

To: rampage@angelo.edu Subject:

Op-ed Dear Editor: My name is Esteban Gerena-Marcano, I am a first year English major and education minor at Angelo State University, and I will be writing about the restrictions on content of suicide and self-harm and how social media in general needs to do better.

Social media will always be a big part of the younger generation's lives, and what we decide to regulate affects their minds in a negative or positive way. The restrictions set on content of suicide and self-harm have slight disadvantages with distinct advantages. There are advantages and disadvantages to restrictions set on suicide in social media, and there are plenty of articles that speak about this. However, the first one that comes to mind is Allan House's post on National Library of Medicine. He states that there are negative and positive effects of restrictions of said content. House states, "Negative accounts have been emphasized in mainstream media, with social media presented as places where you are drawn into an immersive atmosphere of depressive messages and images that act as enticement to self-harm and suicide." This shows the worldwide concern for the restrictions set, as there is a possibility for young people to be enticed by images shown and decide to take their own lives. There are also positives to this as House also states, "More positive accounts from young people suggest that social media can also offer a space where you can come out of hiding, share otherwise secret fears with peers, and gain an element of support and advice." The positive is something social media apps must take into consideration, as they don't want to take away from people's ability to feel comfortable in their own skin. For example, Discord is a big social media outlet with "supposed" heavy restrictions on such content. In fact, their community guidelines directly state not to post any content of suicide, self-harm, or gore. However, regardless of the restrictions that discord has set, there are still plenty of communities on discord out there breaking guidelines and spreading videos of suicide, self-harm, and murder. There is no positive to people being able to see this content on discord, it helps no one feel comfortable with their mental illnesses, it makes them feel as if they should do what was done in the video. The guidelines need to be stricter, the information above proves so.

Not just discord has troubles with their regulations, other social media sites have "regulations" on said content, but there seems to still be an excessive amount of it swirling around on the site. For example, Instagram still has explicit content on their website, even after stating they would not allow said content anymore. An article by Shanti Das on "The Observer" goes into detail of this. In this article Das says Instagram is, "breaking a promise to remove posts that glorify self-harm and suicide after the death of schoolgirl Molly Russell". Das states that a simple keyword search would show that many images still exist on the site. In the wake of a death brought on by suicide they broke a promise to restrict said content. In the article Das states, "Many of the posts were made under hashtags including slight misspellings of banned or restricted searches. Users searching for banned terms minus the vowels, for example, were shown a stream of posts that appeared to go against Instagram's community guidelines." The restrictions they have set aren't strong enough, and the fact that there are humans who are supposed to review this type of content is worse. They need to be able to find and exterminate

this content, if not it can lead to another child taking their own life. This negligence cannot be allowed. Instagram makes some efforts as Das states, “In other cases, users searching for banned terms were shown a list of alternative hashtags that they could try searching instead. Some of the suggestions related to keywords associated with recovery and self-harm prevention, but others did not. Under one suggested tag, top posts, which have since been removed, included images that appear to normalize or glamorize self-harm, such as a meme describing fresh cuts as “perfect” and a photo of a lighter with the words: “We’re all addicted to something that takes the pain away.” There is an effort being made, but it simply isn’t enough. The content being shown is something that can lead a young child to do something they can never take back; it’s even being glamorized. Instagram is one piece in the pile of mess that is social media regulations.

TikTok also has issues with their regulations on this content. However, they are trying. In an article on NBC news by Kalhan Rosenblatt it states that TikTok has new mental health resources for their users. Rosenblatt states, “What comes next varies. Sometimes, the user makes jokes about hardships. But others are sincere, flashing quick images of smiles at weddings, prenatal ultrasounds, late nights out with friends, the first kiss of a new love, and more. The videos, which use the #suicidepreventionmonth hashtag, coincided with Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, which takes place every September. The trend picked up just as TikTok announced last week that it would be implementing new resources for those who were struggling with suicidal ideations. The new tools include: An in-app resource list of crisis hotlines around the world to help users in every region; information on how to engage safely with someone who may be in crisis; resources, including the Crisis Text Line helpline, whenever someone searches for a term such as #suicide.” This shows that TikTok is trying, and as the first paragraph stated, this is the type of content that shouldn’t be banned. It shows people that they aren’t alone, and there are people just like them. However, it’s difficult to restrict the bad content while allowing the good content to come through. Which leads me to my final point.

Regulations on content of suicide and self-harm are necessary in every way. Everything shown proves that, but it’s also important for there to be some content that allow people to feel comfortable in their own skin. In every sense it would be almost impossible to restrict the keywords connected to that issue and there still be content for people to relate to. If that’s how it is then we have to decide it’s best to not show that content, even the good parts. As the negatives heavily outweigh the positives. Any person can go to therapy and find their help, but any person should not be able to view such explicit content, especially when it’s unknown what they may be dealing with. Restrictions need to be made better, so that there can never be another person who loses their life because of what they saw online.