrative needs to look no further than at the sheer volume of adaptations produced each year. While the financial safety and popularity of adaptations in the 21st century suggest that they are a relatively new phenomenon, a look at early cinema suggests otherwise. An article for *The Atlantic* published in 2016 examined the popularity of adaptations in 21st-century cinema, finding that film adaptations have been a part of the industry since its inception. As the article observes, even as the medium began to emerge in the early 1900s, filmmakers were already interested in bringing existing narratives to the big screen (Klein and Palmer).

While in the past television adaptations have been subject to restrictions based on the networks they were broadcast on, the rise of streaming platforms in recent years has seen the television adaptation become increasingly popular. A 2017 story from *The Verge* written by Andrew Liptak discusses how adaptations have thrived in a time when digital media reigns supreme. Liptak points out that television narratives in the past were based on a schedule set by studios, meaning that viewers were effectively at the mercy of their television set if they wanted to keep up with a television series (Liptak). This made the production of adaptations based on novels problematic, as their serial

narratives were ill-fitted for television at the time. With streaming on-demand video, the television narrative becomes accessible whenever the viewer wants. The rise of streaming services such as Netflix offers another factor motivating the popularity of adaptations by housing shows online, where viewers can access their preferred programming whenever and wherever they want. Whereas in the past fans of ABC's *Lost* would have had to clear their schedules to make time to watch each episode, the rise of streaming video now allows viewers access to the entire series without having to manage their time around the show's airtime to watch it. Liptak goes on to point out that without the constraints of episode length on streaming networks, narratives are able to run as long as they need to, and "it's become easier and more appealing for viewers to consume seasons of television at their convenience; storytellers have been given a larger canvas" (Liptak). With on-demand video services, television series are able to create more complex narratives that are not subject to the runtime restrictions found in traditional television programming. Series such as *Game of Thrones* have paved the way for other shows to develop narratives that are longer and more complex than previous television narratives. To that end, novels have become increasingly desirable for studios to adapt as the new parameters created by streaming services allow for the production of adaptations that are not subject to having their narratives slimmed down to meet runtime requirements.

As more films and television series are commissioned for streaming services, it is important to consider what this implies for scholarship in adaptation studies. Jason Mittell's *Complex TV* defines these narratives as different from traditional television

series because they follow narrative arcs that can last entire seasons. Whereas in the past procedural shows were popular because viewers could watch them without the need to catch up on larger, season-long plots, the landscape has changed to where serial narratives such as *The Walking Dead* and *Stranger Things* are now some of the most popular television series. As Mittell writes, the number of complex narratives has risen dramatically in the past two decades, driven by an increase in filmmakers entering the television production space and institutional practices such as syndication. Mittell's text does not reference streaming video, but his understanding of complex television narratives and the increasing popularity points to a television industry now more receptive than ever toward bringing novels to television

One of the most common criticisms levied at film and television adaptations is their inability to adequately replicate the works that they are based on. Critiques of an adaptation's inadequacy in this regard can come from a number of places, from the casting of its characters to the removal of plotlines considered essential in the source material. A less-discussed aspect of adaptations is how they can encourage a reassessment of the source material. Linda Cahir's *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches* offers an effective description of how an adaptation functions in relation to its source material, with Cahir observing that an adaptation is able to create a new narrative while also time adhering to aspects of the original work (14). This thesis is interested in exploring the implications of the new narrative Cahir references in her text, and how an adaptation is able to reconfigure one's understanding of its source material. To that end, the project will examine how a novel can be reevaluated through its

adaptation and how adaptations are limited in their ability to reproduce narrative elements from their source material.

I examine Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Brian Yorkey's adaptation, *13 Reasons Why*, as a case study to examine how the creation of an adaptation can cause a reevaluation of the source material that is both textual and contextual. While scholarship on the novel and adaptation is limited, research on adaptations and narratology offers a base of understanding for the questions this project aims to answer. By synthesizing scholarship from these areas of study, the examination of the novel and adaptation together provide a new perspective on how an adaptation can catalyze a reevaluation of the source material. The novel and its adaptation might exist as separate works, but I argue that the relationship between the two works reveals that the two are linked by a shared interest in producing a therapeutic experience for readers and encouraging empathy toward the narrative's characters. At the same time, the changes made to the narrative structure in the adaptation and renewed criticism directed toward the novel following the show's release point to Asher's novel experiencing a reevaluation.

Thirteen Reasons Why tells the story of Hannah Baker, a teenage girl who takes her life and leaves a series of cassette tapes addressed to those she believes are responsible for her death. The story follows Clay Jensen, one of Hannah's classmates, after he receives a box containing her cassette tapes and instructions to listen to each of them. While the novel can be described as a work targeted at young adults, it is structured as a mystery through Hannah's cassette tapes, which she uses to identify the individuals who wronged her. Clay does not know why he's named on Hannah's cassette

tapes, so he and the reader spend a large part of the story connecting past events together in order to figure out what his role was in her death. As the narrative plays out, the circumstances behind Hannah's death come into focus and Clay's understanding of Hannah and those named on the tapes is altered.

The novel divides its attention between two narratives, with the story in the present day following Clay as he listens to the tapes and Hannah's cassette tapes detailing her own story in the past. In the present day, the tapes and a map included with them guide Clay around his town to various locations mentioned on the tapes that were important to Hannah. Hannah's tapes function as the second narrative, in which she identifies people she believes are the reasons behind her suicide and describes painful memories related to these individuals that pushed her to take her own life. By the end of the story Clay has passed the tapes on to their next recipient and, affected by Hannah's story, chooses to reach out to a classmate he believes is going through an experience similar to Hannah's.

Yorkey's adaptation of *Thirteen Reasons Why* uses its first season to cover the plot found in the novel, though it is not a complete replica of its source material. While changes to the narrative will be discussed in the ensuing chapters, Yorkey's adaptation is a mostly faithful reconstruction of Asher's narrative. The adaptation's presence on Netflix works to its advantage, as the narrative does not face runtime restrictions that might have been placed on it if it had been adapted as a traditional television series, aligning with Liptak's claims about on-demand video enabling more complex television narratives. The major change facilitated by the show's production as an on-demand

series appears in the present-day narrative, where in the adaptation Clay spends a week rather than a single night listening to the tapes, allowing the development of plotlines not found in the novel, such as the plot to stop him from finishing the tapes. The narrative on Hannah's tapes is augmented by the adaptation, now including flashbacks to the moments Hannah describes, allowing the narrative to shift between past and present. As the chapters below will discuss, the first season of Yorkey's series remains relatively faithful to its source material, but the present-day narrative demonstrates changes made by the adaptation that foreshadow further deviation in later seasons.

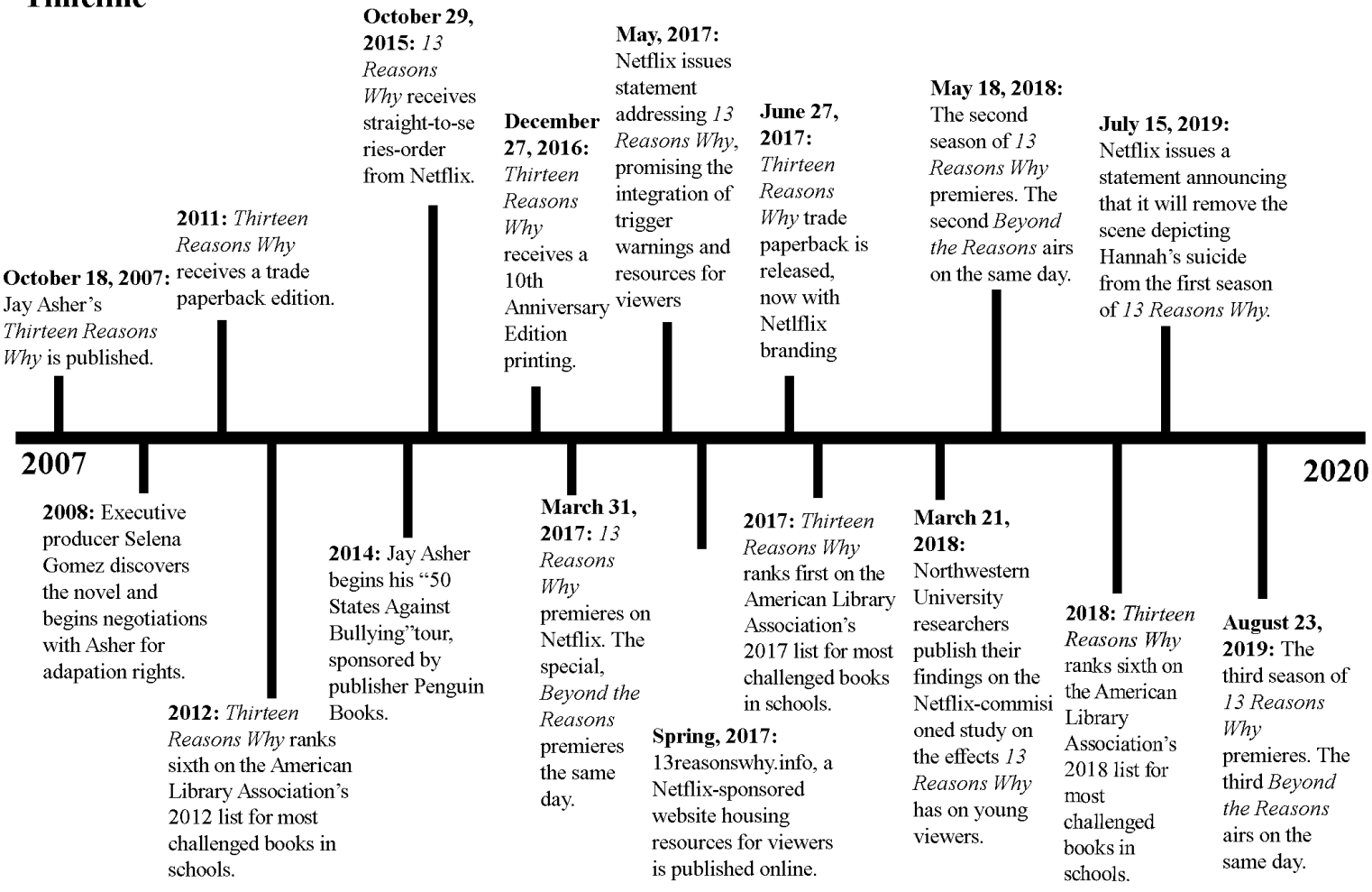
After its first season, *13 Reasons Why* expanded on the fiction created by Asher to include new plotlines and characters while keeping to the narrative structure established in the first season. Both the second and third seasons frame themselves as mysteries that utilize past and present narratives that recall the structure of the first season while shifting the focus from the original narrative over to storylines created for the adaptation. Because Hannah's story in the novel concluded at the end of the first season, the adaptation expands on storylines built around its supporting cast while creating new mysteries to serve as season-long arcs. In the second season, a series of Polaroids implicating several of the schools varsity athletes in a sexual assault scandal are leaked, leading to a season-long mystery in which Clay tries to find justice for Hannah and other victims. Like Hannah's cassette tapes, the present-day narrative is interspersed with flashbacks that contextualize events in the present, this time in the form of testimony delivered during the lawsuit brought by the Baker family against Liberty High School. The third season continues the dual-narrative format of past

seasons with the murder of antagonist Bryce Walker becoming the mystery Clay must solve for that season, with flashbacks detailing the events that led to his death. It would be impossible for *13 Reasons Why* to stretch its source material's narrative across multiple seasons, and the expanded fiction serves as the adapation's solution to this problem. It is through the dual-narrative structure found in the novel that the series builds upon in expanding the universe of *Thirteen Reasons Why* and suggests that Yorkey and his writers are adamant about maintaining structural aspects of the novel even if the resulting adaptation is unable to replicate the source material in its entirety.

Discussion of the novel and its adaptation is divided between two chapters that focus on how the Netflix series has caused the novel to be reevaluated internally and externally. The external understanding of the novel refers to the content and discourse of the novel that take place outside of its narrative. This includes the paratexts included in the novel's various printings, criticism over its depiction of suicide, and Asher's mobilization of the novel in schools. The internal concerns of the project focus on the novel's narrative and how its structure influenced creative decisions made in the adaptation. Unlike its external pieces, the novel did not change after Yorkey's series debuted in 2017. To that end, the second chapter concerns itself with the relationship between the novel and its adaptation in terms of authorship and the extent to which the adaptation is able to recreate its source material. While the internal and external components of Asher's novel bleed together in the two chapters, dividing discussion of the two between the project's chapters allows for a more nuanced understanding of the adaptation's influence on the text.

The first chapter addresses the institutional concerns that have forced the novel to undergo a reevaluation in the wake of the adaptation's premiere in 2017 and the shared interest of both works in creating a therapeutic experience for their respective audiences. Discussion moves chronologically from the novel's publication in 2007 through the release of its adaptation. The time between 2017 and 2018 is arguably the most important period of time for the purposes of this project, as it saw the novel experience newfound interest following the premiere of *13 Reasons Why* while the show experienced growing pains amid criticism over its content and messaging. The following timeline presents key dates related to the external content of the two works:

Figure 1
Timeline



As the timeline indicates, the discourse in the first chapter focuses on the period after *13 Reasons Why* premiered. Specific cases of censorship will be discussed in the chapter itself, hence their absence from the timeline, but it should be noted that the novel's rapid ascent up the American Library Association's (commonly abbreviated as the ALA) list of most frequently banned books in 2017 speaks to the large number of cases that occurred after the show's premiere, which suggests that the show had a role in the renewed criticism directed at the novel. Because this project is concerned with how the novel has been reevaluated after its adaptation debuted, there is minimal coverage of the novel's production history prior to its publication. An analysis of the paratexts discussed in the chapter addresses Asher's creative process, but he makes no mention of when things such as his interest in creating a therapeutic experience for readers first surfaced when writing the novel. As such, it is difficult to pinpoint these moments in the timeline, so the first chapter instead frames them in relation to the date in which the paratexts were published. While this is not a comprehensive diagram of every event that has shaped *13 Reasons Why* and its adaptation, it serves its purpose in outlining key events that relate to the discussion of the two works and their contextual material.

Trade publications play a large part in understanding the institutional concerns that have shaped the novel and its adaptation, and their use in the chapter frames the production history behind the two works. Between the two works the adaptation has received more coverage in these types of publications, though this could be attributed to its popularity. Trade magazines are also the preferred mode of discourse for television shows. This is reflected in the chapter, as the paratexts found in and around the novel are

the primary ways through which the project frames how the novel operates in addressing institutional concerns. Discourse on both works in these publications has focused on two topics: reception and the creative process. Criticism relating to the show's depiction of suicide is well documented by these publications, with articles covering the initial negative reception it received after its premiere to interviews with its production staff as Netflix attempted to address these concerns. In the case of the novel, articles detailing its sales following the adaptation's premiere are useful for understanding the effect the Netflix series had on revitalizing reader interest.

The paratextual content of the novel is just as important as the narrative itself and discussion of the novel's claims of offering a therapeutic experience for its readers is framed through much of this content. Across the different editions of Asher's text, the paratext provides readers with tips on how to read the novel and interviews with Asher on his creative process. As the discussion questions found in the 10th Anniversary Edition's paratext reveal, the novel is interested in affecting readers beyond its pages through the use of its paratext as a guide. Many of the questions ask readers to think critically about the novel and how characters respond to situations presented in the story, but the most striking question comes at the end. Here, the reader is asked. "What will you remember from reading this novel?". While some readers might respond with surface-level answers describing memorable events from the novel, the text appears to expect a more personal answer from the reader. The question assumes that the narrative has had a profound effect on the reader and implies that the narrative is influential enough to encourage prosocial behavior. Asher's interview within the novel's paratext is

equally useful in framing the text's attempts to encourage prosocial behavior. His claims, supported by his book tour detailed in the first chapter, point to an interest in mobilizing the novel as a therapeutic piece of literature. While scholars such as Mittell play a large role in framing the first chapter's examination of how the novel creates a therapeutic experience, the paratext merits attention because of how it deploys the narrative to encourage prosocial behavior.

The debut of the Netflix series had a profound effect on the novel's paratext in late 2016, as the novel received a new printing that featured Netflix branding to coincide with the series' premiere the following year. With this branding change came an increased emphasis on tying the novel to its adaptation through the new edition's paratexts. Cast photos and interviews between Asher and the show's cast members signal a relationship between the two works that finds the novel now tied to its adaptation. As the first chapter argues, the novel uses this reframing to its advantage by marketing its connection to the Netflix series to viewers who might purchase the novel. This is not an uncommon sight with novels adapted into films, as many are rebranded to attract moviegoers, but the rebranding of *13 Reasons Why* demonstrates an interest from both the novel and its adaptation in controlling the public's perception.

Novels and television shows are no strangers to censorship, with concerns over the kinds of messages young audiences receive from media being the primary motivator behind book bannings and censorship on television. The ALA is an important figure within literary censorship, as the organization serves as a defender for texts that face censorship in schools, and their relationship with Asher's text has documented the cases

in which the novel has come under attack by parents and school administrators. As the first chapter details, the novel was criticized for its subject matter before its adaptation premiered, with the ALA noting that the novel's depiction of suicide was one of the main factors behind initial calls for its censorship. Once the adaptation debuted in 2017, the novel experienced a new wave of censorship that suggests a reevaluation of the text on an institutional level.

Underlying all of the external material discussed in the chapter is the therapeutic experience both works aim to produce. In her book, *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture*, Lisa Zunshine uses theory of mind to analyze how fictional narratives can affect readers. Zunshine imagines a "culture of greedy mind readers" full of people determined to process the mental states of everyone around them (11). Zunshine applies this to fiction by describing narratives that invite audiences to try and understand a character's motivations in an effort to fulfill their need to understand the human mind. *Thirteen Reasons Why* and its adaptation model the kind of narratives Zunshine is interested in because Clay (and by proxy the reader) spends the narrative trying to identify what drove Hannah to kill herself. When readers try to read Hannah's mind, they also engage in mind reading with Clay, as the novel shows his understanding of other people changing as the story unfolds. With Zunshine's writing in mind, the therapeutic experience refers to the idea that engaging with the novel or show allows the reader the ability to grow in a manner similar to Clay, learning to empathize with the struggles of others after exploring Hannah's mind as she struggles with depression.

Besides allowing readers to develop empathy through an exploration of Hannah, the two works also aim to create a therapeutic experience by allowing their audiences the opportunity to learn more about topics such as suicide and sexual assault from a safe distance. J.A. Appleyard's *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* examines the reading tendencies of different age groups and describes the motivations behind each demographic's preferences. For the child reader, Appleyard argues that books for this age group often allow readers the ability to engage with topics that might scare them from a safe distance, thus allowing them to learn how to respond to these situations in real life (39). While Asher and Yorkey's target audiences are not young children, Appleyard's understanding of fiction as therapeutic remains useful when applied to the teen-oriented narrative of *Thirteen Reasons Why*. The fictional nature of the narrative helps the viewer or reader engage with topics such as depression from a safe distance. A topic such as bullying might resonate with readers of Asher's novel, and the text provides a space for them to understand the feelings associated with those issues without having to engage with them in the real world.

The novel and its adaptation, while not readers of Appleyard's work, take her understanding of the therapeutic experience and utilize paratexts to encourage prosocial behavior, imagining their audiences as willing to engage with these resources in the process. As the second chapter details, both narratives mobilize a number of different resources to encourage this behavior, with the adaptation building on the work of its source material. The paratexts provided by the two works serve as an extension of the therapeutic experience imagined by Appleyard, as their inclusion suggests that a reader

or viewer might require additional guidance working through the topics from the narratives. The first chapter suggests that the novel is more autonomous than the show in its use of these materials, but the inclusion of them in both works points to a shared belief that the narrative can be used to create a therapeutic experience similar to what Appleyard describes.

The audiences imagined by Asher and Netflix recall Zunshine's writing on mind reading, as both works assume that the viewer or reader will be affected by the narrative and therefore feel encouraged to engage with the paratexts. Skeptics of the series, discussed in the first chapter, suggest that the therapeutic experience is nothing more than moral posturing by the show, a view that assumes that most audience members will not engage with the narrative as its creators envisioned. To that end, both works gesture toward the formation of community and the notion that the narratives are able to bring audiences together in order to encourage prosocial behavior as a community. As the latter part of the chapter discusses, both works gesture toward the formation of community through their paratexts to suggest that their paratexts and resources can bring people together.

The second chapter will look at the two works from a narratological perspective, examining the adaptation's introduction of Yorkey as an author or authority to rival Asher; the chapters also discusses the series's inability to replicate the novel's construction of the relationship between Hannah and the reader. Scholarship on narratology, particularly from Sara Day, helps me argue that the novel is highly effective in building a relationship between Hannah and the reader; however, the same scholarship

when applied to the adaptation suggests that a translation of the source material to screen cannot come without changing the extent to which the reader is able to connect with Hannah. A close reading of the novel in relation to its adaptation offers a look at how the adaptation approaches this relationship and reframes it in a manner that decenters Hannaht. Discussion of Asher and Yorkey as rival authors will focus on how the adaptation's expansion of the novel's narrative in later seasons becomes problematic when determining creative authority. As the second chapter finds, while Asher can argue that the novel and adaptation are separate narratives, he cannot stop the comparisons between himself and Yorkey.

To address Asher and Yorkey as rival authors, it is important to understand that questions of authorship are inevitable in adaptations that expand on the source material. As Cahir writes in her text on adaptation studies, it's not uncommon for adaptations to make creative concessions when bringing a novel to the big screen, producing the common critique that the adaptation fails to uphold the qualities of the original work. What has become more popular in recent years is the use of adaptations to craft original storylines within the universe of their source material. *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is an example of this, as its narrative was not written by the series' author J.K. Rowling but received her blessing as canonical. Adaptations that introduce narratives beyond their source material can become problematic, however, when the elements of the new material contradict the narrative governed by the source material. While *The Cursed Child* is canonical within the *Harry Potter* universe, fan reception has called its place in the universe into question because it ignores rules established in the book series

and the behavior of its characters contradicts that of their counterparts from the novels. While *13 Reasons Why* does not have the same issues of canon as those found in Rowling's work, *The Cursed Child* does point to issues in authorship related to fiction that expand the universe of its source material. The second chapter explores this problem by exploring the implications of *13 Reasons Why*'s later seasons and their potential to cast doubt on Asher as the dominant author of the work.

Day's *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary Young Adult Literature* serves as one of the guiding texts for the chapter, and her writing on the relationship between narrators and readers is important when examining how aspects of *13 Reasons Why*'s narrative cannot be replicated on television. "Narrative intimacy" is a term coined by Day that will be referenced throughout the second chapter and refers to the relationship between a reader and narrative within epistolary narratives. Day describes narrative intimacy as a relationship "established through the constructions of the narrator and reader that reflect and emphasize the creation of an emotional bond based on trust and disclosure" (4). Day frames the epistolary narrative as a form of storytelling that enables the formation of narrative intimacy because the narrator is unfiltered and candid in his or her disclosure to the reader. This produces a one-sided relationship between the narrator and reader in which the narrator's disclosure is never matched by the reader. Day observes that the symbiotic relationship created by narrative intimacy allows the reader the opportunity to experience intimacy without the need to reciprocate.

While Day's text is concerned with the formation of narrative intimacy within epistolary novels, this project uses her writings to demonstrate the narrative restrictions inherent to adapting novels into films. The second chapter also makes use of Seymour Chatman's work analyzing the differences between written and screen narratives to understand how the formation of relationships through narrative intimacy in novels is difficult to recreate in film and television. As the chapter addresses, Chatman's writing on narration across novels and films is important to understanding the challenge of replicating narrative intimacy in a medium where narration is not as prevalent as what is found in novels. This complicates how a novel that encourages narrative intimacy, such as *Thirteen Reasons Why*, could be adapted because it speaks to Day's narrative theory being incompatible with visual media.

Reader reception discussed in the first chapter shows that the audience response of empathy toward Hannah is an important part of the narrative, so the adaptation must find a way to develop a similar mode of affect. Chatman's understanding of narration suggests that it's unreasonable to expect Yorkey's adaptation to recreate the first-person narration found on Hannah's cassette tapes. As the second chapter speculates, Yorkey and Netflix understood the challenges posed by the adaptation in trying to produce the same empathetic response found in the novel. In response, the adaptation engages in what this project refers to as decentering, in which the focus on Hannah is changed to allow other characters time to develop. Liptak's understanding of television widening its narrative scope to accommodate adaptations of novels is valuable here because the

adaptation uses the present-day narrative of the novel to develop the characters named on Hannah's cassette tapes.

In evaluating the novel and its adaptation, it is important to note that my discussion does not include the Netflix series' third season. The primary reason for its absence here comes from its incompatibility within the topics discussed in the two chapters. From an institutional standpoint, the third season does not add enough to what is discussed in the first chapter to merit its inclusion. Trade publications on the third season have focused on critical reception rather than the prosocial behavior discussed in the previous seasons. This regression extends to *Beyond the Reasons* as well, where the third season's special abandons the talk-show format found in the second season in favor of a more PSA-oriented program. The fourth and final season of *13Reasons Why* is due to air this year, and it remains to be seen if the series is scaling back on its efforts to create a prosocial experience for viewers. With regard to its place in illuminating narratological issues, the third season treads ground already covered in discussion of the second season. Topics discussed in the second chapter, such as narrative intimacy and the adaptation's expanded plot, would not be developed further through an examination of the third season because it does not change the narrative formula to the same extent as does the transition from the first to second season. The third season is still mentioned in the two chapters but its lack of substantial alteration to the trajectory of the show make it less essential to the larger conversation taking place because the discourse already includes the second season.

Another piece of clarification that should be provided is an explanation of why Yorkey is treated as the show's sole author in this project, as he was not the only one involved in adapting the novel for Netflix. As Mittell outlines in *Complex TV*, determining authorship in the television industry can be a challenging task. Mittell understands the process of creating a television series to be one in which multiple creators are often involved. As the second chapter understands him, Mittell argues that this can result in a somewhat convoluted understanding of whom to give creative credit to when examining a television show's production history. For *13 Reasons Why*, Yorkey was not the only creative involved in developing the adaptation, as trade magazine interviews and the *Beyond the Reasons* specials show that he had a number of writers working with him during production. However, the majority of *13 Reasons Why*'s marketing frames Yorkey as its sole creator, a decision that aligns with Mittell's understanding of television authorship. Mittell's text observes that a television show's paratexts can go a long way toward giving authority to a single figure in the eyes of viewers (102). When Hannah's suicide scene was removed in 2019, the Twitter account for the show issued a statement on the scene's removal along with a separate statement from Yorkey. The show describes Yorkey as the "show creator" in the tweet, placing authority in his hands by including the title as part of his statement and not using another member of the production staff to comment on the situation (@13ReasonsWhy). This instance of his speaking on behalf of the show, along with other examples covered in the second chapter, signals that the show aims to treat him as the face of the series when discussing its production. While there were certainly other writers (several of whom are

referenced in the chapter) who played a part in the series' creation, Yorkey is the one Netflix has chosen to act as its representative. As such, references to *13 Reasons Why* as "Yorkey's series" and the discussion of Asher and Yorkey as rival authors reflect how Netflix has positioned him within the series' paratexts.

As scholarship on adaptation studies suggests, there is an ongoing discourse within the field about the transition a narrative undergoes when it is brought to a new medium. As Cahir and others in adaptation studies understand, the language of film does not follow the same rules as that of the novel, which results in a product that must make concessions to tell its story. This in turn results in the perception that the adaptation is inferior to its source material because it cannot produce a 1:1 translation of the original work. An examination of how a novel can be reevaluated through its adaptation offers a response to this claim through the notion that what an adaptation produces is not merely a translation of its source material but also mirror through which the novel can assess itself.

Based on Day's writings, understanding young adult literature and narratology involves an exploration of the relationship between the readers and the characters who occupy the novels they read. Appleyard's text, in describing the adolescent reader, finds that teen readers seek out literature with characters they can relate to, supporting Day's concept of narrative intimacy as a means of developing a connection between the narrator and reader. Day's text focuses on a very specific genre of YA literature, which raises the question of how it might be applied to other modes of storytelling targeted at adolescents. Widening the scope of Day's work could be productive in understanding

how different genres of YA literature go about developing a connection between readers and the characters and these texts.

Between the two fields of scholarship discussed, there is a noticeable lack of discussion involving the internet's role in reshaping discourse on adaptations. This thesis attempts to fill that void by examining *13 Reasons Why*, an adaptation born in the era of streaming video where serial narratives have become increasingly popular within the television industry and streaming services such as Netflix have enabled access to their series beyond the television set. Just as the Netflix series builds upon its source material in encouraging a therapeutic experience for its audience, streaming video adds a new object of study for scholars who work with adaptations. As the project lays out in its first chapter, the online format of *13 Reasons Why* allows it to reach a wider audience than its novel or a traditional television series might offer. On the narratological front, the production complex of television narratives described by Mittell is encouraged by streaming platforms, where the limitations found in television such as episode and season length are not factors. This encourages the production of television adaptations based on novels, as series writers can more easily replicate the narrative complexities and length of the source text. To that end, the Netflix series presents a narrative that, while unable to replicate every aspect of Asher's novel in encouraging audience empathy, is nonetheless able to compensate for these deficiencies through an expansion of the narrative's scope.

This project serves as a synthesis of the ongoing discussion from scholars in narratology and adaptation studies, presenting the adaptation as a catalyst for the

reevaluation of the novel both internally and externally. *Thirteen Reasons Why* is distinctive in that it exemplifies many of the ideas presented by scholars such as Day, while also calling them into question through its adaptation. As the thesis reveals, a television adaptation can reveal that the novel that it is based on can experience a reevaluation that is both contextual and textual.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXTUAL CONCERNS

In examining *Thirteen Reasons Why* and its adaptation, it becomes clear that the two are intertwined in ways that go beyond a shared narrative. Exploring the novel's publication history and the critiques directed at the content of Brian Yorkey's adaptation reveal that the adaptation obliged a reevaluation of the novel. This reassessment reveals a shared desire behind each story to create a therapeutic experience for the audience that encourages prosocial behavior. Paratextual material found in pre-adaptation editions of the novel and with Asher's promotion of his book as a tool for bullying prevention point to gestures toward encouraging social behavior that preclude the show's premiere in 2017. This chapter examines the publication history of Asher's novel in relation to Yorkey's adaptation and how the show has built upon its source material to form the community it envisions.

Asher's novel has experienced a history of opposition in schools that began with its publication and saw a resurgence in criticism following the debut of Yorkey's adaptation. While specific cases of banning prior to the Netflix adaptation's premiere in 2017 are sparse, common critiques noted by the American Library Association in 2013 resulted from the novel's depiction of suicide and sexual assault. In an interview with CNN that same year, Asher noted that his novel was becoming the third most challenged title that year, according to the ALA, and explained his reasoning behind writing about mature content. When asked how bullying and suicide are depicted in the novel, he

responded “To emotionally reach people, I had to write my story honestly” (Grinberg). Asher’s claim that the novel offers an unfiltered look at adolescent life echoes Netflix’s response to similar criticisms directed toward the adaptation and suggests that his response influenced how the company chose to frame and defend the inclusion of scenes such as Hannah’s suicide.

The primary argument from those opposed to the novel’s removal from classrooms is that its unfiltered look at issues such as bullying helps young readers become more conscious of the effects of their actions. Brandie Trent and James Chisholm’s 2012 article“‘Everything … Affects Everything’: Promoting Critical Perspectives toward Bullying with *Thirteen Reasons Why*” examines the novel’s pedagogical uses, arguing that its treatment of bullying could be highly productive in teaching students how actions have consequences. Trent and Chisholm argue that Hannah’s suicide is the result of people at her school failing to realize how their actions affect her. The two propose that the novel can be used as a catalyst for discussion among students about bullying and its consequences, suggesting that the novel be treated as a prosocial piece in classrooms (75-80). This stance echoes Asher’s own view (and that of proponents of the adaptation) that the narrative can be used to foster discourse around the issues presented in the narrative, as demonstrated by Asher’s book tour discussed later in the chapter.

Asher and the novel’s publisher RazorBill (a young adult imprint of Penguin Books) have not been oblivious to criticism of the novel, and the integration of resources, designed to help readers connect and address issues in the narrative to their

own lives responds to critics while positioning the text as a prosocial piece. While the novel does not ask readers to look outside the narrative to the same extent the show does, it signals that resources are available to those who might be struggling with issues such as depression. Early editions of the novel accomplish this by including the phone number for a suicide hotline at the end of the text in an effort to offer readers a means to discuss a potentially uncomfortable topic outside the confines of the novel. This gesture serves the dual purpose of directing young readers to a space where they can begin talking about suicide while signaling that the novel has a vested interest in using its narrative to create a dialogue.

An interview with Asher contained in the 2007 printing of the novel's paratext offers further evidence that the novel aims to create a pipeline for readers to begin talking about mental health in space separate from itself. When asked what readers should do if they see aspects of Hannah in themselves, Asher replied "They absolutely must talk to someone about their feelings," showing his willingness to direct readers toward conversations outside the novel and suggesting that the novel provides a means for achieving this. The importance of communicating with others is something Asher repeatedly emphasizes in several of his answers and supports in his vision for the novel as a catalyst for these conversations to take place. While *Thirteen Reasons Why* indicates an interest in promoting prosocial behavior, these messages in the text are not positioned to be as direct as those found in Yorkey's adaptation. The novel's placement of resources in its paratexts coupled with limitations created by its focus on forming

community locally rather than online (discussed later in the chapter) make the text's ability to promote prosocial behavior appear less effective than its adaptation.

Asher's interest in promoting prosocial behavior through the novel should not be overstated, as the novel still aims to entertain readers. In the same interview where he expresses his belief in the novel's ability to encourage disclosure from its readers, Asher discusses the events that led him to write the book. When asked to describe the creative process behind the novel, Asher remarked that he took inspiration from an audiotour at a museum where visitors learned about the various exhibits through personal cassette players: "I've always been drawn to books with unique formats and kept the audiotour in the back of my mind." While Asher's comments on reader reception in the interview reflect his desire to make readers engage in prosocial behavior, his response to what inspired the creation of the novel serves as a reminder that the book is still meant to entertain.

The conflicting views surrounding the novel present two contrasting approaches toward allowing young readers to engage with the text, and the arguments from both sides suggest that the novel transcends its function as an entertainment piece. For the novel's opponents, the content is too dangerous for adolescent readers because it could inspire them to consider actions found in the novel, such as suicide or drug abuse. Limiting their access to the text would keep these topics from entering classroom settings. In contrast, proponents for the novel present arguments similar to Trent and Chisholm's that the novel's value comes from its ability to encourage prosocial behavior. Here, the novel's perceived influence on readers is used to facilitate discourse

outside the narrative, where the text acts as a vehicle for readers to understand and work through the issues it presents. What both sides seem to agree on is that the novel does not merit attention because of its story, but rather because of the influence it can have on readers.

The novel's use as a tool for exploring the effects of bullying did not go unnoticed prior to its adaptation, as the "50 States Against Bullying" tour demonstrates. Sponsored by Penguin Books as part of the National Bullying Prevention Month in 2014, Asher toured the United States using the novel to discuss bullying with students at the many schools he visited. The tour saw Asher hold discussions with students and faculty over the content of his book and the importance of preventing bullying. In an interview with *Publisher's Weekly*, Asher discussed the purpose of embarking on the tour, remarking that, "At every stop on this tour, I'll encourage students and faculty to continue pursuing a more open and understanding school," in a comment that echoes some of the messaging that Yorkey's show utilized after its premiere (Lodge). Asher's tour ultimately brought him to one school in every state, making his audience for these messages substantially smaller than Yorkey's audience. Nielsen ratings for Netflix shows were not available until a few months after the first season's premiere, but a *Variety* article on the second season of *13 Reasons Why* reports that an estimated six million viewers watched its premiere (Spangler). Nevertheless, that the novel was mobilized in conversations over bullying suggests that the narrative is thought to be valuable in reaching young audiences regardless of the medium in which it is delivered.

Perhaps as a response to criticism that the novel glorifies suicide, later editions make use of reader reception as proof that the novel has value in creating a dialogue with its readers. The readers Asher and Razorbill use to endorse the novel's prosocial effects are in essence "model readers," young adults who have read and are willing to disclose how the novel has affected them. By having these readers sing the novel's praises, the editions present the average young reader as an an important critical voice within discourse about the novel. Editions published beginning in 2017 feature a section within the novel's opening paratext entitled "What readers are saying about *Thirteen Reasons Why,*" where several quotations from readers are offered. "Thanks for making me a better person and for helping me understand the way I affect other people's lives" writes one reader, while another praises the novel for helping her during a difficult time in her life. The inclusion of these quotations supports Asher's claims that the novel encourages readers to engage in disclosure; that view is ratified by affected readers while also demonstrating that the novel is capable of encouraging moral development among its audience. The novel also solicits reader responses to the narrative; in providing a link to thirteenreasonwhy.com at the end of the testimonials, the edition suggests that while the reader should not emulate Hannah's actions, he or she can look to other readers positively affected by the novel for guidance. The website directs readers to a page where they can view feedback from other readers while at the same time having the opportunity to share their own thoughts, effectively creating an online community for affected readers to interact. Through the solicitation and integration of reader responses,

the novel provides evidence of its impact as a therapeutic piece while also offering a way for those who want to share their experiences to feel some sense of community.

As observed earlier, while the novel has faced opposition since its publication, it has seen a resurgence in criticism since its Netflix adaptation debuted in 2017 that points to a reevaluation occurring as a result of the show and merits further discussion. Originally appearing on the American Library Association's "Top Ten Most Challenged Books" list in 2012 as the third most challenged novel in schools, Asher's novel appeared again in 2017 as the number one most challenged book. This reappearance coincided with the release of the Netflix adaptation, which was released in March that year. While criticism was primarily directed toward the show, its premiere led to several cases where the text was removed from schools. An article from CBS News that year highlighted a number of cases surrounding the novel in which school districts warned parents about the content of the novel. Besides these warnings, the article, titled "*Thirteen Reasons Why* Briefly Pulled by Colorado School District," found that in one case a Colorado school district chose to stop circulating the novel in libraries over concerns related to an increased number of suicides in the area (CBS).

Examining criticism reveals a complicated relationship between the novel and its adaptation, as the text is often targeted because of its place in schools and availability to students. Many of the controversies associated with the television show resulted from scenes not contained in the novel and have caused the novel to be punished for content created by the show. Scenes such as Hannah's suicide, which the show chose to depict, and Tyler's sexual assault in the second season have drawn the ire of critics and led to

calls for the novel's removal from school libraries despite their absence from the actual text. Responses from schools have varied, with some choosing to issue warnings about the series to parents and others taking action against the novel. The novel's history as a challenged title gives school districts reason enough to remove it, but its relationship to the show adds another dimension to its removal. IDEA Public Schools, a Texas-based school district, issued a statement following the premiere of the adaptation's second season with tips on how parents should approach the series, showing how a show such as Yorkey's is not subject to the same restrictions Asher's novel might encounter. Furthermore, a school district issuing a statement addressing media outside its jurisdiction is abnormal, as the expected response would be for the novel to be banned. School districts cannot restrict what content their students access at home, but they can make gestures toward such control nonetheless. While schools are unlikely to have the Netflix series available to students, restricting access to the novel allows administrators the ability to exert control over the work within the space of their campuses.

Despite getting caught up in the storm of criticism in being tied to its adaptation, the novel nonetheless appears to use the show as a selling point. Since the show first aired in 2017, copies of Asher's novel have been updated to include aspects of Yorkey's adaptation, most notably in the form of its cover being updated to depict actors from the show rather than its original picture of Hannah. "Now a Netflix Original Series" declares the cover of an edition published in late 2016, informing prospective readers that the narrative has an accompanying adaptation. To further connect the text to its adaptation, screenshots from the show depict various cast members with captions identifying the

actor and who they play. Presented with these images, readers are now able to associate the characters with actors from the show, allowing them to visualize the narrative in a way not promoted in earlier editions.

One image that stands out among those provided in the 2016 printing of the novel is a picture of Asher on set during the production of the first season, offering a rare connection between the source material and the adaptation's creators (Asher). The Netflix edition of the novel continues to tie Asher to the show by including a series of short interviews in which he asks Yorkey and cast members about their experiences bringing the novel to Netflix. Asher's involvement in the show ended before the making of season 2, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, but including these interviews in the novel's paratext bridges the gap between the adaptation and its source material (Highfill). Through Asher's excitement during the interviews, the series gets his figurative blessing, possibly pushing readers toward watching the Netflix show.

Recent editions of Asher's novel suggest Razorbill's interest in attaching Netflix branding to the novel, as the presence of the adaptation could bring in new readers. Booksellers such as Barnes and Noble have recognized the value of adaptations for maintaining book sales and have consequently begun curating collections of novels that have received some form of adaptation. Of significance is Barnes and Noble's "Netflix and More" collection, which houses Asher's novel among others that have received an adaptation. "Read it before you stream it" proclaims the bookseller on in-store signage and on their website, evidently in an attempt to sell books when readers make the connection between novels and their adaptations. While this marketing strategy might

aid in keeping the bookseller competitive with online retailers, it points to how Razorbill and its parent publisher Penguin might approach working with Asher's adaptation. While the adaptation has brought renewed criticism to the novel, it has also rejuvenated interest in it. A *USA Today* story published in 2017 observed that the novel experienced a surge in sales after Yorkey's adaptation aired. Examining the newspaper's bestselling books list, the article observes that the novel "entered the top 50 this year, hitting No. 48 on March 30, and rising to No. 12 last week before making the leap to No. 1" (McClurg).

The novel's history and Asher's response to criticism of its content were likely factors Netflix was aware of when it picked up the series, and an exploration of the show's production history, specifically the gestures made toward creating a therapeutic experience is necessary to understand how the show incorporated aspects of Asher's defense into its marketing. Asher's messaging in the novel's paratext and his book tour appear to have laid the groundwork for the show's own approach to encouraging prosocial behavior from its audience. As a result, Netflix's approach to framing the show has followed much of Asher's defense against the novel's disturbing content, arguing that the show's value comes from getting young viewers to talk about issues they might not otherwise feel comfortable discussing.

In contrast to the novel's smaller-scale approach toward communicating with its audience, the Netflix show engages in far more direct messaging to viewers through a combination of PSAs and a resource website to form a sort of community among viewers. At the start of each season, a short video presents the show's actors directly

addressing the viewer to inform them of what to do if they find the content difficult. "*13 Reasons Why* is a fictional series that tackles tough, real-world issues," says the actor playing Bryce Walker, Justin Prentice (Yorkey, Season 3) in the opening for the third season. While this statement assures viewers that the series is a work of fiction, it also asks viewers to recognize the presence of issues they might find in their own lives. Closing out each episode is a black screen featuring a link to the Netflix-sponsored website, 13reasonswhy.info, along with narration from one of the cast members instructing viewers to go there if they wish to learn more about the issues covered on the show. Presenting information at both the opening and closing of episodes indicates a greater commitment from the show in getting viewers to look beyond the narrative that is found in the novel, where the only communication beyond the narrative is performed through segments found in novel's paratexts offered by Asher and Razorbill.

Katherine Langford's statement in the show's introduction demonstrates its desire to form a community in stating that "By shedding a light on these difficult topics, we hope our show can help viewers start a conversation (Yorkey, Season 2)." The "conversation" Langford refers to asks viewers to disclose how they're feeling to others, and the show aims to do this through the formation of community using the show as a starting point. In stating that "The minute you start talking about it, it gets easier," the show tells viewers that conversation can be a way of working through one's issues (Yorkey, Season 2).

A look at the show's production history reveals a belief in the narrative's ability to help viewers understand and relate to the issues found on screen as one of the driving

factors behind it receiving an adaptation. A *New York Times* article, "Selena Gomez (and Others) on Adapting '*Thirteen Reasons Why*' for Netflix," reveals that the novel garnered interest from adaptors shortly after its publication, with executive producer Selena Gomez and her mother Mandy Teefey negotiating for adaptation rights in 2008. While it took almost a decade for the adaptation to materialize, the interview observes Gomez's view that the show could be used as a tool for young viewers to engage with topics such as bullying and suicide; her own experiences with bullying inspired her to bring the novel to the small screen. Yorkey is also featured in the interview and points to the audience, primarily teenage girls, that Gomez brings with her as one factor in spreading the show's message. After several years as a leading actress for the Disney Channel, Gomez moved toward a career in music and took on more mature roles on screen. Having grown up with her, many of her younger viewers are now teenagers and their tastes have shifted toward more mature content, such as *13 Reasons Why*. In discussing Gomez's role as executive producer, Yorkey says that"Selena will say, 'Hey, check out what I've been working on because it's really important to me,' and [her fans] will check it out. This is a show that they need" (Rochlin). An article from *Rolling Stone* in which Gomez defends the show following the premiere of its first season echoes Yorkey's sentiments. Gomez says that "I think that stuff is uncomfortable for people to talk about, but it is happening and hopefully it opened the door for people to actually accept what's happening and actually go and change it, talk about it," again casting the show as a vehicle for young viewers to begin talking openly about bullying and suicide (Chen).

Yorkey's and Gomez's remarks both treat the show as therapeutic for young viewers, and also demonstrate an awareness that the show would attract attention from those opposed to its content. *13 Reasons Why: Beyond the Reasons* operates as one response to these concerns, with the program running parallel to each season of the adaptation. Acting as both a retrospective and resource guide for each season, *Beyond the Reasons* uses a combination of cast members, production staff, and medical experts to discuss issues covered on the show and how viewers should address them. While Gomez and Yorkey serve primarily as figures behind the scenes whenever the show has presented resources to viewers, both appear on the first season's episode of *Beyond the Reasons*. Gomez's presence is interesting because it serves as one of her few appearances in relation to the show beyond press interviews, and in some ways it connects with Yorkey's belief that bringing her own young following to the show might establish the community the show does indeed try to form. In this special episode, Yorkey explains the decisions behind specific scenes and the overall intent of the show, which presumably responds to viewers' concerns over the more mature content. While *Beyond the Reasons* supplements the main series, its existence speaks to efforts on Netflix's part to address its critics while also opening the door for viewers to understand some of the issues about which the show attempts to raise awareness/

The second season's *Beyond the Reasons* changes its format significantly from the first season by featuring a live studio audience, composed of both adults and teenagers, and operating as a sort of talk show (a significant shift away from the show as a teen drama), with a host asking different combinations of the cast, production staff

members, and experts questions about the making of the season. Compared to its first iteration, this *Beyond the Reasons* is also substantially longer, with a running time of an hour compared to the first season's half-hour length. The special is broken down by topic, with the host bringing on different people associated with the show for each segment. For example, when discussing the show's portrayal of sexual assault and the importance of consent, the actors who play Justin and Jessica are brought out alongside Yorkey to discuss the production of their scenes along with what viewers can take away from the series. During these segments, Yorkey explains the rationale behind exploring plotlines such as Jessica's struggle to speak out about her sexual assault, and solicits opinions from both the cast members on why these scenes merit discussion. Changing the special's format also serves the purpose of promoting a more open sense of community among viewers compared to its first iteration. Under the talk show format, the cast and guests appear far more animated than in the first special, with the host encouraging discussion during each segment. For the viewer, the altered format may serve to promote the dialogue the show aims to start, as the behavior of the show's guests could be viewed as a model for younger viewers to follow when discussing these issues. It also functions as a lighter way of approaching the show and the topics it aims to address by creating an environment centered around involving both its guests and the audience in the conversation. Compared to the show's status as a drama, *Beyond the Reasons* presents itself as more welcoming by humanizing the cast members while breaking down the show's darker scenes in an environment that encourages discussion.The updated format of the show suggests an intention to ease viewers into

talking about the topics covered in *13 Reasons Why* because viewers are given the opportunity to watch others engage in a dialogue and therefore might start one of their own.

The audience shown in the second *Beyond the Reasons,* while offering a visualization of community by showing individual viewers that they are not the only ones watching Yorkey's adaptation, models the kind of participation and dialogue desired by the show. Audience questions appear throughout the special, with topics ranging from the portrayal of gay men on the show to how the cast dealt with filming difficult scenes, such as when Bryce sexually assaults Hannah. While these questions operate as a catalyst for discussion among those on stage, they also recognize the audience as part of the conversation by showing the cast members responding to what they have to say. The inclusion of these questions in the special connects with the show's emphasis on starting a conversation because of how it depicts audience members as more than figures in the background and instead presents them as individuals ready to engage with the topics discussed. The presentation of the show's viewers as members of an audience also presents the community both the novel and its adaptation aim to create. Frequent cuts throughout the special to audience members serve to enforce the idea that the viewer is not the only one witnessing the conversation between the cast and production staff, and presents the idea that others are watching and willing to talk about topics from the show. In responding to a question asking why the school in the show forbids discussion about Hannah's suicide, Dr. Christine Moutier, an expert brought in to discuss suicide prevention, mentions the importance of maintaining a dialogue for issues

like that, and the special's format operates as a reflection of that (*Beyond the Reasons 2* 36:10).

The presence of *Beyond the Reasons* alongside Yorkey's adapation is curious because it suggests that *13 Reasons Why* is not as autonomous as the novel or even other television series. Recap episodes or specials produced to catch viewers up on previous events are not uncommon in serial television narratives, but *Beyond the Reasons* expands on the concept by taking viewers on a heavily guided tour through each season. Having Yorkey and psychologists on hand in the special to explain the significance of specific scenes implies that the show requires additional material beyond the fictional experience it provides within each episode if viewers are to fully understand its content. The presence of a Netflix-produced website, discussion guide, and "*13 Reasons Why* Discussion Series" YouTube videos covering the show represents supplementary material available to viewers far in excess of what is typically found surrounding television shows. Examining the show as a non-autonomous narrative connects back to earlier discussion of the narrative doing more than entertaining viewers by presenting them with opportunities to learn prosocial values. The specials are just a part of the larger network of resources but stand as the most direct evidence that the show is not fully autonomous and positions itself this way in order to provide a therapeutic experience for viewers.

Supplementing *Beyond the Reasons* in creating a therapeutic experience for viewers is 13reasonswhy.info, a website created by Netflix to act as a hub for resources related to the show. Referenced on title cards at the end of each episode and

accompanied by narration from the show's actors, the website offers links to other websites specializing in topics covered on the show, a discussion guide, and a series of informational videos discussing issues such as bullying. Through the website, Netflix offers viewers multiple ways to respond to the show's content, with the discussion guide and videos using the show as a guide for viewers to follow. The website appears at the end of each episode as well as in post-adaptation copies of the novel, showing that both forms are interested in reaching out to readers beyond the narrative.

The most direct way for viewers to interact with the show comes from the discussion guide, which is framed as a resource that viewers can utilize while watching the show or after they've finished it and still want to talk about topics they encountered during their viewing. While some parts of the guide present content found in other resources surrounding the show, such as *Beyond the Reasons*, tips for watching the show and discussion questions are features found only in the guide and direct the viewer's therapeutic experience. The tips offered by the guide appear to address young viewers and their parents, as many of the points aim to help viewers understand what they're watching. The guide instructs viewers to "Hit pause and talk about an issue during an episode," which demonstrates the "conversation" Yorkey and Asher speak of when describing the importance of their respective narratives while also breaking viewers' immersion to address issues beyond the scope of entertainment. Additional tips ask viewers to make connections between the show and their own lives, teaching readers not only to think critically about the show but also to begin seeing how the covered topics might appear outside of fiction.

Much like the gestures *Beyond the Reasons* makes toward forming a community, the discussion guide directs viewers toward behavior outside the show by presenting questions designed to connect topics from the show to their own lives. Placing the questions under the title "Starting the Conversation," the guide offers assistance to viewers unsure of how to begin working through the show's topics, even going as far as instructing "If you are not quite sure how to start the conversation, here are some ideas." The phrasing of this statement is curious because while it provides questions, it also subtly pushes readers to begin thinking of their own questions to ask. The questions themselves also reveal an interest in getting viewers to go beyond thinking about the show, with questions such as "How do you know when to offer compassion/support/empathy and when to set clear boundaries?" asking the audience to look outside the show for answers. While the guide does offer questions that connect with events found in Yorkey's adaptation, those that ask viewers to think critically about their own life experiences speak to Netflix's interest in getting viewers to treat the show as a therapeutic experience.

Like the discussion guide, the informational videos walk viewers through topics found on the show but now with the use of cast members to assist in explaining how to address each issue. Over the course of six videos, the actors and experts discuss topics such as bullying and depression, and explain how viewers might see these issues on the show and connect them with their own lives. This mimics the content found in *Beyond the Reasons*, but the shorter form of each video and focus on single topics appears to frame them as supplementary material to be viewed concurrently with the show rather

than after it like the specials. With the exception of one video addressed to parents by the show's adult actors, the videos are aimed at teenage viewers and show how each topic appears on the show along with what to do if they encounter a similar situation in real life. These directions take their cues from the discussion guide in that they provide a methodology for viewers to process the ideas found in the videos and show in order to understand how situations might be manifested in real life. The show asks viewers to recognize the imperfections of the characters, at one point telling them to remember that sometimes the characters do not make the right choices. This request responds to critiques such as that the narrative encourages behaviors like suicide; asking viewers to think critically about the decisions characters make also speaks to the show reinforcing the expectation that viewers will learn prosocial behavior from the show.

Examining the individual videos reveals an emphasis on using the show's actors to teach viewers how to make connections between topics on the show and in the real world. In "Understanding Consent," scenes from the show are used to teach viewers how to understand what consent looks like and what to do when someone does not ask for it. The video makes heavy use of Bryce's portrayer Prentice, along with several of the characters victimized by him, to teach viewers about the importance of consent. When Prentice observes in the video that "Some characters ignored the signs of consent," viewers are meant to recognize the connection between the actor and character, with the expectation that they will be able to use the latter's poor choices as examples of what not to do. Similarly, Devin Druid who plays Tyler, appears in a video on bullying, presumably to help viewers make a connection between his experiences on the show and

those in real life. Tyler's character, after engaging in a number of misdeeds during the first season, becomes the subject of extreme bullying in the second season, and the show recognizes this by placing him at the forefront of this video. The videos bear similarities to Asher's anti-bullying tour in 2014 in that they extrapolate content from the narrative and use it to teach prosocial behavior to an audience. The videos also attempt to create an ethos similar to that which Asher utilized on his tour through the show's actors. Just as the cast members are treated as experts because of the characters they play, Asher is cast as an authority on mental health because his writing explores the topic. While Asher might not have been an expert on mental health or bullying, his experience of writing *13 Reasons Why* is thought to make him qualified to speak to students on these topics and the show attempts to build this same type of ethos around its actors.

The use of Prentice in these videos is somewhat problematic given his role as a villain over the course of the series. Guilty of multiple rapes and one of the school's leading bullies, Bryce could be seen as the most irredeemable character on Hannah's tapes. By placing the actor who portrays him in positions where he provides guidance to viewers, however, the show asks viewers to cast aside their negative perception of Bryce and see Prentice's words as separate from his character's actions. This creates a complicated scenario in which viewers are asked to trust Prentice because he speaks about experiences lived through his portrayal of Bryce, but viewers might resist this representation because of the character's actions. The show's paratext deals with this dilemma directly, inasmuch as during the second *Beyond the Reasons,* the discussion turns to the topic of justice and how the show depicts Bryce. Prentice is present for this

part of the show and is asked what it was like playing the character, at which he decries the actions of his character, referring to Bryce as a "monster." At this point, Yorkey interjects, stating that "I know we all know this, but Justin is not Bryce," a statement meant to reinforce the difference between actor and character. Yorkey continues by saying that "This is one of the finest human beings you will ever meet here!" as if to clear up any doubt viewers might have about him (*Beyond the Reasons 2* 52:15). The praise Prentice receives at this point is intriguing, as adult viewers should be able to separate him from Bryce, but Yorkey's actions during this sequence suggest that younger viewers might have difficulty doing so.

The use of actors in the resources offered by Netflix raises questions of how the company uses the characters they play to position them as experts on the topics discussed in each video. As seen with Prentice, the issue of villainous characters teaching lessons can create problems if viewers are unable to separate an actor from his character, but Netflix has leaned heavily on the connection between the two in trying to create a therapeutic experience for viewers. In *Beyond the Reasons* and the PSAs put out by Netflix, the actors are always accompanied by experts on the topics discussed, such as psychologists when talking about bullying or suicide prevention. The purpose of this is clearly to have professional expertise to support what is being said, but in placing the actors in these resources, the show relies on the connection between actor and character to persuade viewers to take the show's messages to heart. For example, the actress playing Jessica, Alisha Boe, frequently appears in resources that discuss sexual assault and the importance of speaking up about it. In the first *Beyond the Reasons*, Boe recalls

talking with a friend who was a survivor of sexual assault in preparing for the ninth episode where her character goes through the same experience. Through her anecdote and testimony from a licensed psychologist during this segment of the special, Boe's role should, in theory, be limited to talking about how her character relates to the topic. However, a 2019 interview in *Glamour* shows that Boe, like many of her fellow castmates, has come to represent the conversations surrounding these issues. In the interview, Boe is asked, "For sexual assault survivors who are watching the show: What do you hope they feel from seeing this character portrayed on screen?", at which she expresses hope that her portrayal of a survivor was authentic (Rosa). The question and Boe's acknowledgment of positive viewer reception of the character suggest that while she is not an expert on sexual assault, her role has elevated her to a position where viewers regard her as such. An additional example occurs during a fan question on *Beyond the Reasons*, where Christian Navarro (Tony) is asked about his portrayal of a character who breaks the stereotypes of feminine gay men. While Navarro's response focuses on how gay men are represented on television, the fan question suggests that the actor, in playing a role, has some obligation to speak about what his character represents even though Navarro's own experiences as a straight man is different from Tony's.

The show has not been immune to criticism, and like the novel, the majority of it has resulted from its portrayal of suicide. One of the most notable changes made by Yorkey has to do with how Hannah chooses to end her life. In the novel, Hannah overdoses on pills and her death is never fully detailed. The show changes this by having her commit suicide by slitting her wrists in a visceral scene that shows her parents

walking into the room after she has died. Whereas the novel keeps Hannah's death in the background to focus on the bullying she experienced, the show presents her suicide as a warning of sorts by presenting a graphic scene that asks the viewer to consider the physical pain of suicide along with the emotional pain it inflicts on one's loved ones. The viewer watches as Hannah sits in her bathtub and slits her wrists, with no accompanying score to further emphasize the deeply intense nature of the scene. It is inarguably the show's most violent scene, offering an end to Hannah's story that shows the consequences of all the bullying depicted in previous episodes.

Because the series brings Hannah's death to the forefront of the narrative, suicide prevention groups have criticized its decision to depict suicide on screen. In an article for the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Behind the Scenes of Netflix's Call to Alter '*13 Reasons Why*' Episode," Joe Flint details the pushback the show faced in response to the scene. As Flint found, researchers for suicide prevention groups noted an increase in suicides among teenagers in 2017, particularly in the month after the show aired. While a direct correlation between the show and rising suicide rates has never been found, opponents of the scene and show have argued that given the young audience it attracts the show must be careful with the message it sends in depicting suicide. A journal article from *JAMA Internal Medicine*, "A Call for Social Responsibility and Suicide Risk Screening, Prevention, and Early Intervention Following the Release of the Netflix Series *13 Reasons Why,*" argues that in depicting suicide the way it does, the show sets a precedent for future programs in how to show adult issues on television (O'Brien et al. E1). The article concludes by cautioning the show's producers that they must be careful

with portraying suicide on screen because of the influence such depictions can have on young viewers; mental health professionals may also need to be better equipped to handle more cases involving teenage mental health issues. As one researcher in Flint's article observes, "Netflix is so powerful that what they do matters," indicating a clear level of accountability on the show's part in what they choose to air. The content-related criticism leveled at Yorkey's adaptation is similar to that surrounding the novel, but also suggests that the television format demands greater accountability in the messages it sends to young audiences.

Critical reception of the adaptation's more graphic scenes has been mixed, with a common critique being that the narrative does not make good on Yorkey's claims that the show can catalyze discourse among viewers. A *Vox* review of the adaptation's second season offers a negative assessment of the show, deeming its efforts to create therapeutic experience for viewers ineffective. Constance Grady writes in her critique, "[*13 Reasons Why*] seems to find the idea of such thoughtful and careful dialogue to be boring and trite," arguing that many of the show's more graphic scenes are used simply for shock value rather than to send any sort of message to viewers . A review of the third season from *The Guardian* echoes Grady's thoughts, observing that the show has continued to use its subject matter for dramatic effect rather than its advertised message of engaging with viewers. A subhead to Arielle Bernstein's review in this periodical notes "a shift in focus can't prevent the writers from falling back into bad habits," referring to the third season's move away from Hannah as the central plot point and the series' continuing struggles with starting meaningful conversations. While Netflix has

touted the show's ability to encourage prosocial behavior, negative reviews suggest that the adaptation is not as effective as it claims to be at forming a community dialogue among viewers.

Netflix has not been deaf to these critiques, and the sponsorship of research arguing that the show can positively affect viewers is one way the show has attempted to defend its claims. In a study commissioned by the studio titled "How teens, parents responded to Netflix series '*13 Reasons Why*,'" researchers at Northwestern University surveyed viewers to determine what effects the show had on them. Examining a population of 5,000 people, the study concluded that the show had positive effects in terms of raising viewer awareness around topics covered such as bullying (Wartella, et al., 1). These researchers' finding that "Nearly 80 percent of adolescent and young-adult viewers reported that watching the show helped them understand their actions can have an impact on others" echoes some aspects of what the show's cast members and producers have argued for when defending its content. While the study concedes that the results do not speak for every viewer's experience, the report leans toward the show being useful for young viewers. As Drew Cingel, one researcher for the study, concludes, "These findings suggest that 'tough topic' programs like *13 Reasons Why* may be able to help adolescents talk about these stressors in their lives" (Wartella, et al., 3) While the results provide the show with research to back up claims of helping to start a conversation among its viewers, that Netflix commissioned the study has suggested to some critics that it influenced the results. Published in March of 2018, two months before the premiere of the second season, the study appears to come in response to

editorials critical of the first season's content and concerns that the show is not actually reaching its viewers in the ways its producers claim it does. While this is not to say that the study's findings are invalid, it is important to be aware that the studio had a vested interest in what conclusions were made.

While Netflix stood firm on its decision to include the suicide scene for several years, 2019 saw the scene removed from the series along with a statement from the company addressng the concerns of those opposed to the scene. Hannah's death is now entirely off-screen, with the only suggestion of her death coming from her parents finding her. The resulting changes remove much of the intensity found in the original version. Flint's examination of the changes reports a significant amount of deliberation at Netflix, along with the observation that Yorkey and the show's writing team were not forced to make the change. His article reveals that after the first season aired, the studio began working closely with suicide prevention groups and "began to follow guidelines against graphic portrayals of suicide in media," showing a willingness to recognize the show's influence on young viewers. While it might be easy to suggest that the show is now susceptible to excessive outside influence, having responded to viewer criticism through the integration of disclaimers, others in Flint's article argue that the shift merely demonstrates an awareness of the show's power in depicting adult issues for a young audience. Joseph Turow, a media studies professor interviewed for the article, notes that while this does not mean the show will now amend scenes whenever critics find them problematic, it does mean that Netflix must maintain a "sense of stewardship regarding what they're doing" (Flint). Flint's assessment of the suicide scene speaks to the power

of outside groups in influencing changes from Netflix, which is sufficient that Netflix is willing to rewrite the show retroactively.

Beyond operating as a response to concerns over the appropriateness of the scene, the changes made by Netflix provide a glimpse into the unique ability of streaming services to retroactively make changes to their shows. In the past, changes to a television show have come in the form of modified rebroadcasts of episodes or changes made when the series is brought to physical media, but streaming video's home on the internet means it can be readily modified at a moment's notice, with the only record of the unchanged piece coming from viewers who can download it before it gets removed. In the case of *13 Reasons Why,* Netflix has been thorough in ensuring that footage of the scene is scrubbed from the Internet. A search for the scene on YouTube yields mostly clips from news sites discussing its removal along with a few fan-created videos featuring the scene. While the scene is still viewable in select spaces online, it's clear that Netflix has taken some effort to police the Internet to keep the scene away from viewers, as other significant scenes from the show are readily accessible on most video-sharing sites. While a DVD form of the show exists containing the unedited scene, there is an absence of press coverage surrounding its existence, suggesting that interest in this release is not significant enough to merit a reissue of the series on physical media.

Yorkey's show will not be the last series on a streaming service to undergo changes, given the ease with which edits can be made, but it does speak to the power companies such as Netflix hold in responding to criticism of their shows' content. *Stranger Things*, another Netflix-produced series, is set in 1980s America and attempts

to capture the culture of the time. Consequently, the show reflects the prevalence of smoking cigarettes at the time by depicting multiple adult characters with them. As a result, anti-smoking groups have taken issue with Netflix, demanding the removal of these scenes because young viewers might be inspired to take up smoking as a result of the show. In an article for *National Public Radio*, Vanessa Romo details Netflix's response to the criticism, with the studio stating that "Going forward, all new shows it commissions with ratings of TV-14 or below (and all films rated PG-13 or below) will exclude smoking and e-cigarette use, except for 'reasons of historical or factual accuracy'" . While this case shows Netflix looking at the future of its programming, it also offers another case of the studio taking criticism from outside parties and adjusting its programming to reflect it. This case bears some similarity to Yorkey's show in that Netflix is showing an awareness of the impact its productions have on young viewers.

A key distinction between these two cases comes from the number of occurrences in which the offending content appears, which is important when considering how studios can retroactively edit scenes. In the case of *13 Reasons Why,* Hannah's suicide comes as a single scene and also carries enough emotional weight that its removal can be justified on the grounds of controversy and the relative ease in tweaking narrative to account for its removal. On the other hand, Romo's article cites a report from Truth Initiative that found 262 instances of tobacco usage in the second season of *Stranger Things.* Ignoring the differences in gravity between suicide and tobacco usage, it might be unfeasible for Netflix to retroactively remove every single instance of smoking in the season. The decision to remove smoking from future

productions shows Netflix's awareness of the complexities that come from removing scenes from its shows and pledging to not depict smoking in the future operates as its response to critics.

Netflix's issues with censorship are not limited to the United States as cases in international markets suggest a changing landscape for how streaming platforms navigate broadcast guidelines. A story for *VICE* by Shamani Joshi on efforts by the Indian government to regulate the content of streaming platforms explores how Netflix and other platforms operate in countries with stricter content policies. In the article, she points to the internet as a home for streaming platforms as one of the defenses for companies like Netflix when it comes to avoiding government restrictions. As Joshi writes, "Movie content that comes out in India is usually censored by the Central Board of Film Certification, [but] streaming services manage to bypass all the cuts because they run on the internet. The article goes on to describe a petition demanding that streaming platforms follow the same rules as traditional films, showing the increased interest in bringing platforms such as Netflix under the same umbrella of guidelines as physically distributed media. While content guidelines in India are stricter than those in the United States, the movement to get streaming platforms to follow the same guidelines as other media forms offers one possible explanation for Netflix's self-censorship in *13 Reasons Why*. The removal of the suicide scene was not required under any broadcast policies, but the move may have come in some part as a result of Netflix wanting to avoid future regulations in the United States amid rising interest in streaming services in foreign markets.

A *New York Times* article, "Netflix Expands Into a World of Censors," references the debate in India, but also addresses its presence in Turkey, which has gone farther in getting the streaming platform to begin following government guidelines. As the article details, Netflix's movement into international markets has been marked by self-regulation, with trailers for several series facing censorship in Turkey. Netflix's history in Turkey parallels its experience in India in that new laws in 2019 require streaming platforms to follow the same censorship laws as other forms of broadcast media. The article also references a 2018 report from Netflix in which the company addresses its future and concerns surrounding expansion to markets in different countries, finding that "'Censorship' and 'the need to adapt our content and user interfaces for specific cultural and language differences'" were two major concerns for the company (Marshall). While these comments refer to international markets, they reveal that Netflix is aware of the importance of being receptive to the rules and preferences of each market it enters. Despite split opinions on the appropriateness of the scene, Netflix evidently felt that removing the suicide scene was in the best interest of recognizing the concerns of those in the U.S. market.

The motivation behind the moves Netflix has made in and around *13 Reasons Why*, when examining the context surrounding the series, begin to make more sense when one considers the increased level of competition among streaming platforms. The company's streaming offerings began in 2007 and for a time it operated as the premier platform for streaming movies and television shows on the internet. The rise of platforms such as Amazon Prime in 2011 presented Netflix with greater competition for

subscribers. The increasingly crowded market for streaming platforms meant that the company had to compete with others for the rights to offer licensed shows and films on their platform. In a *Los Angeles Times* article examining the "streaming wars" between Netflix and other platforms in 2019, the rise of original content is cited as one of Netflix's biggest strengths. The article features an interview with Netflix's chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, who notes that the platforms most popular shows are original content and that "Basically our goal is we're trying to make your favorite show," a statement that indicates a desire from Netflix to maintain its subscriber base through the creation of original content (Lee). As part of the Netflix Originals brand, *Thirteen Reasons Why* is clearly intended to be one of these shows, with the amount of marketing and resources poured into the show suggesting that the company views it as a flagship title. With the streaming video landscape expanding to include more and more platforms, Netflix has seen the departure of many of its licensed shows; billing *Thirteen Reasons Why* as one of its leading programs suggests that it is trying to reclaim a space in the streaming market for teen dramas.

Disney Plus stands as Netflix's most direct competitor when it comes to youth-oriented programs. Launched in November of 2019, the service's arrival was marked by a back and forth between the two companies over creative talent and licensing. In the *New York Times* article "Netflix Goes All Out to Wow Children as Streaming Wars Intensify," Brooks Barnes makes apparent that Disney and Netflix had been quietly preparing to compete with each other once Disney's service launched. The article notes that prior to Disney Plus launching, Netflix began to acquire creative talent for teen and

children's programming who had worked at Disney as they began losing licensed shows to the rival streaming platform. Barnes points out that providing programming for young viewers is important for streaming platforms, writing that "Families are valuable streaming customers [...] because they are reliable, paying month after month instead of 'churning' in and out based on what is available." With Barnes's observation in mind, it becomes clear that Netflix's moves to bring in additional creative minds for youth-targeted programming is motivated in some part by a desire to pull in and maintain families as subscribers.

The Disney brand is defined by its emphasis on family-oriented content, making it an easy choice for parents deliberating between which streaming platform to subscribe to for their children, something Netflix's original content aims to counter. While Disney maintains the rights to its programming, the creative talent Netflix has recruited come with experience working on a number of programs found on the rival platform to produce more youth-oriented shows. This interest in appealing to younger audiences is a reflection of the streaming platform's content consumption, with Barnes quoting Netflix's animation director Melissa Cobb to the effect that "About 60 percent of Netflix's global audience watches the service's content for children and families on a monthly basis." The high volume of subscribers interested in family-centric programming operates as one motivator behind Netflix's push to compete with Disney because of the potential for customers to move to their rival's streaming platform. By bringing on creatives with ties to Disney and investing in children's programming (Barnes estimates this to be in the billions), Netflix positions itself to compete in a space

where it had previously relied on licensed content. Netflix's move may allow it to utilize original content to attract younger viewers, but how it chooses to mobilize it may ultimately be what sets it apart from its competitors.

The therapeutic experience Yorkey and Netflix aim to create through *13 Reasons Why* speaks to one approach Netflix might be taking in appealing to younger audiences because of the larger social impact their programs could achieve. While this chapter has approached the resources Netflix has created around the show as a response to criticism over its content, the emphasis on using the show as a vehicle to start a conversation about difficult topics among young viewers could function as a way for the streaming platform to separate itself from its peers. If one is to view Disney Plus as a direct rival to Netflix in competing for the attention of young viewers, particularly adolescents, then a show such as Yorkey's would give the platform an advantage if the show is to be taken as something that teens can learn from. Presently, Disney offers nothing that could compete with Netflix in covering issues to the extent of those found on *13 Reasons Why*, nor does its teen-targeted programming ask them to consider how what they watch could be applied to their own lives, and it is here that Yorkey's show could lay the groundwork for future, socially motivated programming.

Yorkey's show is currently the only youth-targeted program on Netflix to offer as many resources for viewers as it does, which speaks to the potential of similar programs in the future. Framing their youth-targeted programming as beneficial beyond entertaining viewers could give Netflix an edge over competing platforms. Just as Asher mobilized his novel to raise awareness of bullying and suicide prevention, the messaging

around Yorkey's adaptation aims to push the show beyond entertaining viewers and toward improving them as people. This is not to say that Netflix's intention is to create didactic programming for adolescent viewers, but that this framing presents an opportunity for them to brand their shows targeted at teens as something that can do more than entertain. The previously discussed investment Netflix has made in programming aimed at its younger viewers shows that the company has the resources to continue producing shows similar to *13 Reasons Why*. Social media posts from cast members in December 2019 confirmed that filming had concluded for the fourth and final season of the series, indicating the end of Yorkey's adaptation and creating space for Netflix to begin pushing for other socially conscious teen dramas. *13 Reasons Why* is not the first teen-targeted drama to try and approach social issues, but Netflix's efforts to compete with Disney on the streaming front suggest that framing its programs as doing more than entertaining may be one way the company can keep its foothold on the market.

13 Reasons Why is not unique as a therapeutic piece of media; a similar series merits examination. *Degrassi*, a Canadian television show spanning five multi-season series addresses similar issues to Yorkey's adaptation, attracting a similar wave of criticism in the process. *Degrassi High School,* for example, faced censorship from its American broadcaster PBS for an episode on abortion. In an article for *The Fader* in 2017 that profiled the episode, which originally aired in 2004, series co-creator Lisa Schuyler offered a few words on the episode that echo much of what Yorkey and Asher have said in defense of the content of *13 Reasons Why.* As Schuyler says in the article,

"some parents and some broadcasters that feel that we should be more protectionist of our young children [...] and that's not where I come from as a producer" (McDermott). The similarities between the two series have not gone unnoticed, as Schuyler was interviewed in 2018 by *The National Post* to talk about Yorkey's series and how it handled some of the same issues found on her series. While commending the show for asking viewers to confront tough issues, Schuyler expressed concern over the suicide scene and noted that she struggled when writing an episode of *Degrassi* on the same topic, ultimately choosing to not show the act on screen (Szklarski). Schuyler's series is not the only teen drama prior to Yorkey's to bring difficult topics to young viewers, but an examination of it suggests that Netflix had similar intentions to Schuyler when picking the series up.

The connection between *Degrassi* and *13 Reasons Why* is made deeper by the former, under the title of *Degrassi: Next Generation,* premiering on Netflix in 2016, roughly a year before the premiere of Yorkey's series. Following the same structure as its predecessors, *Next Generation* covered a variety of issues such as misogyny and racism across four seasons until its unannounced cancellation at the end of 2017. While the series covers topics of similar gravity to those found in Yorkey's series, disclaimers and resources discussing these topics are absent. This could be attributed to the series' ownership, as Netflix comprised one third of the group who produced it, meaning they might not have had the same level of control over the series as with Yorkey's. However, the series' third and fourth seasons aired around the premiere of *13 Reasons Why* in 2017 with surprisingly little attention from the press over its subject matter compared to the

latter. Despite covering issues relevant to adolescent viewers, the show makes no attempt to ask its audience to take action as Yorkey's show does. Schuyler's previous statements regarding *13 Reasons Why* and her work with *Degrassi* indicate that she's not opposed to having viewers engage with difficult content, but the absence of discussion guides or special episodes surrounding *Degrassi: Next Generation* speaks to how the series deviates from Yorkey's in approaching viewers. While both series aim to operate beyond entertaining viewers, the presence of resources around *13 Reasons Why* suggests a level of viewer engagement not present in Schuyler's own Netflix series, even though the latter likewise encourages a therapeutic experience through viewing.

The therapeutic effects of the show and its source material are clearly what its creators use when faced with criticism over the content of their narratives, pointing to things such as audience reception to justify their claims. While this defense connects the two forms, it also serves to reveal the limitations of form in achieving this. Asher's book tour across the country demonstrates the merits of the novel in teaching concepts such as the importance of recognizing the consequences of bullying but also reveals issues in scale that might prevent such therapeutic effects from reaching as many people as something presented in a visual medium. For the novel, discourse is limited primarily to forums such as book clubs, meaning the change Asher aims to create occurs in small groups rather than in large communities. Additional content found in later editions of the novel points readers in the direction of the Netflix show, where a multitude of resources are presented to build community and get the audience involved in discussing the content. This indirectly implies limitations on the part of Asher's novel because while it

still maintains its narrative and form, messaging in later editions of it appear to defer to the Netflix series as the superior form for those who want to do more with the issues presented. The 10th Anniversary Edition of the novel demonstrates this point, with one of its first pages providing a link to 13reasonswhy.info, where information is framed through the context of the show rather than its source material.

The fact that *13 Reasons Why* premiered and housed the majority of its materials online is another advantage it has over the novel in forming community, as Asher's book relies heavily on forming physical communities. As part of the "50 States Against Bullying" initiative, the Penguin-sponsored website 13RWcommunityread offers a discussion guide similar to that found on 13ReasonsWhy.info, but with a greater emphasis on developing communities local to the reader. "Using TH1RTEEN R3ASONS WHY in the Classroom and School Community" features questions similar to the Netflix-created discussion guide but also presents activities readers can do to create a "community read" in which local communities can read the novel at the same time. While a "community read" enables a more physical manifestation of community than what the show sets out to produce, it also presents more challenges in trying to assemble and encourage membership. The guide recommends that readers "Contact teachers and principals at all area schools (or even the school district supervisor), work with the public libraries, touch base with the local bookstore, colleges, churches, and talk to parents," suggesting a substantial investment of time and resources from the community in order to host a community read. In contrast, "watch parties" for the Netflix show are far easier to achieve due to the online nature of both the series and

communication channels such as social media. This means that group consumption and discussion of *13 Reasons Why* is more readily available than its source material. While Penguin's gestures toward community formation through its discussion guide offers suggestions for how readers might find others to read and discuss the book with, limitations of scale and access prevent it from achieving the same reach that its Netflix adaptation is capable of.

In his book *Complex TV,* Jason Mittell explores what he calls "narrative complexity" in television, which refers to programs that redefine episodic storytelling by utilizing more serial narratives to engage viewers, and touches on the concept of community formation that Yorkey's show attempts to create as a product of these shows (18). *13 Reasons Why* matches the type of program described by Mittell through its narrative structure, as each season is structured around a larger plot point that plays out over the course of multiple episodes. In examining complex narratives, Mittell observes that this type of storytelling, particularly with the rise of the internet, has led to the creation of numerous fan communities dedicated to discussing shows. Writing that "Audiences tend to embrace complex programs in much more passionate and committed terms than they do most conventional television," Mittell describes the communities formed through complex narratives as integral in increasing viewer involvement (35). Because Yorkey's series housed online, the formation of community is made even easier because of how seamless the act of watching the show and then discussing it with others online is.

Accessibility with each form also merits consideration when evaluating the extent to which the novel and show are able to form communities. In the education space, the novel is far easier to control than the show because school administrators are able to dictate what students are allowed to read in the classroom. This proves to be problematic in forming community around the novel as restricting access to it, in turn, prevents the formation of community by denying readers the ability to engage with the text. Outside the school, young readers, whose possessions are most likely purchased by their parents, must rely on them to obtain things like novels. A parent might research Asher's novel, discover its controversial history, and decide the novel is not appropriate for their child. While Netflix offers parental controls to control the content young viewers have access to, an article by tech website How-To Geek suggests that these are not as preventative as they are meant to be, as tech-savvy youths in many cases can get past filters to access whatever content they want (Hendrickson). This technology expertise, coupled with the service's availability on smartphones and computers, allows for a level of access far greater than that found with Asher's novel. Teenagers wanting to watch the show could binge-watch the entirety of Yorkey's show on their phones when everyone at home has gone to sleep, and their parents would be none the wiser. The differences in accessibility between the novel and its adaptation suggest that one challenge in building community with Asher's novel comes from getting the novel in the hands of readers. In contrast, the online nature of Yorkey's series and resources tied to it creates a pipeline for forming community.

In examining the history behind Asher's novel and Yorkey's adaptation, it becomes clear that the relationship between the two works has become complicated by reception toward the novel after the show's premiere. While the adaptation draws upon *13 Reasons Why* to form its narrative, it has also led to renewed interest and criticism directed at the novel. In the wake of renewed criticism, Razorbill has still managed to use this attention to push sales of the book, as evidenced by branding changes made to tie the novel to its adaptation. As a result, the show has seemingly become the dominant work for most audiences in terms of freshness and recognition. This is not to say that Asher's novel has become secondary to *Thirteen Reasons Why*, but that the release of Yorkey's adaptation has forced the novel to reassess how it is received by audiences and critics

What has not changed since the release of the Netflix show has been Asher's claim that the narrative aims to affect viewers beyond its pages, a belief Yorkey emulates in his adaptation. For both creators, creating a therapeutic experience and encouraging prosocial behavior among their audiences are achieved through recognizing that their narratives are meant to be consumed for more than entertainment. In the case of Asher, *13 Reasons Why* has been used as a vehicle to promote prosocial behavior through events such as his anti-bullying tour where the novel is used to bring readers together to discuss how they can learn from Hannah's story. Yorkey's adaptation builds on Asher's efforts by increasing the presence of external resources available to viewers and positioning the show as more reliant on these materials to get its message across.

CHAPTER III

TEXTUAL CONCERNS

Having explored how the relationship between the novel and its adaptation within the institutions of book publication and television production, it is still necessary to examine the specific changes made in adapting Asher's novel can reveal about authorial ownership and the challenges of adaptations. In a paratextual interview between Asher and series director Tom McCarthy found in the 2017 printing of *13 Reasons Why,* McCarthy notes that the novel presented a number of challenges in trying to translate it to a screen production. While McCarthy does not specify what these challenges were, his statement alludes to the changes found in *Thirteen Reasons Why* and the difficulty in adapting an epistolary novel to a medium with narrative rules that are not entirely compatible. While this chapter has unearthed a connection between the two works through audience affect, the following chapter examines how narrative limitations suggest that the two are incompatible.

As the previous chapter discussed, Jay Asher's and Brian Yorkey's narratives are connected through a shared desire to form community and offer a therapeutic experience for their audiences. However, the narrative's translation from novel to television series reveals differing approaches to achieving desired audience response and an examination of the narratological aspects of Yorkey's work reveals similar problems in translating a novel into a screen narrative. While Asher's and Yorkey's works are both able to tell Hannah's story, changes made by Yorkey in adapting Asher's novel reveal a conflict in

narrative ownership and the limitations of narrative intimacy in television storytelling. This chapter explores how Yorkey's changes to the narrative have resulted in a battle over narrative ownership while also demonstrating the limitations of screen narratives in recreating narrative intimacy, and how studios are able to reconcile issues in adaptation.

An important distinction to make in examining the show's decentering of Hannah and lack of narrative intimacy is that the show functions as a teen soap opera. Robert Allen's *Speaking of Soap Operas* examines the structure and production of soap operas, and a look at his writings on narrative suggests that *13 Reasons Why* follows many of the conventions found in the television genre. Discussing how the soap opera narrative differs from the traditional television narrative, Allen states that "The soap opera trades an investment in an ultimate narrative [...] for a series of 'mini-closures'" (75). The "mini-closures" Allen refers to are narrative threads that are resolved but never result in the end of the larger story, and the narrative structure found in Yorkey's series align with this concept. Despite following the plot of Asher's novel, the adaptation exhausts the mystery behind Hannah's death by the end of the first season. This creates a problem for Yorkey and his writing staff, as the series must continue to produce stories even after Hannah's story has concluded. To this end, Yorkey treats the series as a soap opera, creating new "mini-closures" through the introduction of storylines built around the show's supporting cast that allow the series to continue beyond the scope of its source material.

The second season models Allen's definition of the soap opera by introducing a number of mini-closures that propel the story forward. Clay, for example, must contend

with the presence of a ghostly Hannah who represents his inability to move on from her. Hannah's ghost follows Clay for the duration of the season and it is only after he works through all of his unresolved feelings toward her that he is able to move on from her. As he delivers a eulogy at her funeral, Clay finds closure after her passing and watches as Hannah's ghost departs from his subconscious, concluding a storyline that spanned the entire season (Yorkey, "Bye"). Even as Hannah departs from Clay's world, and by extension the series, *13 Reasons Why*'s narrative is able to continue because its narrative structure as a soap opera prevents it from ending even after its protagonist exits the series. Just as the series was able to continue after revealing the mystery behind Hannah's death, the second season's plotlines can be resolved because the series can theoretically continue forever as long as its writers are able to develop new mini-closures.

Jason Mittell's *Complex TV,* referenced in the previous chapter, offers an assessment similar to Allen of *13 Reasons Why*'s format enabling the creation of new plotlines beyond its source material. Mittell writes that "American commercial television operates on what might be termed the 'infinite model' of storytelling," which results in television narratives that can effectively go on forever (33-34). While Mittell's interest lies in primetime programming, his treatment of infinite narratives intersects with Allen's understanding of storytelling in soap operas through a shared awareness that a show, such as Yorkey's, cannot survive off of its source material alone. Mittell observes that for television writers, the infinite narrative necessitates "narrative worlds that are able to sustain themselves for years," suggesting that successful television narratives are

able to produce an endless number of storylines (34). In the case of novels adapted for television, Mittell's writing presents a problem because the metaphorical well of storylines from the source material will eventually run dry and require the construction of new characters and plotlines. As Mittell discusses in his book, American television privileges narratives that lack a true ending and, as a result, novels adapted for the small screen must reconfigure their narratives to address this.

While this chapter frames the Netflix series as a narrative without an ending, Yorkey's series is not a true infinite narrative. However, as an adaptation it is subject to the narrative rules outlined by Mittell and Allen. As a 2019 *Variety* story covering the third season's premiere reveals, a fourth season is in production and will conclude the series with the show's characters' high school graduation (Otterson). The series' conclusion after just four seasons complicates an understanding of the adaptation as an infinite narrative, but having its plot extend beyond the scope of Asher's novel nonetheless demonstrates aspects of what Mittell and Allen argue about the structure of television narratives. As a television adaptation, the Netflix series adopts an infinite narrative out of necessity, as the hour-long length of each episode and the narrative extracted from Asher's novel make it unreasonable to try and spread the mystery behind Hannah's death across multiple seasons. Relying on the source material as the sole narrative aligns more with the model of a film adaptation where the narrative structure envisions a definitive ending. *13 Reasons Why* might not be an infinite narrative, but it takes cues from the model described by Mittell, thereby demonstrating how adapting a

novel for television requires an understanding that adaptations cannot be confined to just their source material.

With the adaptation's need for new storylines, authorial ownership becomes questionable once *13 Reasons Why* outgrows its source material and ventures into uncharted narrative territory. As the first season concluded, it was understood that a second season would need to expand on storylines from the novel while adding new plotlines to justify the serial nature of the adaptation. With Asher absent from the series from the second season onward, Yorkey emerges as the creative mind behind the storylines that developed from outside the novel. The second and third *Beyond the Reasons* specials point to Asher's lack of input in the expanded narrative, as there is no mention of him or his creative intentions whenever the production staff discusses the rationale behind plotlines found in the later seasons. When Yorkey discusses the decision to create a storyline involving the ghost of Hannah in the second season, he frames it as building on Clay's guilt from the first season but makes no mention of Asher having had influence over this decision. By pushing the adaptation beyond the limits of the adaptation, Yorkey is able to take the narrative reins from Asher and guide the series toward his own creative vision, complicating how one understands Asher's place within the discourse of authorship in relation to the novel and its adaptation.

Mittell, in his chapter on authorship, presents several examples of conflicts in authorship to show how the television production pipelines can often create confusion over the identity of a series' author. Using the ABC series *Lost* as his case study, Mittell details the history behind the show's conception, explaining how the series was born

from ABC chairman Lloyd Braun's interest in creating a television series like the film *Cast Away*. Braun commissioned writer Jeffrey Lieber to develop a script and then pitched it to Damon Lindeloff and J.J. Abrams, who developed a pilot. Mittell is most interested in the question of authorship that *Lost* raises because the show that emerged was significantly different from Braun's vision and saw Abrams depart from production early on (93). "So who is *Lost*'s author?" he asks at the end of his account, running through key figures in the show's early production history and noting that technically everyone identified in his retelling had some hand in the show's creation (93). What Mittell concludes from his analysis of the show is that "A serialized text's authorship can change over time as the ongoing narrative and production process unfolds" (94) and it follows that an adaptation such as *13 Reasons Why* can facilitate similar discussion. Yorkey's adaptation was not transformed to the same degree as *Lost*, but Mittell's belief that authorship is not static in serialized narratives suggests that Asher's authorial perception changed once the adaptation premiered.

The expansion of the narrative in the Netflix series, while necessary because of the demands created by the television series' format, has the unintended consequence of positioning Asher and Yorkey as rival authors. A joint interview of Yorkey and Asher found in the paratext of the 2016 edition of *Thirteen Reasons Why* suggests a mutual respect between the two that casts the status of the two as rivals into doubt. In the interview, Asher expresses his excitement and admiration for Yorkey taking on the task of adapting his novel, asking Yorkey whether he had any reservations about changing the novel's content. Yorkey's response signals an interest in keeping the show faithful to

the source material, as he states that "We wanted to, as best we could, bring Clay, Hannah, Justin, Jessica, Tony, and everyone else to life as we knew them from the pages of the book," but this claim becomes questionable the farther the series moves from its first season. By the third season, Hannah's story is long gone and the series-exclusive characters have begun to replace the novel's original cast, showing the extent to which the adaptation has separated itself from its source material. The positioning of Yorkey and Asher as authorial rivals comes from this separation because the changes the series has undergone in creating new storylines along with its recency compared to the novel casts the series as more recognizable to the general public. As a result, Yorkey has the potential to overtake Asher as the more recognizable author due to Asher's relative silence in discussing any additions to his novel since the series premiered.

Asher has not expressed any interest in writing a sequel to *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and an *Entertainment Weekly* interview where he discusses production of the second season suggests that a sequel may never be in the cards. In the interview, Asher says that a sequel to the novel will never happen, and he expresses content that the show's second season will fill the void left by the absence of a sequel. At the end of the interview, Asher remarks that even with the show's presence, "The book will still be able to be itself. I don't think the show is affecting what the book is saying" (Serrao). While Asher suggests that the novel can remain separate from its adaptation, the reevaluation of the text that occurred after the show's premiere discussed in the previous chapter casts doubt on his assertion. Without a sequel to the novel, the adaptation's later seasons are effectively canonized through the absence of source material to compare the

second and third seasons to. While Asher can express his acceptance of the show as pseudo-sequel, this cannot stop comparisons between the two narratives and the question of whether Yorkey or Asher controls the dominant narrative.

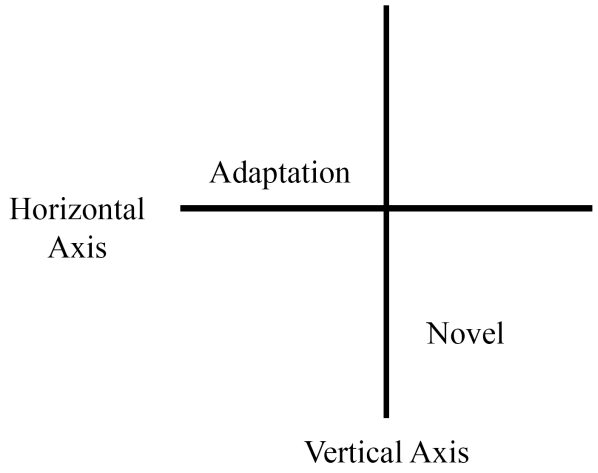
Asher is not the only author who has found himself at odds with an adaptation of his work; *Game of Thrones* author George R.R. Martin provides insight into how authors can respond to authorial rivalry. Like *13 Reasons Why*, the *Game of Thrones* television series strays from its source material, in this case once it outpaces the still-ongoing series of books that it is based on. Martin has not finished writing the remaining books in the series, and a major point of discussion comes from whether he will take negative reception of the adapation's final season into consideration when completing the series. An interview with Martin from *The Observer*, published after the television adapatation's series finale, asked him about what influence the series might have on his writing. In response, Martin said that "They're not the same thing, although they are very closely related to each other," going on to say that the series didn't have any influence on his creative process (Hughes). *Game of Thrones* exemplifies the authorial conflict television adaptations of novels can create by showing how the adaptation and its source material can compete for dominance within the canon of the works. As Mittell's writing on *Lost* suggests, authorial ownership can become muddled once multiple authors enter the picture and offer their own visions for the direction of the story. Asher takes a stance similar to Martin regarding adaptations with his endorsement of *13 Reasons Why*, but in the process he calls his authorial ownership into question.

Having discussed authorial ownership and the rivalry created by Yorkey expanding on the narrative of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, one should not assume that Asher is notthe creator of the novel. What comes into question is how viewers perceive the adaptation and whether or not Yorkey's building on Asher's work has allowed the adaptation to usurp its source material as the canonical narrative. As the work from other scholars has shown, the adaptation is obligated as a television series to create new stories, but in the process it potentially alienates Asher's novel by expanding on the narrative to where the new work no longer resembles the original. While differences in narrative form are one result of the move from novel to adaptation, the ability to produce narrative intimacy is another issue the adaptation must grapple with in bringing Asher's narrative to television.

As outlined in the Introduction, Asher's novel produces narrative intimacy through the epistolary narrative told in Hannah's cassette tapes. While the first season of Yorkey's adaptation remains largely faithful to the novel, the show's narrative discourse deviates substantially from its source material in the seasons that follow. This results in a narrative that takes the novel's focus on a single character and disperses it among the characters found on the tapes. Hannah's story remains at the center of the narrative, but Yorkey's adaptation widens its focus to include other storylines that begin in the first season and develop over the course of the series. To that end, two models can be used to understand these changes and how the narrative changes made by Yorkey inhibit the formation of narrative intimacy.

A way of spatially visualizing this alteration is to think of the adaptation and novel as operating on different axes. Narratives operating on a vertical axis are concerned with a single character and promote the formation of narrative intimacy through this deep exploration. The vertical narrative facilitates narrative intimacy by confining the story's focus to a single character that readers can form a connection with. Contrasting this is the horizontal axis where a narrative can widen its focus to include multiple perspectives and plotlines.

Figure 2
Axes



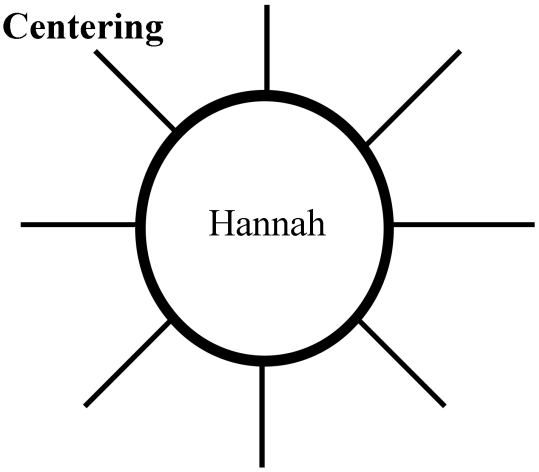
On the vertical axis is Asher's novel, where the focus on Hannah provides the conditions necessary to facilitate narrative intimacy. While the novel follows Clay in the present day, his role is primarily to take the reader through Hannah's tapes and keep the focus on her story rather than his. The novel's vertical orientation enables the formation of narrative intimacy between Hannah and the reader by focusing on the narrative centered on Hannah even when she is not present. The epistolary aspect of the novel is

further evidence of the novel as a vertical narrative because Hannah's tapes operate as the central objects of the story and provide most of the exposition on her death. Clay's journey is motivated by his history with Hannah, and the characters he encounters in the present are nearly all framed within the context of their relationship to Hannah which demonstrates the novel's verticality in building the narrative around a single character.

In contrast, Yorkey's adaptation falls on the horizontal axis in that the focus on Hannah shifts to feature storylines for other characters from the novel. While the adaptation is still concerned with Hannah's story, it creates space for characters such as Jessica and Tyler to develop their own storylines. This technique, motivated to some extent by the demands of the medium Yorkey is working in, spreads the narrative's focus across multiple characters and inhibits the formation of narrative intimacy between the viewer and Hannah by decentering her and giving other characters additional time on screen. In the novel, Tyler's character is limited to his role in causing Hannah's suicide, with the focus on Hannah preventing his character from developing beyond being represented as a perverted classmate. In contrast, the show spends significantly more time with him, showing his interactions with the rest of the student body in order to characterize him as a flawed but nonetheless sympathetic character. Recharacterization occurs with the majority of characters identified on Hannah's tapes, but it also causes the narrative to move away from the verticality found in the novel because the series must include new storylines to facilitate this development. By placing its narrative on the horizontal axis, *13 Reasons Why* is able to develop its supporting cast to a greater extent than its source material, but it must de-center Hannah's story to achieve this.

The centering of Hannah is an important aspect of *Thirteen Reasons Why*'s ability to produce narrative intimacy, as the ability for readers to connect with her comes not only from the disclosure of information on her cassette tapes, but also from how Asher builds the novel's universe around her. The figure below illustrates the structure of Asher's narrative and how Hannah motivates events in both the past and present:

Figure 3
Novel Centering



Here, Hannah is at the center of the narrative; her perceptions guide the reader through understanding the characters found on her cassette tapes. The tapes serve as a narrative thread for Clay and the reader to follow, and as he listens to each tape, the characters who affected Hannah are introduced. Whereas the Netflix adaptation spends time developing these characters as independent from Hannah's storytelling, their counterparts in the novel are framed from Hanah's perspective. Returning to the previous discussion of Tyler, his character in the novel is shaped exclusively through Hannah's tape on him, with minimal time spent characterizing him beyond commentary from Clay and Hannah. This approach effectively allows Hannah to speak for many of

the novel's characters because the reader's perception of them comes from what she discloses on the cassette tapes. This centering of the narrative on Hannah can be attributed to the epistolary narrative the novel deploys, which shows how this form of storytelling creates a network centered around a narrator who frames how readers perceive other characters.

As the novel's central figure, Hannah also indirectly builds relationships between characters based on their connections to her. Tony's relationship with Clay, for example, develops from their mutual connection to Hannah.When Clay begins listening to the cassette tapes, he becomes aware that Tony is seemingly present everywhere he goes, a detail later revealed to be the result of Hannah's final wishes. As the novel reaches its climax, Clay begins to rely on Tony for support, having now developed a friendship and dependence on him. As Clay states after being comforted by Tony, "It feels good knowing someone understands what I'm listening to, what I'm going through," showing that he finds friendship and comfort through his and Tony's connection to Hannah (Asher 239). Hannah's influence in the novel is seen again at the novel's conclusion when Clay chooses to reach out to Skye, an action motivated by Hannah's death and his experience listening to her cassette tapes. As Clay searches for closure following the story's events, he sees Skye exhibiting signs similar to those displayed by Hannah prior to her suicide and decides to intervene. He at first expresses resistance, commenting that "Part of me wants to ignore it. To turn around and keep myself busy," suggesting that had he not discovered the truth behind Hannah's death, he might not have intervened (287). This comment again points to Hannah's role in influencing the behavior of

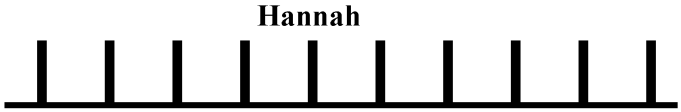
characters even after her death, in this instance by giving Clay the motivation needed to help Skye. While Clay notes that characters such as Skye and Tony are merely acquaintances, the connection he shares with them is initiated by Hannah, which points to Hannah's role as the central figure in the narrative, a character so significant that she gives Clay the ability to perform this reevaluation.

As examples from the novel demonstrate, Hannah as the center of the narrative produces connections among the majority of the story's characters, a narratological move that positions her as the driving force behind events in the present. Because Hannah is the primary source of exposition, the reader is dependent on her to build the world within the text, and this centering on Hannah serves as a source for forming narrative intimacy because the reader effectively becomes a part of Hannah's world through her disclosure. With Hannah as the novel's central figure, readers come to understand the world of *Thirteen Reasons Why* through her eyes, all while never having to disclose anything about their own world or experiences. The nature of Hannah's disclosure, which implicates many of the characters on the tapes and casts them as antagonistic, aligns with Sara Day's description of narrative intimacy as demonstrating an interest on the narrator's part in disclosing highly personal thoughts (Day 4). As such, one could conclude that placing Hannah at the center of the narrative helps to form narrative intimacy because the reader comes to understand Hannah as a sort of guide through the narrative

If the novel aims to place Hannah at the center of the narrative in order to form narrative intimacy, then Yorkey's adaptation contrasts with this strategy by removing

Hannah from the center and giving the stories of the other characters greater value. As the figure below shows, *13 Reasons Why* decenters Hannah and places a greater emphasis on telling the stories of the show's supporting cast:

Figure 4
Adaptation Decentering



In this model, Hannah's narrative is given the same importance as those of the show's other characters, allowing the formation of new storylines. While Hannah's story remains the driving force behind the first season, the focus on her is diminished by the characters whose stories the adaptation chooses to expand on. Though the episode titles are based on the chapter titles from the novel, which identify which tape Clay is listening to, the adaptation places a greater emphasis on events happening in the present. While the characters the show follows in the present day are connected to Hannah's tapes, the adaptation's interest in developing storylines for the characters often comes at the expense of developing Hannah's relationship with the viewer.

Courtney Crimsen, for example, receives significantly more attention in the adaptation than does her counterpart in the novel through the backstory she is given. In

the novel, Hannah uses the word "posed" to describe Courtney, referring to her tendency to put on a fake personality for those around her (94). Hannah's issue with Courtney comes from her artificial personality, which she claims Courtney uses to get everyone at the school to like her. While the show maintains this part of Courtney's character, it adds context to her actions in the narrative by revealing that she is a closeted lesbian. The novel never addresses Courtney's sexuality, but the show relies on this plotline to develop a character arc for her. In the novel, Courtney and Hannah have a sleepover to try and catch a rumored Peeping Tom (revealed to be Tyler), where Chloe gossips about Hannah having sex toys in an attempt to catch Tyler spying on them. In the adaptation Hannah's sleepover with Courtney is recontextualized by showing the two kissing, which sets up Courtney's actions for the rest of the series through the revelation of her sexuality. This alteration completely changes the fallout Hannah endures after the sleepover, as Courtney starts a rumor that Hannah is a lesbian, adding to the mounting gossip among students about her supposed promiscuity. While this change adds to the weight of the gossip surrounding Hannah, it also gives depth to Courtney's character by providing motivation for her creation of the rumor. In the show, Courtney is revealed to have two fathers, and her fear of being stigmatized as they are for being gay helps the viewer to understand why she turns on Hannah and plots to prevent Clay from making the content on the tapes public. Courtney's character arc demonstrates the decentering that takes place in the show in that the storyline involving her sexuality alters the viewer's perception of her.

Compared to her appearance in the novel, Courtney becomes a more sympathetic character in the adaptation because her actions are motivated by more than a desire to maintain her image at school. This is not to say that her character is absolved in the adaptation, as her treatment of Hannah and the implication that the girls sexually assaulted by Bryce are lying frame her as arguably one of the season's antagonists. Nonetheless, knowing that her actions are motivated by insecurities about her sexuality helps add depth to her character by showing the viewer that she is not entirely malicious. Courtney's character arc continues into the second season, where her testimony in court forces her to confront her sexuality when questioned about her relationship with Hannah. The fact that her character is explored beyond the first season is also significant because it shows a depth not seen in the novel and points to the decentering of Hannah, whose story on the cassette tapes is no longer the only storyline viewers are following.

Decentering also causes Hannah to lose some of her control as the narrator. While the viewer still hears her grievances against the characters on the cassette tapes, there is added context given through backstories presented by the adaptation along with events in the present day. As the novel's primary narrator, Hannah passes judgment on characters such as Courtney in a way that prevents them from defending themselves. Clay's own narration reinforces Hannah's claims, as his own commentary frequently finds him agreeing with what she has to say about the characters on each tape. While Hannah and Clay still offer their thoughts on characters in the adaptation, these characters are given greater depth through new storylines and details not found in the novel, giving the viewer the agency to make their own judgments. In other words, the

adaptation removes Hannah's ability to maintain complete control of the viewer's opinion.

Another instance of the show's shift in focus comes from Clay, whose role in the novel is altered by the series to make him more autonomous in his decision making. Clay still functions as a surrogate for the reader because he acts as a vehicle for readers to experience Hannah's cassette tapes and the present-day narrative, but the adaptation adds agency to his character that has significant effects on the storyline in the present day. Whereas the novel's Clay remains relatively passive throughout the story, following Hannah's tapes with minimal deviation, the adaptation recasts him as more independent from the tapes in the present day. When Clay is not listening to the tapes, he frequently spends time confronting characters found on the tapes, a significant change from the novel where he simply gives his opinion on what they did to Hannah. This allows the story to move forward in the present, but also serves to recharacterize Clay as an active participant in the story. His confrontation with Bryce, not found in the novel, sees Clay trick Bryce into confessing to raping Hannah and stands as a prominent example of Clay taking matters into his own hands ("Tape 6, Side B"). This plot point is a far cry from the novel, in which Clay's passive behavior only changes at the end of the novel when he chooses to reach out to Skye. The agency Clay gains in the adaptation serves as another example of the show's decentering of Hannah because his actions in the present create another storyline for readers to follow alongside hers.

Examining the series as a whole offers the most compelling look at decentering and narrative intimacy by showing how the series moves away from Hannah from the

second season onward. As previously discussed, the soap opera format of *13 Reasons Why* necessitates the creation of new storylines to keep the series going, which suggests a shift away from Hannah as early as the first season. While Hannah's story guides the plot of the first season through the mystery surrounding her death, the show places a greater emphasis on events in the present than in the novel, specifically Clay's journey through the cassette tapes. Between flashbacks depicting Hannah's story on the tapes are Clay's confrontations with characters featured on the tapes. As the season continues, an alliance between many of the characters on the tapes begins to form, with their goal being to prevent Clay from finishing the tapes and revealing what happened to Hannah to the public. While this storyline helps to develop Clay in the present day, it also creates a narrative thread that runs parallel to Hannah's story and does not require her participation. The gradual decentering of Hannah in the first season serves as a precursor to the events in the second season where the mystery behind Hannah's suicide has been solved and the narrative focus has shifted to the show's other characters by showing that the series can continue without restricting itself to the plot found in Asher's novel.

The second season functions as a transitional space for the series as it moves away from Hannah as the narrative's central figure and toward a more traditional soap opera narrative that follows multiple characters. The Baker family's lawsuit against Hannah's high school and Bryce's trial run parallel to a multitude of storylines ranging from Clay's inability to move on from Hannah, Mr. Porter's redemption arc, and Jessica's struggle to step forward as a victim of sexual assault. This demonstrates the show's interest in decentering its narrative from Hannah by providing storylines that do

not directly involve her to illustrate that the show can continue long after her story concludes. As Figure 4 illustrates, Hannah in the second season stands among the other characters from the show rather than at the center, showing not only the show's ability to reconfigure itself around new storylines but also the medium's limitations in producing narrative intimacy.

As discussed in the project's Introduction, narrative intimacy is a relatively new term in narratology, referring to a novel where it is "Established through constructions of the narrator and reader that reflect and emphasize the creation of an emotional bond based on trust and disclosure" (Day 4). Clearly that *Thirteen Reasons Why* is a novel capable of producing this type of bond. As an epistolary text, Asher's novel is easily able to begin forming this relationship between Hannah and the reader through her self-disclosure on the cassette tapes. "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life," she tells the reader on her first tape, creating the expectation that she will be disclosing highly personal information to her listener (Asher 7). In discussing the conditions necessary to facilitate narrative intimacy, Day notes that the bond requires a willingness to disclose information on the narrator's part is essential, and the context behind Hannah's cassette tapes readily signals this (6-7). By designing the tapes to be sent to the people who caused her to commit suicide, Hannah gestures toward this willingness to disclose her story by rationalizng that telling her story will serve as a form of justice. In outlining the rules to her listeners, Hannah states that the tapes must be listened to in their entirety (Asher 8-10). This aligns with Day's comments on the need

for a narrator to self-disclose because while Hannah does so rather forcefully, it's clear that she wants her whole story to be heard.

The fact that Hannah's tapes are passed around after she has died is of interest when examining the narrative's ability to produce narrative intimacy because the self-disclosure comes from a speaker who never expects the reader to reciprocate. Day describes the disclosure between the narrator and reader as highly one-sided, writing that narrative intimacy "Allows for the possibility of enjoying disclosure without facing the pressure of having to reciprocate with disclosure of one's own secret thoughts and feelings" (28). *Thirteen Reasons Why* is able to circumvent concerns of disclosure on the readers' part simply because its narrator is incapable of listening. Hannah has already died at the start of the novel, so there is no expectation on the reader's part that they will ever have to disclose their own thoughts or feelings to Hannah. In her opening remarks, Hannah makes a joke about being unable to lie to the reader because "Why would a dead girl lie?," a comment that reinforces her honesty on the tapes but that also emphasizes the one-sided nature of the relationship between her and the reader.

My first chapter discussed how the two works set out to teach behaviors to audiences and, to some extent, the novel models narrative intimacy through the relationship between Hannah and Clay. When Clay first starts listening to the cassette tapes, he expresses surprise that he is one of their recipients, remarking that "I hardly knew Hannah Baker," but over the course of the novel he becomes intimately familiar with her story (Asher 10). As the story progresses, the reader watches as Clay grows more and more distraught listening to Hannah's tapes, not knowing why she chose to

name him as one of her "reasons." The mystery of the novel comes from trying to identify Clay's role in her death. By the time he reaches his tape, Clay is on the verge of committing suicide himself. Cassette 5 is dedicated to Clay and the grief he expresses while listening to it is indicative of the change he has undergone in hearing her story. When Clay tells Tony that "I know where her mind was that night. I know what she was going through," it becomes clear that Clay has, in essence, become a model for narrative intimacy because of how his understanding of Hannah has changed (Asher 219). Because Hannah has already died, all that Clay can do is listen to her. In the process, he reevaluates their relationship through the disclosure of her story. While earlier discussion of Clay's in this chapter was critical of him as a passive observer in the novel on his journey through Hannah's tapes, the guilt he experiences over the course of the story demonstrates the formation of bonds among the story's own characters and points to the novel's ability to model and produce narrative intimacy.

While an examination of the novel has yielded evidence that it creates the conditions necessary for the formation of narrative intimacy, Yorkey's show suggests that translating Asher's work to visual media reveals the limitations of applying Day's concept to a medium such as a television series. An examination of Seymour Chatman's "What Novels Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)" reveals the ability of screen adaptations to capture large amounts of detail in a single shot that a novel might take several paragraphs of description to convey. A key distinction between films and novels is the use of narration to convey information, be it the description of events taking place or a character's inner thoughts. As Chatman explains, "A film does not say, 'This is the

state of affairs,' it merely shows you that state of affairs," and this is an important consideration to take into account when examining the translation of Asher's epistolary narrative to visual media (128). Chatman goes on to argue that using first-person narration to describe what is taking place in a scene takes away opportunities for sound to be used for other aspects of storytelling in the moment, which suggests that narration in literature is not completely compatible with the narrative structure found in films.

Chatman's analysis of adaptations suggests that attempting to produce narrative intimacy in visual media is problematic because of narrative considerations that inhibit it. *Thirteen Reasons Why* depends on narration from Hannah to develop a bond between her and the reader, but bringing the narration found on her cassette tapes to visual media violates the conventional construction of film narration. While *13 Reasons Why* utilizes narration from Hannah's cassettes to some extent in the series, it does so sparingly, often having Hannah's cassette narrations segue into a flashback. The first episode, for example, introduces Hannah's encounter with Justin Foley by having her narration provide exposition that then leads into dialogue in the scene (Yorkey, "Tape 1, Side A"). The series presents this form of narration for the entirety of the first season (the Netflix uses more traditional flashbacks in later seasons) as a way of keeping to the novel's narrative structure, but does so with an awareness that Hannah's narration cannot permeate every flashback.

Decentering is another aspect of the show that merits consideration when looking at the show and narrative intimacy, as previous discussion of Hannah's reduced role later in the series suggests that narrative intimacy cannot be recreated in visual media. A

major plotline in the second season explores Clay's struggle to move on from Hannah, and the closure he achieves in the season finale mirrors the series' awareness that she cannot remain on the show forever. While Hannah's role as a ghostly presence in the second season mimics her character's connection to Clay in the novel and the first season, her diminished role not only points to her decentering in the show's narrative but also suggests the difficulty in recreating narrative intimacy on screen. By the second season the reader is now following a multitude of characters' storylines, with Hannah now competing with characters such as Jessica and Tyler for the reader's attention. While this could be attributed to the show's soap opera narrative structure, it also suggests that decentering occurs because the show's writers recognize the difficulty in building a relationship between the viewer and a single character to produce narrative intimacy, and reframe the narrative to follow multiple characters as a result.

13 Reasons Why appears to recognize that visual narratives follow different rules for narration than do novels, and the decentering of Hannah operates as a solution to this problem. As Day's discussion of narrative intimacy has shown, a significant amount of narration and disclosure is required in order to form a bond between the reader and narrator. While Hannah's disclosure remains intact in the adaptation, the narrative rules described by Chatman inhibit the extent to which her narration appears on the show. Hannah's narration often covers multiple pages of the novel, but as Chatman suggests, narration to this extent is not appropriate for a visual narrative. As such, the connection between Hannah and the viewer does not develop to the same extent found in the novel because the conditions to create narrative intimacy are either absent or underdeveloped.

Yorkey and his writing staff were likely aware of the challenges in translating this type of narration for the adaptation. By decentering Hannah, they are able to move away from narration through her cassette tapes, but in the process they signal that narrative intimacy cannot be replicated on screen.

While the show is notable to produce narrative intimacy as its source material does, it uses Hannah's centering to develop storylines for its supporting cast that achieve the same connection between the characters and viewer. Centering the narrative on Hannah in the novel enables the formation of narrative intimacy because the reader becomes intimately familiar with her story through the cassette tapes and the focus placed on her character throughout. As a substitute for narrative intimacy, the show attempts to develop its other characters, such as Tyler and Jessica, alongside Hannah to produce a similar empathetic effect to that found in the novel. In the novel, Hannah describes witnessing Jessica's sexual assault by Bryce, but she does not elaborate on it beyond explaining how traumatic it was. The show expands on this event by making Jessica's struggles as a sexual assault victim a key plotline in the second season. While this aligns with the show's need to create new storylines as part of its soap opera narrative structure, it also operates as a way to develop reader empathy for Jessica. The events of the first season should already create viewer empathy for her but the continuation of Jessica's story into the second season increases empathy for her by showing her struggling to speak out about her sexual assault during the Baker family trial. Like Jessica, characters such as Courtney, Tyler, and Justin experience similar character arcs that are designed to encourage viewer empathy by humanizing them in

ways not found on Hannah's cassette tapes. The shift away from narrative intimacy and toward a more expansive means of producing empathy suggests that the show is operating on a different narrative axis than does its source material in attempting to develop a connection between its characters and the viewer.

As the models of centering and narrative structure indicate, the novel and its operation travel in different directions, and as a result produce different forms of reader empathy. The centering of Hannah in the novel results in a narrative that produces narrative intimacy through her disclosure and the amount of time the reader spends with her. Narrative intimacy is difficult to replicate in the Netflix series because, as discussed by Chatman, the narration found in novels cannot be reproduced on screen. With this in mind, the adaptation decreases the focus on Hannah to allow the storylines of other characters to develop. Characters whose stories are overshadowed by Hannah in the novel, such as Tyler, are given a new lease on life in the show, allowing viewers to develop a deeper connection with them compared to their counterparts from the novel. This change reveals the limitations to narrative intimacy in novels but also shows that screen adaptations are still capable of developing reader empathy toward characters by widening the focus of the narrative to follow multiple characters.

As the previous sections have discussed, creating storylines for the characters found on Hannah's cassette tapes in *13 Reasons Why* gives them more depth as character while allowing the reader to empathize with them. In many cases, the addition of storylines on the show allows characters framed in a negative light by Hannah the opportunity to redeem themselves. While a character such as Bryce might be beyond

redemption on the show, others such as Mr. Porter and Tyler are given storylines that focus on their trying to make amends for their actions in the novel. As flawed as these characters are in the novel, the show depicts them as showing remorse for their treatment of Hannah, which aligns with how the adaptation aims to recast many of its characters as recipients of viewer empathy. Through the redemption of Tyler and Mr. Porter in *13 Reasons Why,* the Netflix series is able to produce an empathetic response from readers that is absent from Asher's novel.

To reframe many of its characters, the adaptation uses the present-day narrative in the first season as a space in which to show their actions in the wake of Hannah's death. In the novel, Clay listens to the tapes in a single night, which leaves little time for other characters found on the tapes to appear, let alone develop to the same extent as they do on the show. The adaptation alters this by extending the narrative in the present day, where Clay now listens to the tapes over the course of several days. This change could be attributed to the episodic nature of the series, where the contents of one chapter from the novel must fill the roughly hour-long runtime of each episode. As a result, the present day becomes essential for the show's decentering of Hannah because it is here that supporting characters are given the ability to defend their actions on the tapes and to make amends, removing Hannah's ability to influence the viewer's opinion. Through the show's present-day narrative, the viewer is able to see how characters, such as Mr. Porter, have responded to Hannah's death beyond what Clay describes in the novel.

Across both narratives, Tyler is cast as an unpopular figure at Hannah's school, with characters on her cassette viewing their harassment of him as a form of justice for

her. In the episode "Tape 3, Side A," a nude photo of Tyler is leaked online by Clay, resulting in harassment and bullying from the rest of the student body (Yorkey, "Tape 3, Side A"). While Clay attempts to help Tyler through his trauma from bullying and sexual assault in later seasons, his actions in the episode speak to Tyler's representation as an irredeemable figure who deserves punishment. Clay's decision to leak Tyler's photo in the show also provides a brief shift in empathy away from Hananh and Clay in favor of Tyler by framing Clay as vengeful in acting on behalf of Hannah. This harassment is not exclusive to the show, as the novel contains a scene in which Clay encounters Marcus throwing a rock through Tyler's window. In the scene, Marcus mentions that multiple people from Hannah's tapes have come to Tyler's house and vandalized it, with Clay questioning why Tyler deserves to be harassed when everyone else on the tapes is just as guilty (Asher 108). Marcus condemns Tyler, referring to him as a "freak" for spying on Hannah as justification for throwing rocks through his window. In both narratives, Tyler becomes a pariah onto whom other characters are able to project their own guilt at having caused Hannah's death. What sets the Netflix series apart from Asher's novel in its depiction of Tyler is its recasting of him as a sympathetic victim as the series progresses.

Tyler's characterization in *Thirteen Reasons Why* is substantially different from his appearance in Yorkey's adaptation, with Hannah's characterization of him in the novel casting him as a Peeping Tom who took away her sense of security. The Tyler that appears in the adaptation is still faithful to his original rendition in the novel, but the present-day narrative of the first season adds depth to his character by depicting him as a

victim of bullying. The first season's fifth episode shows the aftermath of the leaking of Tyler's photo, with the student body shunning him as a result (Yorkey, "Tape 3, Side A"). The episode also shows the formation of a group consisting of those named on Hannah's tapes in an effort to prevent Clay from revealing the truth. When Tyler tries to ally himself with them in order to protect himself from further bullying, the group rejects him on the grounds that they cannot trust him, showing his isolation even among the show's antagonists. While Tyler experiences harassment in the novel, the show uses its present-day narrative to amplify this by depicting him as a constant victim of bullying throughout the series.

Clay's questioning of why Tyler deserves to be harassed in the novel is something the show expands on in developing viewer empathy for him. While Tyler's actions described on the tapes are deplorable, the Netflix series aims to recharacterize him by showing the effects of the bullying he experiences. The series accomplishes this through the introduction of the series-exclusive Montgomery, one of Bryce's friends and the main source of Tyler's bullying. The first season contains multiple scenes depicting Tyler's isolation from his classmates and the bullying he faces after Clay leaks his nude photo, culminating in a scene where Tyler is shown acquiring a gun to protect himself from his harassers in an act that foreshadows events in the second season (Yorkey, "Tape 6, Side B"). In the season finale of the first season, Tyler delivers a deposition as the Baker family moves to sue the school, candidly describing the negative school environment at Liberty. "I get shit every day" he says, describing the bullying he has experienced and stating that Hannah faced the same kind of harassment before she took

her life (Yorkey, "Tape 7, Side A"). Tyler's confession in this episode demonstrates the show's ability to recast many of its characters because the viewer sees him not only as a victim of bullying like Hannah but also as someone trying to get justice for her death.

Tyler's sexual assault in the second season is the series' most direct attempt at asking viewers to show empathy toward him. In the second season's finale, Montgomery sexually assaults Tyler in a school bathroom, pushing him to try and commit a mass shooting at the school dance (Yorkey, "Bye"). In the second *Beyond the Reasons*, Yorkey addresses the scene, explaining that he wanted viewers to experience "radical empathy"for Tyler, which he describes as "The exercise or attempt to empathize with someone completely different from you" (*Beyond the Reasons 2*, 1:00:09). Yorkey says that while viewers might distance themselves from Tyler in other scenes, the scene depicting his sexual assault was designed to elicit empathy by showing the pain he experiences. Yorkey's explanation of the scene demonstrates the show's interest in recharacterizing Tyler, as the scenes from the first season all the way to the second season's finale give depth to his character beyond Hannah's depiction of him in the novel.

Another figure on Hannah's tapes recharacterized by the Netflix series is Mr. Porter, whose actions in the present-day narrative of the adaptation not only redeem him but also respond to criticism of how the novel portrays adults. On tape, Mr. Porter's failure to save her came from his inability to help when she reached out to him after she was sexually assaulted by Bryce, resulting in her decision to commit suicide because she believed he was the only one left who could help her. The adaptation attempts to paint

Porter in a more positive light through its present-day narrative by depicting him as engaging actively with students at Liberty, despite his failure to help Hannah. The series' uses of its present-day narrative in redeeming Porter recalls its treatment of Tyler, as both are maligned characters in the novel who receive storylines in the adaptation designed to elicit viewer empathy. As an exploration of Mr. Porter's character in the adaptation reveals, the present-day narrative is essential in removing Hannah's judgment of him in the eyes of the viewer.

In the novel, Mr. Porter is given no opportunity for redemption, and Clay's narration suggests that he cannot be trusted to help students. As the novel reaches its conclusion, Clay hears Mr. Porter's voice and comments that "The voice will never sound friendly again," condemning the counselor and presenting the problematic suggestion that adult figures like him are unable to understand the minds of teenagers (Asher 286). The series recognizes how the story's portrayal of Porter could influence a teen viewer's perception of adults and addresses this through the present-day narrative, with the most substantial evidence of this found in the second season. After listening to Hannah's tapes, Mr. Porter undergoes a significant change during the second season, taking on a more active role in protecting students and working to right wrongs at Liberty. In the first episode, Porter confronts Bryce when Jessica makes her return to Liberty, warning him to stay away from her (Yorkey, "The First Polaroid"). Porter's aggressive behavior continues throughout the second season and shows his attempts to make amends for failing to save Hannah, demonstrating how the series attempts to counter the negative image Hannah has of him on her tapes. His testimony in the episode

"The Missing Page" attempts to elicit viewer empathy by showing him in tears expressing his guilt and apologizing to Mrs. Baker for failing to save her daughter (Yorkey, " Missing Page").

The second season's *Beyond the Reasons* offers an explanation for the redemption of Mr. Porter, with a segment on how adults are portrayed working to reassure young viewers that adult figures at school can be trusted. Series writer Marissa Cerar is brought on to talk about Mr. Porter's behavior in the second season and notes that his actions are motivated by guilt and a desire to make things right, which shows that the series was interested in reframing him as a character worthy of viewer empathy. Cerar goes on to explain that the writers in the second seasons sought to humanize Porter, stating that "We wanted with Mr. Porter to make it clear that he didn't have all the training he needed [and] he didn't know how to help Hannah," echoing Yorkey's words on Tyler and the need to show viewers that many of the characters condemned by Hannah still deserve empathy (*Beyond the Reasons 2*, 1:03:13). Lastly, Cerar remarks that "We didn't want to make it seem like school counselors are terrible people," seemingly in reference to concerns over the narrative's treatment of adult figures (1:03:20). Despite Mr. Porter's shortcomings in the narrative, Cerar's explanation of how the show's writers chose to depict him in the second season demonstrates an awareness of how his behavior toward Hannah could affect readers; their decision to redeem him serves as an attempt at nullifying distrust toward him.

While Mr. Porter makes a brief appearance in the novel, his counterpart in the adaptation is evidence of the series' interest in making readers empathize with him.

Asher's novel creates a highly negative image of Mr. Porter, and by extension adult figures, that its Netflix adaptation attempts to remedy by depicting him as a flawed but caring member of the school. While readers might not empathize with Porter in the first season, his efforts to help the students at Liberty in the second season along with his scenes where he expresses guilt for failing to save Hannah attempt to reverse the negative image he carries as the last person who could have prevented Hannah's death.

Tyler and Mr. Porter are not the only characters redeemed by the Netflix series, but they stand as some of the most prominent examples of the adaptation widening the narrative's focus to make viewers empathize with more characters than just Hannah. As the show demonstrates, the characters identified on Hannah's cassette tapes are imperfect, with her accusations against them signaling their flaws. In the novel, the focus on Hannah discourages empathy toward these characters because the only frame of reference readers are given comes from Hannah who casts everyone on her tapes, except Clay, in a negative light. By decentering Hannah, the show is able to develop viewer empathy toward a character like Mr. Porter by showing that while Hannah's tapes expose their failings, their ability to express regret and attempt themselves humanizes them and encourages viewers empathy. While the series might be unable to produce empathy through narrative intimacy between the reader and Hannah, its use of decentering functions as an alternate approach toward connecting viewers with the narrative by spreading the opportunity for viewer empathy across multiple characters.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

As the discussion in this project's chapters has revealed, the arrival of *13 Reasons Why* in 2017 caused Asher's novel to experience a reevaluation that suggests a new understanding of the relationship between adaptations and their source material. In the case of novels and screen adaptations, a common perception casts the adaptation as inferior to its source material for failing to replicate the novel's content on screen. The introduction offered a look at the discourse within adaptation studies, showing how scholars have argued that adaptations should not carry this negative connotation because of the narrative imitations that come with bringing a complete translation from novel to screen. This project has attempted to add to this conversation by suggesting that when a novel is adapted, a mirror is created that forces the novel to be reexamined against its adaptation.

As *13 Reasons Why* demonstrates, a controversial text can experience new criticism as a result of its adaptation. While the novel's initial censorship was the result of its own content, cases in which it was banned became infrequent until its adaptation premiered in 2017. The novel's ascent up the the American Library Association's list of most-challenged novels following the show's premiere is evidence that a re-evaluation has taken place. Discussion of censorship in the first chapter revealed that the acts of censorship levied against the novel came from scenes on the show that never appeared in the book, suggesting that school administrators wanting to show their ability exert

control over the text was one of the primary motivations behind removing it. The new cases of censorship involving *Thirteen Reasons Why* present a new understanding of the relationship between a novel and its adaptation by demonstrating how an adaptation of an already controversial novel can reignite calls for censorship.

Discussion of the adapation's role in reigniting calls for the censorship of Asher's novel also raises questions about how the relationship between controversial novels and their adaptations operates in school settings. In the case of Yorkey's series, schools grew concerned with its content and moved to have the novel removed from their campuses in some cases, while issuing statements cautioning parents about the show's content in others. The warnings sent to parents about the show merit further discussion because it is rather unusual for a school to issue warnings about something outside of their jurisdiction. As the first chapter observed, these calls suggested that school districts issue these statements as a way of maintaining the appearance of authority in the eyes of parents. This leads to more questions regarding the role schools play in controlling what media their students have access to because the low likelihood that a school would try and integrate *13 Reasons Why* into its curriculum points to concerns over how schools can exert control over the media their students consume outside the education setting.

Amid calls for censorship, both Asher and Yorkey's works have presented themselves as offering a therapeutic experience to their audiences. Both the novel and its adapation claim to offer a way for their audiences to engage with topics such as suicide and bullying in a way that helps address these issues in their own lives while

encouraging prosocial behavior. As the first chapter discussed, Asher's novel utilized content found in its paratexts and its author as a spokesperson for anti-bullying to signal that the novel was capable of encouraging prosocial behavior and creating a community among its readers. The scope of this outreach was limited by factors such as the number of schools Asher visited and how readers could access the novel, but *Thirteen Reasons Why* laid the groundwork for the therapeutic experience its adaptation presented to viewers. Since its premiere, the Netflix series has battled criticism that its content is too disturbing for viewers and has responded by creating resources intended to help viewers engage with the show and create a therapeutic experience built upon Asher's work. This has come in the form of specials, PSAs, and a viewer discussion guide aimed at directing viewers through the material and toward a therapeutic experience. While the integration of these resources has allowed the series to create a therapeutic experience for its viewers on a larger scale than the novel, it raises the question of how autonomous the show truly is. The first chapter touched on the notion of the show losing autonomy by relying on its resources to guide viewers, and further investigation is needed in order to understand how the pursuit of a therapeutic experience might have caused the show to lose autonomy

Between battles over censorship and the formation of community, what unites the topics presented in the first chapter is the internet and its ability to reshape the adaptation in a way not possible with its source material. Unlike the novel, the adaptation is primarily a digital work, making it easier to make adjustments to both the narrative and its supplementary material. The most obvious example of this comes from

the removal of Hannah's suicide on the show, as it shows the ease at which Netflix can scrub material it no longer wants contained in its productions. The show's home on the internet also allows for the addition of material, as seen by the introduction of trigger warnings within the show and 13reasonswhy.info outside of it, pointing to the show's fluidity online. In contrast, the novel as a physical text makes it more difficult to respond to criticism using supplementary material as quickly as the show is able to, barring the release of new editions with updated paratexts by Penguin Books. It is also more challenging for the novel to respond to calls for censorship because unlike the show, the novel is unable to perform retroactive edits to its narrative, making it an easier target for censorship. As a streaming television series, the adaptation reveals the novel's limitations as a physical text in responding to new developments through its ability to edit its content and provide new resources for viewers online. With the rise of original programming on streaming platforms, *13 Reasons Why* sets a precedent for how adaptations can respond to the demands of their audiences in a way not possible on traditional networks or within their source material.

Chapter 2 addressed the ways in which the adaptation forces a reexamination of the novel's narrative by addressing issues of rival authorship and the difficulty of completely replicating Asher's novel on screen. Whereas the first chapter showed the external reevaluation of the novel through its paratexts and censorship, the focus on narrative in the second chapter looked inward at the novel and how the adaptation navigate the challenge of expanding the novel's fiction while maintaining its structure. Discussion of authorship in the second chapter focused on the adaptation's creation of

new plotlines at the conclusion of the first season. With these additions came the notion that Yorkey was becoming the dominant author within the *Thirteen Reasons Why* universe because his fiction expanded upon what Asher had created. While Asher can express his disinterest in competing with Yorkey over which narrative is canonical, the expanded narrative of the Netflix series will always leave questions of which work is superior or more canonical. As the chapter details, this presents a problem for novel and adaptation pairings in the event that the novel's author chooses to expand on the text, calling the legitimacy of the adaptation's narrative into question. Authorial ownership is not a new phenomenon in adaptation studies, as the *Game of Thrones* example discussed in the chapter shows, but with the television industry's shift toward more serial, complex narratives suggests that more adaptations are on the horizon that will challenge their source material for narrative dominance.

Beyond expanding on the material, the adaptation also must respond to the challenge of bringing elements of the novel to screen that cannot be replicated. Discussion of Sara Day's text showed how the novel develops narrative intimacy between Hannah and the reader by making Hannah the center of events within the novel. This results in a relationship of intense intimacy and empathy, in which the reader never has to reciprocate Hannah's disclosure while reading. Complications arise when it becomes clear that the formation of narrative intimacy enabled by the novel cannot be reproduced on screen. As a result, the adaptation must compensate for this and does so by decentering Hannah in its narrative and giving more time for readers to follow its supporting characters. While Hannah's story remains the core storyline of the first

season, the decentering that occurs allows for the series to move away from following her story exclusively in pursuit of widening the narrative's focus. Characters such as Courtney and Jessica are recontextualized through this decentering, casting them as more sympathetic in the present day and setting up the possibility for new storylines beyond the first season. By removing Hannah from the center of narrative and bringing the stories of the novel's supporting cast forward, the show offers an alternative to narrative intimacy by asking the reader to feel empathy for characters previously given little room to develop in the novel.

As the second chapter discussed, the decentering benefits nearly every character outside of Hannah, as the expanded focus allows characters such as Mr. Porter an opportunity for redemption. One of the benefits of adaptations expanding on their source material is the development of characters whose stories are left untold in the original work. As *13 Reasons Why* shows, this can allow characters vilified by the novel their own story arcs where their motivations are contextualized. Mr. Porter and Tyler in the second chapter demonstrated how the show could humanize characters named on Hannah's tapes through story arcs in the second season that cast both characters as showing regret for their treatment of Hannah. Through decentering, narratives with focus on a single narrator are reconfigured to allow its other characters room to grow beyond their appearance in the novel.

Despite the decentering of Hannah in the Netflix series, it appears that the novel's production of narrative intimacy, according to Day's definition, is impossible to reproduce in a visual narrative. One of the problems with trying to bring narrative

intimacy to the Netflix series, as detailed in the second chapter, is the difficulty in translating the amount of narration found in the novel to visual media. This becomes a problem, as the empathy the reader develops for Hannah in the novel is predicated on delivering her narration through the tapes and as Chatman's writings demonstrated, longform narration is unsustainable in visual narratives. As a result, the show settles for an alternative to narration (and narrative intimacy in the process) by diverting attention away from Hannah. The series can still generate empathy by widening its focus to follow additional characters, but the promotion of disclosure becomes a casualty in the process. The narrative still features disclosure from Hannah in the first season as Clay goes through her tapes, but the decentering in the show makes it so that the viewer follows Hannah significantly less than in the novel and as a result the audience is not exposed to her disclosure to the same extent. The widened focus also takes away from the viewer's trust in Hannah, especially as the characters named on her tapes are given more time to develop in the series. By taking away Hannah's authority as the story's narrator, the show gives her less control over framing the story's other characters, giving a maligned character in the novel such as Tyler a space within the narrative to redeem himself. It is unlikely that Yorkey and his writing staff were familiar with the concept of narrative intimacy when writing the show, but they must have been aware of the issues presented by Chatman regarding narration in visual storytelling. To that end, narrative intimacy in visual media requires further study, as this case study suggests its impossibility if the concept is reliant upon extensive narration.

As one considers narrative intimacy, a question that merits further research is how the novel and show's emphasis on audience disclosure complicates the formation of narrative intimacy in the narrative. The one-sided disclosure of narrative intimacy produces an environment through which readers experience intimacy without the expectation that they have to reciprocate, but what happens when the work asks them to share their thoughts with others? As Asher and Yorkey suggest, their audiences are not intended to stay within the confines of the novel and adaptation and are instead expected to engage with others in a way that runs counter to what narrative intimacy promises. It is already established that Yorkey's work cannot replicate narrative intimacy, but does the therapeutic experience intended by Asher therefore invalidate his novel's ability to produce narrative intimacy?

To answer this question, it might be productive to understand narrative intimacy in the same way that this project has understood the novel's relationship to its adaptation in creating a therapeutic experience: as a building block. Perhaps one could consider narrative intimacy the first step in the therapeutic experience, in which the reader learns to experience intimacy and disclosure through Hannah. Engaging with the novel's paratexts would assist in guiding its audience through the process of learning to mimic the disclosure found in the novel, with the reader practicing disclosure with other readers online via thirteenreasonswhy.com or with peers through the discussion questions offered by the novel. While narrative intimacy is not possible within the Netflix series, its own treatment of empathy and disclosure could act as a model for viewers to observe and then replicate in their own lives. This model would not produce the same lessons in

disclosure as those found in the novel, but its existence does align with the notion that the adaptation attempts to build upon the work done by Asher in his novel. Narrative intimacy might not have been how Asher aimed to encourage prosocial behavior among his readers when he wrote *Thirteen Reasons Why*, but understanding Day's concept as a building block which readers can learn disclosure is useful when considering how the topics from the past two chapters connect.

Despite the claims made in this project, there is still more work to be done. This project has examined a single novel and its adaptation with the goal of understanding how an adaptation can cause a reevaluation of the novel on which it is based. What has come from this research is an understanding that novels and their adaptations are linked by more than their narratives, and these connections reveal that in many cases the novel can be reshaped by its adaptation. *Thirteen Reasons Why* and its adaptation are one of many novel-adaptation pairings that have arrived on streaming platforms and examining other works would aid in understanding how the ideas presented in this project might manifest elsewhere.

Chapter One's discussion of Netflix as a purveyor of prosocial programming is one area that merits further research, as it remains to be seen what direction the streaming platform will take to compete with others for the attention of teen viewers. The therapeutic experience intended by the novel that the show has built points to the possibility of other programs making similar gestures to viewers in the future. As Mittell's writing suggests, the era of streaming video has enabled the production of more complex serial narratives, specifically adaptations of novels, so a future in which more

YA novels addressing the same subject matter as *Thirteen Reasons Why* might not be too far off. Additionally, examination of other banned texts that have received adaptations would offer more insight into the notion that a novel can be recontextualized by its adaptation. This project has shown that *Thirteen Reasons Why* experienced renewed interest as a result of its adaptation, but the calls for censorship that came with this revival demand further questioning. Working with additional novels and adaptations that have experienced censorship would aid in understanding how and why school districts engage in censorship, as well as the influence adaptations can have in the censorship of novels. The first chapter identified a variety of institutional factors at play with the novel and its adaptation, and the discoveries made in the chapter point to the need for more research to validate the chapter's claims and forecast the future of adaptations in the wake of streaming video platforms.

Similarly, the discussion of authorial ownership and narrative intimacy in the second chapter could benefit from further research on the relationship between novels and their adaptations. On-demand video encourages the creation of more adaptations based on novels, meaning that there will be more and more cases of serial narratives on streaming platforms creating rivalries between creators. Even if the relationship between an author and their adaptor is amicable, there will always be comparisons between their two works and these questions of authorship will only be exacerbated once the adaptation exhausts its source material. As *Game of Thrones* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* have shown, rival authorship can be an unintended consequence of adaptations and even when authors attempt to dispel this notion, the audience might be the true judges of

authorship. Just as the audience frames one's understanding of authorship, it prompts discussion of narrative intimacy's limitations when adapting novels into television series. Additional work in narratology and adaptation studies would aid in the claims made by this project as it remains to be seen whether a true substitute for narrative intimacy exists in visual storytelling. The relationship between the narrator and reader is an essential component of narrative intimacy, but the substitute suggested by this project in the form of decentering might not be satisfactory to those seeking a true substitute for longform narration. To that end, additional novels and their adaptations could be used to identify other ways creators such as Yorkey could approach bringing narration-driven works to television.

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