



Incel, the Manosphere, and Toxic Masculinity: Issues Depicted in Netflix's "Adolescence" Miniseries

Hesthi Herusatoto

Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing LIA, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence email: hesthi@stbalia-yk.ac.id

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Corresponding Author: Hesthi Herusatoto,
email: hesthi@stbalia-yk.ac.id

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Abstract

This article is based on library research after watching the Netflix four-episode limited series "Adolescence". By collecting information from published materials, this article attempts to provide an understanding of the words 'incel', 'the manosphere', and 'toxic masculinity' which become issues addressed in "Adolescence" and to show how the issues are portrayed in the British miniseries. Socio-psychological approach is used to examine Jamie, the main character, who is given the label of an incel by Katie, his schoolmate and to examine Jamie's father, Eddie. The findings of the library research reveal that the meaning of the word 'incel' (involuntary celibate) has shifted from its original meaning coined in 1997. Incel in the manosphere, which is a cluster of online communities with misogynistic and toxic masculinity contents, has become negative movement against women since 2012. Jamie learns toxic masculinity from his father and the manosphere. His exposure to toxic content in the manosphere has fueled his resentment after being rejected by Katie and has triggered him to kill her.

INTRODUCTION

The crime drama "Adolescence", streaming on Netflix, has captivated viewers across the world. The four-episode limited series released on March 13, 2025, according to Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) – the UK's official TV ratings body— has been watched by 6.45 million people in its first week (The Express Tribune, 2025). The British show written by Jack Thorne and co-written and starred by Stephen Graham, which addresses the issues including incel culture, the manosphere, and toxic masculinity, has created widespread conversations and discussions about the harmful impacts of social media on teenage boys. It has also burnt up the Internet with analyses and opinions, along with praising the impressive performance of the first-time acting role of Owen Cooper, who plays the accused killer Jamie Miller. The TV series directed by Philip Barantini is about a 13-year-old boy named Jamie Miller who is arrested on suspicion of stabbing Katie Leonard, a schoolmate, to death. The first episode begins with the British armed police, breaking into the Millers' house early in the morning, looking for Jamie Miller. The police burst into Jamie's bedroom, making him wet himself with panic. He is arrested and taken to the police station for further investigation. The second episode depicts the police investigation at Jamie's school

three days after the fatal stabbing. Detective Inspector Luke Bascombe (Ashley Walters) and Detective Sergeant Misha Frank (Faye Marsay) dig for information from Jamie's classmates and teachers about the knife used by Jamie to murder Katie. They are trying to get the motive behind the murder. The third episode is seven months after the death of Katie, portraying an intense interview between Jamie and a child psychologist, Briony Ariston (Erin Doherty), who is psychologically assessing Jamie in a children's mental health facility. The interview suggests that Jamie who has been exposed to incel online culture content killed Katie because she hurt his feelings on her Instagram posts. The fourth episode, which is thirteen months after the murder, describes how Jamie's detention affects the Miller family. Jamie's phone call telling that he is going to plead guilty to killing Katie devastate Jamie's parents and his sister, Lisa.

The one-shot TV series, in which each episode is shot in one hour continuous take with no edits, is inspired by some brutal incidents in England where young boys attacked young girls with a knife. The young boys have been radicalized by social media that exposes them to online influencers who incite violence and hatred towards women. "Adolescence" has been a wake-up call for parents, educators, and policymakers, especially in the UK, to the unseen dangers of the digital world among teens. The British Prime Minister Keir Starmer even supported the calls for the miniseries to be available in secondary schools across the UK to help students understand the dangers of online radicalization, according to the press release published by the website of the UK Prime Minister's office (www.gov.uk) on March 31, 2025. In addition, teens will get anti-misogyny lessons to promote healthy relationships under the new government guidance for Relationship, Health, and Sex Education (RHSE).

In the second and third episode, "Adolescence" mentions terms like an 'incel' and 'the manosphere'. Mrs. Fenumore is described as a teacher at Jamie's school who has never heard the word 'incel'. The cast of this show who play Jamie's mother (Christine Tremarco) and father (Stephen Graham), in an interview with Yahoo UK, also admitted that they were unfamiliar with incel before "Adolescence". In addition, the words 'incel' and the 'manosphere' stunned many parents who had just watched the miniseries as they had never heard the words before, as reported by Xiang in *The Straits Times* (2025). Viewers of the series might also have no idea what an incel was before watching the show. This can be seen from Google trend data, which reported that the online searches for the two terms have spiked following the release of the show (Xiang, 2025; Lim, 2025). This article explores the terms 'incel' and the 'manosphere' as well as toxic masculinity which become the topical issues raised and depicted in "Adolescence" TV series. The words 'incel' and the 'manosphere', including phrases and emojis related to the manosphere which are used on Katie's Instagram and mentioned in episode two and three of the miniseries, are made not visible in any scenes of the show. The viewers of the miniseries are left to decipher the words/phrases as well as the emojis.

Numerous research on incels, the manosphere, and toxic masculinity have discussed their cultural, psychological, social, crime, and political issues. For example, Stijelja and Mishara (2023) studied the psychosocial characteristics of people identifying themselves as incels; Czerwinsky (2024) reviewed research on the misogynist incel community; Vallergera and Zurbriggen (2022) scrutinized posts on two manosphere message boards to find out the beliefs about women and men; (Sparks et al. (2022) investigated dating app experiences, mental, social, and relational well-being among incels; and Harris (2021) examined the relationship between toxic masculinity

traits, mental health outcomes, and help-seeking behaviors among college male students.

This article delves into the words ‘incel’, ‘the manosphere’, and the words/phrases as well as emojis associated with the manosphere, such as the 80/20 rule, red pills, blue pills, and kidney beans, introduced in “Adolescence” episode two and three. Toxic masculinity, which is also the issue addressed in the miniseries, especially in episode three and four, is discussed in this article as well.

METHOD AND THEORY

Library research was conducted to get information concerning incel, the manosphere, and toxic masculinity. Information is gathered from scholarly articles, reports, and other published materials discussing the three terms to learn and understand more about them. The findings from those sources are synthesized to draw insights of the terms. The usage of the terms ‘incel’ and ‘the manosphere’, including words/phrases and emojis related with the manosphere in "Adolescence", especially in episodes two and three, is displayed by quoting the dialogs taken from the show. Dialogs from episodes three and four are presented to depict toxic masculinity seen in the character of Jamie and Jamie’s father, Eddie. Online materials published discussing those three issues in "Adolescence" are also used to shed light into the terms in the TV series.

The socio-psychological approach which examines how a person's views, thoughts, and actions are shaped by their interactions with others and their social environment (Ashraf, 2021) is used to study the character of Jamie and Jamie’s father, Eddie, who are described to have toxic masculinity traits in episodes three and four of the TV series.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Incel

Definition, History, and Incel in “Adolescence”

Incel, which stands for 'involuntary celibate', is defined by Sparks et al. as “loose collection of individuals who are experiencing sexlessness despite their desire to be active” (2022, p. 732). Preston et al. (2021) refer incels to “people who define themselves by their inability to have sexual intercourse and romantic relationships” (p.284). They are mostly men who feel incapable or struggle to establish heterosexual relationships (Preston et al., 2021; Lindsay, 2022). This shared state of being involuntary celibates (inceldom) unites these “socially alienated men” to have a collective incel identity (Lindsay, 2022, p.211). In addition, these heterosexual men “express rage at women for denying them sex and frequently fantasize about violence and celebrate mass shooters in their online discussion groups” (Bosman et al., 2025). O’Kane (2025) as referenced in the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, informed that the term emerged from a Reddit group in which the male users blamed women for their lack of sexual activity.

The word 'incel' is first mentioned in "Adolescence" episode two by Adam, the son of DI Bascombe. When DI Bascombe visits Jamie's school to get information about the murder weapon, Adam, who is a senior student at the school, talks to his father privately. He wants his dad to check Katie's Instagram posts since he thinks his dad does not understand what is happening.

Adam : ...she's saying he's an incel, Dad.
Adam's dad : He's 13. How can you be involuntarily celibate at 13?
Adam : Dad, I know--
Adam's dad : Who isn't celibate at 13? Huh?
Adam : She's saying he always will be. "You're an incel." You're gonna be, I don't know, a virgin forever, basically. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 2, 00:30:22 - 00:30:35)

Adam's dad does know the meaning of incel, but is wondering the problem for a thirteen-year old boy like Jamie to be celibate. Mrs. Fenumore, a teacher at Jamie's school, even had never heard the word incel. After DI Bascombe finished talking to his son, he told DS Frank and Mrs. Fenumore about incel. Mrs. Fenumore declares she does not know what the word means.

DI Bascombe : We were wrong about all that Instagram stuff.
DS Frank : What do you mean?
DI Bascombe : Katie was bullying Jamie.
DS Frank : Oh no.
DI Bascombe : That's what it was. Incel stuff. You know what that is.
DS Frank : Yeah, I do.
Mrs. Fenumore : No, I don't know what that is. What is it?
DI Bascombe : It's the, um, involuntary celibate stuff.
DS Frank : It's the Andrew Tate shite.
Ms. Fenumore : I've heard the boys talking about him. (Barantini, 2025, Eps 2, 00:34:10 - 00:34:32)

Andrew Tate is a British-American online influencer who is infamous for preaching a controversial view of masculinity and promoting various misogynistic contents in the manosphere, i.e., "a collection of online forums where misogynistic views are prevalent, including the belief that feminism has ruined what they perceive to be an ideal society" (Broyd et al., 2023, p.254). He is so-called "the king of toxic masculinity" as his contents exalts toxic masculinity and devalue women (Villanova University School of Law, 2025). He has millions of social media followers who are mostly young men struggling with their own ideas of masculinity. Andrew Tate is one among other manosphere influencers who draw susceptible young men's attention to toxic masculinity and misogyny using social media (Horowitz, 2023). Such online influencers also try to get profits from young men's insecurities. As seen in the dialog between the investigators and Ms. Fenumore above, they learn that Jamie could have been influenced by the preaching of Andrew Tate or other manosphere influencers on being a real man.

In "Adolescence" episode three, the word 'incel' is also stated when Jamie is being interviewed by the psychologist, Briony. When Briony asks Jamie the meaning of kidney beans, Jamie mentions the word 'incel' and rebuffs being part of incels.

Jamie : She's pretending like I'm part of one of those truth groups.
Briony : What truth groups?
Jamie : The ones that say that women don't want us and don't care.
Briony : Are you part of those?
Jamie : No!
Briony : But you know what they say?
Jamie : Yeah, 'cause everyone kept on going on about it. Incel stuff. So I had a look, but I didn't like it. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:39:30 - 00:39:49)

On Katie's Instagram's comments, Jamie is repeatedly mocked for being "an incel" through the use of emojis (will be further explained in the next part of this article). Katie seemed to begin a cyber bullying campaign, provoking her schoolmates to post a series of emoji branding Jamie an 'incel'. "The term 'incel' is used as an insult and a joke, and it is a term Jamie consistently rejects" (Rasker, 2025). Such comments have pushed Jamie further to spend time online, searching for "incel stuff", i.e. anything relating to incel, including the emojis used by incel communities. He claims that he had a look at incel stuff, but did not like it.

The meaning of 'incel' has changed from the original definition. The word 'incel' was coined in Canada in 1997 by a single woman named Alana. In her interview on BBC Radio 5 live, she explained that she made a website called Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project and abbreviated the words 'involuntarily celibate' into 'invcel', which later changed into incel (Taylor, 2018). The website was her attempt to connect with similarly lonely people. She used the term 'incel' to refer to "anybody of any gender who was lonely, had never had sex or who hadn't had a relationship in a long time" (Taylor, p.1). Incels included all men and women seeking sexual relationships. The website became a support forum for anyone, men and women, who were struggling to form romantic attachments. Alana described it as "a friendly place" for men and women to share their feelings of loneliness and to create a positive movement. She left the website community in 2000 after she finally found a partner. About 15 years later, she learned that incel has shifted into online communities of men who feel frustrated with their lack of success with women. They blame women for their failure. Their resentment towards women promotes hatred and violence against women. The online communities have become negative forums and movements which have led killing sprees, incel-related attacks, and plots done by young men in some countries, such as in the USA - California (2014, 2020), Oregon (2015), New York (2019, 2020, 2021), Arizona (2023)-, in Canada - Toronto (2018), Montreal (2020)-, in the UK - Middlesbrough (2019), Plymouth (2020), Birmingham (2021)-, in New Zealand -Auckland (2022)-, and France -Bordeaux (2024), to name a few, as reported by the Anti-Defamation League website (2024).

The incel subculture whose communities exist mainly online emerged from the manosphere. People who join the communities are frustrated men who desire romantic or sexual relationships with women but unable to find a partner. They vent their feelings of loneliness, rejection, and desperation with others having similar experiences to seek answers to why this is happening to them. Also, they share misogynistic values and abusive statements about women, which even promote rape and violence.

The Manosphere

Words and Emojis of the Manosphere in "Adolescence"

As defined by Broyd (2023) in the previous section of this article, the manosphere refers to a collection of online forums with misogynistic views. *Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology* (Journal EXIT-Deutschland, 2021) refers to the manosphere as online pro-men communities with misogynistic and anti-feminist contents (p.13). Jones (2020) propounds the meaning of the contemporary manosphere that it was "the site of collective anti-feminism with distinct strategies for reinforcing hegemonic masculinity" (p.16). Vallergera and Zurbriggen (2022) include websites, blogs, and message boards devoted to the views condemning feminism and glorifying hegemonic

masculinity as the manosphere (p.602). In short, the manosphere is a cluster of websites, blogs, online forums, and message boards promoting misogyny, masculinity, rejection to feminism, and hateful ideas. Online communities within the manosphere include Involuntary Celibates (Incels), PUAs (Pick up Artists), MGTOWs (Men Going Their Own Way) and MRAs (Men's Rights Activists) (Horta Ribeiro et al., 2021, p.196).

The word 'the manosphere' is stated in episode two of "Adolescence" in a scene at Jamie's school where Adam, DI Bascombe's son asks his father to read between the lines of the Instagram messages between Jamie and Katie. Adam thinks his father, who is searching for the crime evidence, does not understand what is happening and is unable to understand the dark meaning behind Katie's comments on her Instagram. Katie uses a series of emoji which, according to DI Bascombe, are no more than decorative images to show being friendly to Jamie.

Adam : *It's not going well. 'cause you're not getting it.*
Adam's dad : *What am I not getting?*
Adam : *You're not reading what they're doing. What's happening.*
Adam's dad : *What are you talking about?*
Adam : *Insta. You've been looking at Insta, right?*
Adam's dad : *Yeah.*
Adam : *Uh, okay. So you've, um...You've seen... what she wrote?*
Adam's dad : *I have.*
Adam : *Okay.*
Adam's dad : *Looks like she's being nice, right? Isn't she? Hmm? (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 2, 00:29:02 - 00:29:30)*

Adam then explains the hidden meaning of the emojis in Katie's comments. Katie includes a dynamite, an exploding red pill, and the blue pills in her comments which are connected to the online manosphere. Adam's father seems bewildered by the two emojis and the word 'manosphere'. His understanding about the red pill and the blue pill are from what he had watched in "The Matrix" movie.

Adam : *The dynamite. What do you think that means?*
Adam's dad : *Uh, I don't know.*
Adam : *An exploding red pill. The blue pills mean you see the world as it wants you to--*
Adam's dad: *That's when the Matrix...You've been watching The Matrix?*
Adam : *What?*
Adam's dad : *Don't worry. Yeah. Don't worry, carry on.*
Adam : *The Matrix.*
Adam's dad: *Carry on.*
Adam : *Um...The red pill's like, "I see the truth." It's a call to action by the manosphere.*
Adam's dad : *"Manosphere"?(Barantini, 2025, Eps. 2, 00:29:31 - 00:30:00)*

Likewise, episode three of "Adolescence" depicts a scene where Jamie explains the meaning of 'red pill' and 'dynamite' emojis in addition to 'kidney beans'. Briony shows Jamie Katie's Instagram post with 'kidney beans' emoji directed to Jamie, and she asks him to explain it to make sure he understands that incel stuff.

Briony: *What do these emojis mean, Jamie? What do the kidney beans mean? They're kidney beans, right? And was you being an incel what she was saying with all of these?*
Jamie : *Yeah.*
Briony : *Could you explain them all?*

Jamie : Uh want love, won't get it. My throat's killing. Uh, red pill, exploding. That's the same as the red pill. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:39:50 - 00:40:20)

Nervously, Jamie tells that 'kidney beans' emoji represents 'exploding red pill' indicating that someone is an incel.

The terms 'red pill' and 'blue pill' indeed come from "The Matrix" movie (1999). Neo, the protagonist, is given an option to choose taking a red pill or a blue pill. The 'red pill' reveals the truth of reality (Preston, 2021, p. 826; Linsday, 2022, p. 212; Spark, 2022, p. 733). In the world of the manosphere, to be 'red-pilled' means to wake men up to the real world that they live in a reality constructed by women that reduce the rights of men and that they must fight against it (Linsday, p.212) by dominating, controlling, and manipulating the world (Czerwinsky in Finighan, 2025). *Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology* (2021) states, "swallowing the red pill refers to a man waking up to the real world, where women are better off than men... (p.5). As for the 'blue pill', it refers to the life of delusion (Czerwinsky in Finighan, 2025), "disconnecting from reality into a delusional agreeable world" (Linsday, p.212). Bluepilled men, according to *Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology*, have "not yet woken up to the fact that society discriminates against males, rather than females" (2021, p.13) and still engage in conventional dating practices (p.5).

Another pill terminology known in the online manosphere but not mentioned in "Adolescence" is the 'black pill' which implies acknowledging the fact that men have no chance of forming sexual relationships with women (Preston, p.826). Incels believe that men's physical attractiveness determines their dating success; therefore, only physically attractive men can access romantic and sexual relationships (*Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology*, 2021, p.13). Broyd citing Meloy (2004) clarifies, "A blackpilled incel willing to carry out violence could be described as a 'violent true believer', someone committed to a belief system promoting homicide and suicide to further their goal" (2023, p.255). The pill emojis or terminology above is used to show that an individual shares incel beliefs.

In addition to the pill emojis, in episode two Adam further explains the '100' emoji, another incel symbol, which refers to the '80 to 20 rule'. His father struggles to understand what Adam explains to him. It is an incel belief saying that "80 per cent of women are attracted to 20 per cent of men." His father is completely baffled by the words since he never heard such words. He finally concludes that the Instagram posts are acts of cyber bullying.

Adam : Which is where the 100 comes in. The 80 to 20 rule.

Adam's dad : Adam, Adam. Listen. My brain can't take all this. I don't know what you're talking about. Just break it down.

Adam : 80% of women are attracted to 20% of men. Women. You must trick them 'cause you'll never get them in a normal way. 80% of women are cut off or she's saying he's an incel, Dad.

...

You're gonna be, I don't know, a virgin forever, basically.

Adam's dad : Okay. So this is... This is bullying? (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 2, 00:30:04 - 00:30:46)

'The '80 to 20 rule' is also explained by Jamie in his conversation with Briony in episode three of the miniseries. Jamie clarifies the '80 to 20 rule' to Briony, showing his familiarity with the word.

Jamie : And then that's an 80-20 thing.

Briony : What's an 80-20 thing?

Jamie : Where 80% of women are attracted to 20% of men. But I do think they're right about that, though.(Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:40:20 - 00:40:36)

Adam and Jamie explain that 'The 80 to 20 rule' means "80% of women are attracted to 20% of men." The rule suggests that 80% of women only seek out 20% of men who are highly attractive and rich, leaving the 80% of men including incels without a partner. Those 20% of men that most women want to date, according to *Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology* (2021), is referred as 'Chads', while the 80% of women is called 'Stacys' (p.4). These women only want to date Chads, but incels want to date them. Yet, incels also hate 'Stacys' and make them target for physical violence, online offensive language, and humiliation. Women are blamed for incels' lack of romantic success.

This 80/20 rule actually comes from economics known as the Pareto principle. It suggests that 80% of outcomes come from 20% of their causes. The incel community used it in the context of dating, suggesting that "80% of women have access to the top of 20% of men in a society, meaning that 80% of men are left with the remaining 20% of women between them" (*Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology*, 2021, p.13).

Jamie is labeled as an incel and does not belong to the 20% of men who can get a woman. He is rejected by Katie who then makes a mocking post on Jamie's Instagram, suggesting that he is an incel. What Jamie sees on his Instagram strengthens his beliefs that he is unattractive and undesirable. This feeling undesirable leads to feeling of rejection in him.

Briony : Well, why did she do it to you?

Jamie : Because... Because I'm ugly.

Briony : You think that's why she did it to you?

Jamie : Well, I'm the ugliest, I suppose, so.(Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:29:02 - 00:29:30)

Another manosphere stuff revealed by Adam in episode two is the hidden meanings of the colored hearts. Heart emojis have different colors including red, orange, blue, purple, yellow, green, white, and black. People might think that heart emojis just means love. Commonly, according to Hunter (2025), a red heart shows romantic feelings or classic love; an orange heart represents warmth, enthusiasm, or love between friends and family; a blue heart means friendship or is used to say that something is cute. Colored hearts on Katie's Instagram posts and comments carry hidden meanings. Adam convinces his father by explaining more emojis in the online manosphere when his father is still perplexed by the pill emojis. He explains the different meanings of colored hearts.

Adam's dad : It's just hard to believe, like, all that from two symbols.

Adam : You text hearts, right? To Mum?

Adam's dad : When I don't know what to reply, yeah.

Adam : What color?

Adam's dad : Red.

Adam : Means love. Purple, horny. Yellow, I'm interested. Are you interested? Pink, I'm interested, but not in sex. Orange, you're gonna be fine. It all has a meaning, Dad. Everything has a meaning.

Adam : I could, um, show you 15 others. Messages sent to Jamie. All different emojis. They're saying the same thing. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 2, 00:31:04 - 00:31:39)

According Czerwinsky, who is an incel and misogyny expert, the emojis mentioned in episode two and three of the miniseries are indeed widely used by misogyny influencers and their followers on social media (in Finighan, 2025). The emojis are mostly used on Instagram content made by misogyny influencers. Using the emojis, their content will be deemed to be in compliance with Instagram's rules and will not be removed so that they can actively promote their content.

Toxic Masculinity

Definition and Its Reflection in "Adolescence"

An issue reflected in "Adolescence" is toxic masculinity. The online (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) Dictionary defines toxic masculinity as "ideas about the way that men should behave that are seen as harmful, for example the idea that men should not cry or admit weakness." Similarly, (Grewal, 2020) (2020) points out that masculinity becomes toxic when it harms men's mental health or harms people around them (p.3). Becoming aggressive to women to show dominance and power and never showing any emotions since emotions make men appear weak and vulnerable are examples of toxic masculinity mentioned by Grewal. Likewise, Harris (2021) refers toxic masculinity as "adherence to traditional masculine norms that is harmful to men and those around them" (p.6). Traditional masculine norms include traits such as "aggression, self-affirmation, social dominance, and a lack of consideration for others" (Kupers, 2005 and Parent et al., 2019 cited in Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021, p.9). According to the APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men (2018 cited in Harris (2021) values and traits indicating toxic masculinity include power over women, intimate partner violence, aggressive behaviors, emotional detachment, and heterosexual self-presentation. In summary, toxic masculinity is a version of masculinity that is represented by qualities such as being dominant, aggressive, emotionally inexpressive, inconsiderate, violent to women, self-reliant, and heteronormative which is thus not healthy for the men who adhere to it and is harmful for those around them.

Emotional suppression which is one of toxic masculinity traits, as stated by Garcia (2023), "serves to uphold men's power and status in society (p.2)". Expressing emotions showing vulnerability and sadness is discouraged as it makes men appear fragile and weak so that men choose to display stoicism (Levant et al., 2015 in Garcia, 2023). To respond to feelings of vulnerability, such as depression and sadness, expressions of anger (Sharkin, 1993; Levant, 1995; Long, 1987; Lynch & Kilmartin, 2013 in Genuchi & Valdez (2015) is socially acceptable. In addition to anger, hostility and aggression are expressions to resolve feelings of vulnerability and to exert control and dominance in men (Jakupcak et al, 2005 in Garcia, 2023).

In "Adolescence", toxic masculinity is reflected in the character of Jamie and Jamie's father, Eddie. Toxic masculinity in Jamie's father is seen in his traits of emotional suppression, dominance, inconsiderateness, and aggression. Eddie is a man who tries to be a good father better than his father who raised him with abusive behavior. In his discussion with his wife, Manda, recalling if both of them as parents have raised Jamie properly, Eddie affirms that he is not abusive like his father.

Eddie : When I was his age, my dad used to fucking batter me. Sometimes he'd take the belt at me, and he'd fucking whack me, and he'd whack me. And I promised me self...I said, "When I have my own kids, I'd never do that." I'd never... I'd never do that to me kids. And I didn't, did I?I just wanted to be better. But am I? Am I better?
Manda : You tried to be. We both did. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 4, 00:44:38 - 00:45:31)

In his attempt to avoid being abusive to his children—which he thinks has made him better than his father—it seems Eddie avoids expressing his emotions. His emotional suppression once has led him to outbursts of anger. He destroyed a shed as told by Jamie in episode two when Briony the psychologist asks Jamie the intensity of anger his father has.

Briony : How angry does he get?
Jamie : He's never hit me.
Briony : Okay, go on.
Jamie : Go on what? Is that what this is about?
Briony : Why do you call him angry?
Jamie : He just gets mad. We all do. Okay. That's okay. He's just angry in a normal way. Well, he's pulled a shed down once when he was in a proper rage, but that's as bad as it gets.
...
He's not like that most of the time. Hardly ever. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:13:11 - 00:13:52)

Eddie's anger is present, but not openly expressed. It is building up over time, and it erupted making him pull a shed down without any reasonable explanation. Yet, Jamie considers his father's anger "a proper rage". He grew up learning from his father that anger is an acceptable emotional expression for men. This depiction aligns with studies showing that anger is a way to express vulnerable emotions which is consistent with traditional masculinity (Sharkin, 1993; Levant, 1995; Long, 1987; Lynch & Kilmartin, 2013 in Genuchi & Valdez, 2014).

In addition to Eddie's emotional inhibition, aggressive behavior, which is another Eddie's toxic masculinity trait, is clearly seen in episode 4 when two boys spray-painted the word "Nonse" onto his van. He becomes aggressive when he sees the two boys wandering around his van parked in Wainwrights, a hardware shop.

Eddie : Did you do that to my van?
The boy: What?
Eddie : Did you do that to my van?
The boy: It was just a laugh.
Eddie : Well, it's not fucking funny, is it? Hey? Is it funny? Don't smile, kid, 'cause I'll slap that fucking smile off your face. Don't you fucking ever! (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 4, 00:27:28 - 00:27:39)

Eddie chases the two boys, making one of the boys fell over. He grabs the boy by the collar, angrily threatens him, and pushes him down. The boy rushes in panic leaving his bike. Eddie then takes the boy's bike and dumps it. His aggression continues when he goes back to his van. He throws the contents of the can of black paint on his van out of anger. He also yells at the security guard of the hardware store who asks him to clean the mess he has made with the paint he just bought.

Eddie's being dominant in his household is displayed in a scene in episode 4. Jamie's mother and sister impulsively adjust their behaviors to avoid conflict with him. When he abruptly commands his wife and his daughter Lisa to go with him to Wainwrights, to buy paints to clean the word "Nonse" on his van, his wife and Lisa cannot resist following him into his van.

Eddie : So, come on, let's go now. Won't be long. Come on, let's go. Lisa! Lisa, get downstairs, love!

Lisa : What?

Eddie : Put your coat on. We're going to Wainwrights.

Lisa : Can't I just stay here?

Eddie : No, you can't stay here. Someone vandalized the van. Who knows what they'll do next? Not leaving you here on your own.

Lisa : Why would I wanna go?

Eddie : Because I'm asking you to go! (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 4, 00:13:00 - 00:13:23)

Eddie's toxic masculinity also can be seen in his expectation to make Jamie tough and sporty –typical signifiers of masculinity—. In episode 4, Eddie recounts a memory encouraging Jamie to play football and to take up boxing. When Jamie performed badly, Eddie responds with embarrassment, not empathy. In addition, Eddie overlooks Jamie's love for drawing.

Eddie : I took him to footy, didn't I? 'Cause I thought it'd toughen him up. No, but he was crap. So they just stuck him in goal. And I just stood there on the side of the pitch while all the other dads were laughing at him. And I could feel him looking at me. And I couldn't look at him, Mand. I couldn't look at me own boy.

Manda : He idolized you.

Eddie : And then, I took him boxing. I thought that'd make a difference. Well, that lasted ten minutes.

Manda : I know.

Eddie : He used to draw downstairs, remember?

Manda : Yeah.

Eddie : Remember he sat at the table, the kitchen table, and he'd draw pictures.

Manda : And he was good, wasn't he?

Eddie : Yeah, he loved it. He was really good. He loved it. He was there for hours, wasn't he? Then he stopped that. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 4, 00:45:37 - 00:46:38)

Jamie is aware of his father's shame about his lack of manly prowess. In episode 3, when Briony asks Jamie what being a man like and what his father does when he is not working, it is revealed that Jamie does not like sports.

Briony : Are you not into sport?

Jamie : No.

Briony : None of it?

Jamie: Yeah, I'm... I'm not good at much, but I'm really good at getting out of PE. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:19:30 - 00:19:38)

Jamie resentfully recalls how his father, who likes sports, responds with embarrassment instead of empathy when he performs poorly at football.

Jamie : He knew I wasn't sporty or anything like that. I... I used to, uh He used to take me to football. This... This football thing on... on Saturdays. And he'd, um He'd cheer me on and everything, but...But when I I'd fuck up, he'd just...He'd... He'd just look away.

Briony : Pretend he didn't see?

Jamie : Maybe, or... Maybe he just didn't want me to see him looking...sorry.

Briony : Sorry?

Jamie : I dunno. Ashamed. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:15:00 - 00:16:11)

Jamie feels that his father is ashamed of him who is unable to impress his father with his football skill. Being sporty is considered as aligning with a traditional masculine interest. It can be seen that his father holds the belief that sports like football and boxing are sports that men can display; thus, he expects Jamie to be able to play football. When Jamie fails to meet his father's expectation, his father just looks away, implying that he is embarrassed that his son is not manly. What his father does has harmed Jamie. He disregards Jamie's feelings, showing his lack consideration for others. Jamie feels overlooked as his father sees him not being masculine. He also feels humiliated when other kids' fathers laugh at him.

Jamie learns the idea of toxic masculinity through his father. As stated previously, he learns that anger is the only emotion that is acceptable and that men can express. In episode 3, during the interview session with Briony, Jamie bursts into a rage multiple times. One occasion is when Briony tells him to sit down, he yells at her.

Briony : Jamie, if you do not sit...

*Jamie : I don't f****ing wanna sit down! You do not tell me when to sit down! You do not control what I f****ing... Look at me now! You do not control what I do in my life! Get that in that f****ing little head of yours! (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:19:16 - 00:19:33)*

Another occasion is when Briony asks Jamie how he feels about being ugly. He explodes with anger when he accidentally states what he did to Katie after he protests Bryony's question that he feels harder than other psychologist'. DI Bascombe who is outside the interview room shouts at him, making him stops yelling.

*Jamie : The other bloke is much more easy. Him checking whether I understand was much easier. Whether I understand what I did. Look, no, fuck off! I didn't f****ing say that! You're f****ing putting words in me mouth! It's a f****ing trap in here! You are...*

DI Bascombe : Hey! Jamie! (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:33:08 - 00:33:24)

Jamie's mother even acknowledges that Jamie inherits his father's anger. His mother and father's conversation in episode 4, figuring out who should be blamed for Jamie's wrongdoing, describes this.

Manda :He has a terrible temper. But so have you.

Eddie : Don't say that. Well, I didn't give him that, did I? What, did I give him that?

Manda : No. But I do sometimes think we should have stopped it. Seen it and stopped it.

Eddie :We can't think like that. Remember? That's what she said. It's not our fault. Can't blame ourselves.

Manda:But we made him, didn't we?(Barantini, 2025, Eps. 4, 00:43:43 - 00:44:28)

Jamie also learns from his father that other emotions should be suppressed. Feeling affectionate which is seen as a feminine trait, according to traditional masculinity, is considered “weird” by Jamie when Briony asks him if his father is loving.

Briony : Is he funny?

Jamie : Sometimes.

Briony : Loving?

Jamie : No, that's weird. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:13:03 - 00:13:08)

His answer reveals that men’s affection is not natural. Jamie learns that his father is nice to his mother and never hits her. That is enough for him to say that his father is a good man. His respond to Briony’s question asking how his father treats his mother portrays his understanding how to show love and care.

Briony :How does your dad treat your mum?

Jamie : Are you trying to get at my dad again?

Briony : No, not get at him.

Jamie : Dad's actually nice to Mum.

Briony : You did say he tore down a shed.

Jamie :Yeah, he just gets angry with himself, but he's never hit her. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:24:17 - 00:24:30)

Jamie is also exposed to the idea of toxic masculinity through the online manosphere. Even though none of the episodes in the miniseries describe Jamie being exposed to online toxic masculinity ideas, his interactions with Briony in episode 3 explaining his understanding of emojis used by online communities in the manosphere – as explained in the previous sections about incel and the manosphere— have proven this. The conversation between Jamie’s mother and father in episode 4, portraying that the online manosphere might have contributed to toxic masculinity in Jamie, also confirms this.

Manda :He never left his room. He'd come home, slam the door, straight up the stairs on the computer. I'd see the light on at one o'clock in the morning. And I'd knock, and I'd say, "Jamie, come on, son. You've got school tomorrow." And the light'd turn off, but he never said nothing.

Edde : We couldn't do nothing about that. All kids are like that these days, aren't they?

...

Eddie : You don't know what they're watching in their room. Could be watching porn or anything. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 4, 00:42:45 - 00:43:21)

Jamie starts seeing and learning toxic contents in the manosphere after he was mocked and rejected by Katie on Instagram. Katie, who was actually also a victim of bullying as her topless picture circulated around the school, rejected Jamie when he asked her out. Jamie discloses what Katie did to him to Briony in episode three.

Jamie: I did ask her out after the photo. I went round and said I was sorry that they'd done that to her. Showing everyone her tits. Her chest.

And I wanted to know if she'd come to the fair with me. You know, I just thought she might be weak, or that I just thought she might be weak, so... 'Cause everyone was calling her slag, you know, or flat or whatever, so I thought when she was, like, that,

weak, she might she might like me.

It's clever, don't you think?

Briony : To ask her out when everyone else didn't like her?

Jamie : Well, I went round and said I was sorry and everything. That Fidget was a wanker. And I said I'd take her to the fair if she liked.

Briony: Her weakness made her more gettable, was your theory?

Jamie: Mm-hmm. Yeah. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:42:18 - 00:43:13)

...

Jamie : I don't even know why I'm telling you all this, but I just said, "You wanna come to the fair?"

Briony: And what did she say?

Jamie : She just... She just laughed and said, "Oh, I'm not that desperate."

Briony : And the emoji messages came after that?

Jamie : Uh, yeah.(Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:43:30 - 00:43:51)

Jamie thought Katie might be weak as a result of the online abuse. He also thought that because she was weak, he had the power to ask her out and she would agree to go out with him. Instead, he was rejected. Feeling rejected, ashamed, and insecure seemingly has triggered Jamie to figure out the meaning behind the emojis on the internet as well as to seek opinions on the online manosphere that provides toxic contents on masculinity and incel ideology.

Furthermore, Jamie says that he is ugly when Briony asks him whether women are attracted to him. Since he is labeled an 'incel' by Katie using a series of emojis on her Instagram and sees his schoolmates' Instagram comments with emojis indicating him an 'incel', Jamie believes that he is unattractive to girls.

Briony: Jamie, I asked whether you were attracted to women. Do you think women are attracted to you?

Jamie : What sort of question's that?

Briony : Well, what do you think? Do you think girls are attracted to you?

Jamie : No. Of course not.

Briony : Why, "of course not"?

Jamie : Because I'm... I I'm ugly.

Briony : How does that make you feel?

Jamie : Aren't you supposed to say I'm not ugly? (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:31:33-00:32:06)

His exposure to the online manosphere has reinforced his belief that he is an incel; he is ugly and unable to form relationships with the opposite sex. After Jamie explains the meanings of some emojis on Katie's Instagram to Briony, he restates that his being ugly has made Katie rejected him. He even believes he is the ugliest.

Briony : And lots of people liked her comments quite a lot.

Jamie : Yeah, they thought it was funny.

Briony : You must have found that quite cruel.

Jamie : I suppose.

Briony : Did she do this to anyone else?

Jamie : No.

Briony : Well, why did she do it to you?

Jamie : Because... Because I'm ugly.

Briony : You think that's why she did it to you?

Jamie : Well, I'm the ugliest, I suppose, so...(Barantini, 2025, Eps.3, 00:40:40 - 00:41:10)

As Jamie learns about incels in the manosphere and what an incel has to do to women, he comes to understand that rejection is not just painful, but a cruel act against men like him, and that he must fight against it. Such view makes him consider what he did to Katie is not wrong. In episode three, Jamie repeats saying that he did not do it; that he did not kill Katie. He even blames Katie for bullying him.

Jamie : I didn't kill her. You think I did because you've seen the video. You can't trust videos anymore. It's all fake news.

Briony : I'm not here to judge.

Jamie : I didn't kill her. She was a bitch. Even you can see that. I should've killed her, but I didn't. I just... (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:41:39 - 00:41:50)

...

Jamie : You think she's a bitch, right? Doing all that. You think she's a bullying bitch. She was a bullying bitch, right? But that's the thing, you see? That night, I didn't touch her. I could've touched her, but I didn't. I just I had a knife. She was scared. But I didn't do that. I could have touched any part of her body. I really wanted to, but I didn't. I just... Most boys would've touched her. So that makes me better... (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:44:00 - 00:44:40)

Jamie justifies his actions. Toxic beliefs about masculinity, such as dominance or control over women, and aggression or violence towards women, that Jamie learns in the manosphere has fueled his resentment and rationalized what he did. He believes what he did to Katie is not wrong; that violence, i.e. stabbing her multiple times, is acceptable and normal male behavior. By not touching any part of Katie's body, which "most boys would have touched her", even makes Jamie believe that he is better.

In the third episode, Jamie interactions with Briony also display his attempt to control the situation. Toxic masculinity he learns on the internet teaches him to have control over women. The way he controls over Briony is shown by undermining Briony with mimicry and swearing several times. He imitates what Briony said when she asks him about what it feels like to be a man. For him, her question feels like a trick.

Briony : I'm interested in what being a man feels like for you.

Jamie : I dunno.

Briony : It's too big a question, right? And the fight's too small a question. Which is why it's more useful for me to see where the conversation goes and steer it a bit into what you think of your dad and your granddad, for instance. The type of men you think they are. Rather than saying, "So, Jamie, what do you think being a man feels like?"

Jamie : "So, Jamie, what do you think being a man feels like?"

Briony : It's not a trick. It's just a conversation. (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:12:00 - 00:12:33)

Also, he swears a lot, yelling in Briony's face when Briony asks him to sit down:

*Jamie : I don't f*****ing wanna sit down! You do not tell me when to sit down! You do not control what I f*****ing... Look at me now! You do not control what I do in my life! Get that in that f*****ing little head of yours! (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:19:17 - 00:19:33)*

He also yells out the offensive word multiple times, blaming Briony after he accidentally states what he did to Katie. When DI Bascombe shouts to him from outside the door telling him to stop yelling, Briony waves to DI Bascombe to signal that

everything is okay. Jamie then walks towards Briony, stands in front of her extremely close, demeaning her.

*Jamie : The other bloke is much more easy. Him checking whether I understand was much easier. Whether I understand what I did. Look, no, fuck off! I didn't f****ing say that! You're f****ing putting words in me mouth! It's a f****ing trap in here! You are...*

DI Bascombe : Hey! Jamie! (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:33:08 - 00:33:24)

(Jamie then is approaching Briony, standing close in front her, staring at her with a resentful look)

*Jamie : What was that? Hey? What the f**** was that? Signaling him away like f****ing queen, yeah? (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:33:36 - 00:33:45)*

Another example, Jamie degrades Briony when he sees her discomfort after he yells in her face. He ignores Briony's questions asking the meaning of emojis on Katie's Instagram. Instead, he mocks her, thinking that Briony gets scared after he shouted.

Jamie : Are you all right? You look a bit red. Did I scare you when I shouted?

Briony : She wrote this on your Instagram.

Jamie : I mean, I'm only 13. I don't think I look that scary.

Briony : Could you tell me what these emojis are?

Jamie : How embarrassing is that? Getting scared of a 13-year-old. Wow. Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:38:46 - 00:39:08)

Those scenes portray Jamie's attempts to gain control over Briony. Finally, when Briony tells Jamie that the interview is the last session she meets him, Jamie once again explodes with rage and demands Briony to answer his question whether she likes him or not. He begs her to state that she likes him as a person and warns her not to tell what he did.

Jamie : Can I ask you something?

Briony : Yes.

Jamie : Do you like me?

Briony : I was here as a professional, Jamie.

Jamie : Don't you think like that, then?

Briony : My job was to assess you.

Jamie : Because I like you. Not like that. Not fancying you. Just as a person. No, don't you even like me a bit? What did you think about me, then? Decide, come on!

Briony : This was really useful.

*Jamie : Don't you go f****ing telling them what I did! Don't you dare! Don't you go f****ing Get the f**** off me! Don't you dare! F****! Don't you even like me a bit? What did you think about me, then? (Barantini, 2025, Eps. 3, 00:47:23 - 00:48:11)*

The scene shows his frustration at feeling rejected and his attempt to control Briony's action. He wants Briony to like him as a person so that he can feel being accepted.

It appears that toxic contents in the manosphere have fueled his resentment. What he sees and learns on the internet has shaped him, who is still emotionally vulnerable, into a teenager who is unable to control his emotion and normalizes anger.

CONCLUSION

"Adolescence" discloses the dark side of social media and highlights the harmful impact of toxic contents on the internet on young boys. Vulnerable teenage boys, represented by Jamie in the TV series, are consuming misogynistic contents glorifying toxic masculinity and blaming women for their insecurities. Jamie, who is labeled an incel –short for involuntary celibate – on Instagram by Katie and his schoolmates, starts learning the term incel in the manosphere that validates his insecurities and fuels his resentment. Toxic masculinity –the rigid version of masculinity— that he learns from his father, such as emotional repression and aggression, is reinforced negatively by toxic contents in the manosphere that teaches him misogynistic ideas and harmful ideas about masculinity.

Jamie's parents are good parents who care about their kids. Yet, they do not understand that he needs emotional supports after facing online bullying and rejection. Feeling rejected, ashamed, and insecure as well as lacking emotional support have pushed Jamie to seek help from the Internet, i.e. the manosphere which teaches him that power, control, and aggression make him a real man.

The TV series is not just about a murder, but a reflection on a teenage boy shaped by the negative influence of the social media. The show becomes a dire warning for parents as well as educators to pay more attention to young boys' mental health. Parents and educators need to foster conversations about emotional regulation. Teaching teenage boys about healthy masculinity and how to handle emotions and express them in a healthy way can be the possible protection against harmful ideologies.

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