



# MORE THINGS WRONG THAN RIGHT

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The past few weeks, at least for young audiences of American television in Bangladesh, have been rife with different variations of the same discussion. Hannah Baker is a drama queen. Hannah Baker is a hero. Hannah Baker single-handedly shed light on the difficult realities of high school culture. She is the girl most of us can relate to, or at least should be able to relate to, according to the show.

The protagonist's actions and experiences in Netflix's '13 Reasons Why' will resonate differently with different people, sparking frustration in some and sympathy in others. But what it shouldn't do is lure audiences, especially young teenagers, into finding justification in her actions.

Hannah does a fine job of driving home something many people, especially the young and the irrational, often fail to understand – that for each time we treat someone with malice, however trivially, we add a little more to a tower of grief that can topple over to scar their life permanently. But this noble mission of forcing people's eyes open to the repercussions of cruelty should rest primarily on the idea of empathy, something that Hannah doesn't seem to have much of.

She overlooks entirely the effect her death is going to have on her parents, who treat her with nothing but doting love and affection throughout the entirety of the show, even when she makes ridiculously careless mistakes. She literally stands by while a girl is raped in front of her eyes – a girl she used to be best

friends with, no less - and goes on to blame that girl for partially triggering her suicide, because she had behaved rudely with her. And she drags the only person in school who had loved her into this messy revenge-plan, leaving him humiliated and scarred enough to contemplate his own suicide for a while. For a person who claims to have been misunderstood, hurt, and abused by almost everyone in her life, Hannah shows a remarkable lack of compassion when others around her suffer the same fates.

In the documentary 'Beyond 13 Reasons' that follows season finale on Netflix, the makers of the show explain how Hannah was designed to be a flawed character – we're meant to sympathise with her, but we don't necessarily have to love her. Doesn't that apply to all forms of fiction, though? Should the flaws that make a character human be used to justify inconsiderate and irrational actions in a

story that openly seeks to raise awareness about as sensitive an issue as teenage suicide?

Most of us who are educated stand strongly against the concept of victim-blaming. Rape is rape – it is wrong, it is abhorrent, and it is inexcusable under all circumstances. But what do you make of it when Hannah watches Bryce sexually humiliate and bully her in front of the school, witnesses him raping Jessica right in front of her, and then walks into Bryce's party uninvited, and gets into his hot tub of her own volition? How do you root for her when she equates these horrors with being made fun of in her school's hallway?

'Violence in the Media', an article on the American Psychological Association website, cites studies by the National Institute of Health, USA, that have discovered how watching violence on TV and video games can affect young minds.

The three major effects, according to the article, are that, "Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others. [They] may be more fearful of the world around them. [They] may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others." Not only do these impacts parallel what happens in the story, but they also tell us how it can affect the extremely impressionable minds of teenagers in a country where both adolescent suicide and rape are more and more on the rise.

These more serious impacts notwithstanding, the TV show is flawed in the entire cast of stock characters, all of whom seem completely clueless about helping friends, students, families, or even themselves in a healthy manner. The only two interesting, layered characters are Justin and Jessica, who truly reveal how conflicting and challenging it can be to stand up for oneself in the face of tragedy. Instead of focusing on their decision to not hurt themselves despite facing horrible circumstances, the story ends (at least for now) with the message that well-meaning adults will always fail to understand and help teenagers in danger. More alarmingly, it promotes the concept of suicide as a warped kind of justice. In the end, by using her death as a form of revenge against an entire class of teenagers who aren't old enough to be responsible for their own lives, let alone someone else's, Hannah ends up as the biggest bully of them all.

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