

Abstract

Exploring Adolescent Identity and Vulnerability Through the Netflix Series *Adolescence*

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Adolescence is a formative yet fragile phase marked by emotional turbulence, identity crisis and increased susceptibility to social and psychological pressures. This project critically examines adolescence through the Netflix series *Adolescence*, treating it as a cultural text that reflects contemporary concerns surrounding youth behaviour, authority and moral responsibility. Rather than viewing adolescent crime and emotional distress as isolated acts of deviance, the study situates them within broader socio-cultural and familial environments shaped by neglect, miscommunication and systemic failure. By synthesising insights from Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Jacques Lacan, and David Elkind, the project explores how contemporary digital environments amplify psychological vulnerabilities inherent to adolescence. Furthermore, the study extends this analysis to the contemporary Indian context, examining how collectivist social structures, rigid academic expectations and gendered socialisation contribute to juvenile crime and deviance.

EXPLORING ADOLESCENT IDENTITY AND VULNERABILITY
THROUGH THE NETFLIX SERIES *ADOLESCENCE*



Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

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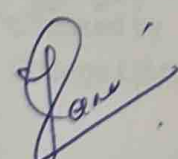
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled “Exploring Adolescent Identity and Vulnerability through the Netflix Series *Adolescence*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Tania Mary Vivera, Associate Professor, Department of English.

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Exploring Adolescent Identity and Vulnerability through the Netflix Series *Adolescence*” by Sneha Paul is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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Introduction

Adolescence has long been recognised as one of the most complex and formative phases of human development marked by rapid biological change, emotional stirrings and the difficult task of identity formation. Psychologists and sociologists have pointed that adolescence is not merely a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood but a foundational period in which patterns of thoughts, behaviour and social belonging are shaped. In contemporary society, this phase has become even more complicated due to the growing influence of digital media, online subcultures and symbolic forms of communication such as emojis. These not only change how adolescents express emotion and build up identity but also intensifies vulnerabilities related to alienation, insecurity and social comparison. This study explores adolescence as a psychological, social and cultural phenomenon using classical developmental theories and examples alongside a close reading of the Netflix series *Adolescence* to illustrate how adolescent vulnerability can be amplified and as well as exploited in the digital age.

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framework for understanding adolescence through major psychological perspectives. Citing from the works of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Erik Erikson and David Elkind the chapter presents adolescence as a site of internal conflicts, symbolic representation and identity experimentation. Freud's structural model of the psyche comprising the Id, Ego and Superego offers insight into adolescent impulsivity, emotional intensity and risk taking behaviour which derives from heightened instinctual drives (Freud 25). Lacan's theories further illustrates how adolescent identity is formed but through images, language and other's perception (Lacan 2). Nowadays peers and digital platforms function as mirrors through which

adolescents attempt to stabilise fragile self images while they often try to mask their inner insecurities with symbolic performances(Elkind 102).

Erikson's psychosocial theory places adolescence within the stage of identity versus role confusion signifying the importance of exploration and social validation in forming a coherent sense of one's self (Erikson 96). Adolescents experiment with roles, beliefs and online personas in an attempt to reconcile internal desires with external expectations. Failure to resolve this stage can lead to confusion, instability and exposure to harmful ideologies. Elkind's concept of adolescent egocentrism particularly the imaginary audience and the personal fable further explains why adolescents often experience high amount of self-consciousness and believe their struggles to be uniquely visible and misunderstood. Chapter 1 also extends these classical theories to contemporary digital phenomena including social media culture, emoji-based communication, incel ideology and manosphere influences arguing that modern adolescence is being defined by intense symbolic pressure and constant surveillance of teens.

Based on this theoretical foundation, Chapter 2 applies these psychological frameworks to a close psychoanalytic analysis of the Netflix series *Adolescence*. The series serves as a contemporary cultural text that dramatises adolescent crises through the story of thirteen-year old Jamie Miller, who is accused of killing Katie, his classmate and then it is later revealed that he had murdered her (*Adolescence*, season 1). Rather than framing the crime as an act of individual pathology, it puts Jamie's actions within a web of emotional neglect, peer humiliation, digital symbolism and ideological influence. Through detailed analysis of key scenes, Chapter 2 demonstrates how institutional forces such as policing, schooling and forensic psychology impose adult

symbolic structures on an adolescent who lacks the emotional language to articulate his inner thoughts and feeling.

Freudian concepts of trauma, repression and ego defence are used to interpret Jamie's arrest, interrogation and psychological assessment while Lacan's notions of the Symbolic Order and signifiers explain how CCTV footage, legal language and emoji-coded communication come to define Jamie's identity from the outside. Erikson's framework highlights Jamie's unresolved identity crisis and his dependency on peer validation. Elkind's imaginary audience becomes realised through social media where public shaming intensifies adolescent humiliation. Emojis appear as powerful semiotic devices that condenses aggression, desire and social exclusion into mere simplified symbols.

Chapter 3 examines adolescent crime in contemporary India. It demonstrates that adolescent crime ranging from theft and vandalism to violent offences is not really the result of inherent criminality but instead reflects developmental immaturity, peer influence and environmental factors such as academic pressure, bullying, familial instability and digital exposure. It discusses how unresolved identity crises and role confusion can turn into rebellion, aggression or deviance particularly when adolescents lack supportive social structures. The Netflix series *Adolescence* functions as a cultural mirror reflecting the developmental vulnerabilities that are seen in adolescent crime patterns.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Perspectives on Adolescence

Adolescence is a very crucial period that is characterized by whirlwind of emotions and developmental changes for teenagers. It is widely considered to be the age range of 12-19 in psychology, although the precise age range varies across different theoretical perspectives. It is marked with the high rate of physical development, profound emotional shifts and the important cognitive and social transformation. Psychologists, sociologists and educators have long said that adolescence is not merely a biological transition into adulthood but also a psychological and cultural journey characterised by self discovery, experimentation and internal conflicts. The theories of Freud, Lacan, Erikson and Elkind are useful in explaining the plight of the adolescents in their works in a powerful combination of the Id, Ego, Superego, the mirror stage, the psychosocial theory and the adolescent egocentrism. Adolescence is followed by very intense emotional experiences and sensitivity to social evaluation. Emotional regulation skills are developed helping them cope with stress, peer pressure and interpersonal challenges. Peer relationships become really important when friendships and social networks influences adolescent behaviour, self-esteem and moral growth. Adolescents begin to understand where they are coming from and steer through social hierarchies, norms and cultural expectations. Their feelings can shift towards romance sometimes sparking close bonds that could possibly deepen emotional awareness. Cultural and societal factors can also shape the adolescence experience. Technological advancements especially social media amplify pressures and create unrealistic standards related to appearance, social validation and achievement. The outcomes of this period are quite significantly influenced by the presence of supportive family structures, peer relationships and

culturally responsive social environments. Adolescence is not just as a temporary stage but a formative period in which lifelong patterns of thought, behaviour and identity are formed. Its significance lies in the bringing together and merging of biological, cognitive, emotional and social transformations making it a time of both opportunity and vulnerability.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory remains as one of the most influential, albeit controversial frameworks for understanding human development including the adolescent phase. The core part of Freud's model lies the structural theory of the psyche: the Id, Ego and Superego. The Id operates according to the pleasure principle seeking immediate gratification of instinctual desires such as hunger, sexuality and aggression. For adolescents the Id manifests in the form of impulsive risk taking, experimentation with substances, rebellious behaviour and the pursuit of romantic or sexual relationships. This drive for instant gratification is evident in the hedonistic tendencies of teenagers in Adolescence who often seek thrill, excitement and emotional release over long term consequences(Freud 25). The craving for pleasure whether through social validation, sexual exploration or thrill seeking reflects the dominance of the Id at a time when the range for self regulation is still under development. The Superego in contrast represents the internalised moral standards, parental expectations and cultural norms. It is essentially the voice of conscience, restraining impulsive desires and urging adherence to responsibility, order and acceptable behaviour. Adolescents however experience tension between the Superego's demands for conformity and the Id's cravings for freedom(Freud 33). Their Superego-conformity, responsibility and restraint are challenged by their risk taking, desire of romantic attention and need of freedom. The battle between these two forces brings internal conflict. The Ego resolves this conflict by discovering socially acceptable outlets. As an

example, 'rather than expressing their feelings verbally teenagers these days resort to use of emojis and symbols as harmless replacements. In this regard emojis serve as Freudian symbols of dreams namely disguised expressions of suppressed feelings like anger, love or frustration that come back in the disguised, symbolic ways (Freud 68). The other aspect of the description of adolescence is the concept of the mirror stage developed by Lacan. It is revealed that identity development relies so much on the reactions of others peer group, social media and friendships serve as mirrors through which the development of an individual identity depends (Lacan 2). In adolescence the "mirror" is no longer a literal mirror but rather shows social interactions and cultural reflections - peer groups, friendships, teachers and digital media. Social media platforms, in particular serve as Lacanian mirrors as adolescents form their identities using edited profiles, filtered photos and symbolic actions that create the illusion of wholeness. This is a weak self image and it is typically built with the help of edited identities and symbolic actions that bring the sense of completeness to the table as well as conceal a sense of alienation within.. Adolescents cling to constructed identities whether through fashion, emojis, memes or subcultural affiliations to mask the underlying sense of incompleteness. Emojis can be read as part of the Imaginary order - simplified images that give the illusions of capturing emotions yet never really express the complexities beneath. The reliance on such symbols illustrate Lacan's idea that the subject is always mediated by signifiers and never directly in touch with their true self (Lacan 8). While Freud focused on the structural tensions within the psyche, Lacan emphasized how identity is constructed through images, language and symbolic recognition. Applied to adolescence his theory suggests that the formation of selfhood is always fragile dependent upon the gaze of others and regulated by symbolic systems like media, peers and culture.

According to the psychosocial theory proposed by Erik Erikson, adolescence is placed in the stage of identity vs role confusion that involves the process of negotiations between a person and the coherent sense of self. When this is not done it may result in uncertainty, instability and fractured identity (Erikson 128). At the core of Erikson's theory is the idea that identity is not simply discovered but actively constructed through experimentation, exploration and negotiation with one's social world. They test different roles, values and beliefs in search of a sense of self that feels authentic and socially acceptable (Erikson 96). This identity exploration occurs across multiple domains - academic, vocational, sexual, cultural and moral. For instance a teenager may experiment with different peer groups, hobbies or fashion styles as part of the identity seeking process. The trial and error nature of this exploration is not quite a sign of weakness but an essential part for healthy development. Adolescents are constantly in a state of flux between trying out various roles, online personas, friendship groups and other forms of rebellious behaviour as well as having to deal with the burden of adult expectations. Their lack of belonging and purpose can be seen as an expression of the concept of role confusion developed by Erikson as it is challenging to establish identity in a highly stressful setting. Erikson argued that without resolution such confusion can lead to instability, isolation or even delinquency (Erikson 102). Importantly Erikson placed heavy emphasis on social relationships in shaping adolescent identity. Unlike Freud who centered development on intrapsychic conflicts Erikson stressed that adolescents rely on peer validation, mentorship and social recognition. Identity must be confirmed not only internally but also externally by others in the adolescent's social world (Erikson 105). This makes peer groups especially significant like when friends act as advisors helping adolescents test new roles. Rejection by peers or exclusion from groups can cause role confusion and this could lead to identity crises. In the digital

culture, Erikson framework becomes even more pertinent. The social media platforms are spaces of psychosocial moratorium, and adolescents experiment with various forms of themselves in terms of photos, bios, posts and online communities before determining what is authentic. Nonetheless, such experimentation may also lead to the escalation of role confusion since adolescents are overwhelmed with facing competing ideals of success, beauty and identity. The online self portrayed through the curation of others might not align with the offline self and this results in tension and instability.

The psychological dynamics of the series are further explained by David Elkind who referred to such phenomenon as an adolescent egocentrism. Elkind posited that adolescents tend to think that they are always being watched by a non-existent audience and that their lives are special and this he referred to as the personal fable (Elkind 102). Both concepts can be seen in Adolescence teenagers are extremely self conscious creating an online personality to showcase to their peers as well as thinking that their plight is unique and not understood by adults. This egocentrism does not only increase feelings of alienation but also promotes risky behaviour as teens tend to think they are invincible in their own fable (Elkind 105). Elkind's theory is even more relevant in the digital era. Social media creates a literal imaginary audience where likes, comments and followers act as constant evaluators of one's self presentation. The curated online persona often exaggerates both egocentric tendencies that adolescents believe they are always being watched and they simultaneously craft narratives that points the uniqueness of their lives.

Adolescents especially teenage boys are drawn to online spaces while forming their identities. Incel forums and social media groups can provide a sense of belonging but can induce misogyny, resentment and fatalistic worldviews. Incel culture preys on adolescent vulnerabilities like loneliness, insecurity and desire for acceptance pushing

them toward misogyny and alienation. Elkind's ideas of the imaginary audience and the personal fable explain how adolescents perceive the world. Teens believe they are constantly observed and judged that induces feelings of rejection or humiliation. Incel communities amplify this by telling boys they are "always seen as undesirable."

Modern adaptations of classical concepts also highlight the Pareto Principle within incel thinking often cited as the "80/20" rule which perversely claims that 80 percent of women are only attracted to the top 20 percent of men (Screenrant). This ideology aims at giving a false sense of rationality to justify rejection and hopelessness. Teenagers who already have problems with identity, egoism or symbolic misrecognition can enthusiastically embrace these stories which strengthens isolation, bitterness and aggression towards women.

Adolescence is a time of identity development, susceptibility and increased social comparison. Most of the teens and young men struggle with the feeling of inadequacy especially in the areas of romantic and social success. In this context online communities especially those tied to incel culture which offer spaces to vent frustrations, seek validation and find ideological explanations for social rejection (Ging, 2019). Andrew Tate is a controversial figure in the manosphere, which is an online community focused on masculinity and men's issues. Tate's self proclaimed misogyny acts as a performative identity signalling power and authority while appealing to male adolescents who feel socially inadequate. Tate portrays toxic masculinity in digital spaces normalising misogyny and aggression as socially rewarded behaviour.

Adolescents and young men are especially vulnerable because the online communities continuously reinforce these messages encouraging feelings of entitlement and resentment among adolescents while discouraging empathy and healthy relationship development. The intersection of the ideology of Tate and the incel culture underscores

how digital personalities can use the psychological weakness to shape the social beliefs of gender and power. The incel culture is one of the harmful aspects of digital adolescence and it embodies the darker dimensions of adolescent development in digital age. For psychologically vulnerable teenagers the intersection of frustrated Id impulses, fragmented self images, unresolved identity crises and self consciousness creates a fertile environment for social alienation and potential radicalisation. The struggles are vividly portrayed in the series *Adolescence* demonstrating how unaddressed vulnerabilities during this formative stage can be exploited by toxic ideologies and online subcultures producing profound and lasting psychological consequences.

Chapter 2

Psychoanalytic Analysis of the Netflix Series *Adolescence*

In the Netflix series *Adolescence*, we are provided with a shocking and at the same time intriguing account of the life of teenagers by presenting the case of 13-year-old Jamieson Miller who is accused of killing his classmate Katie (*Adolescence, season 1*). The Netflix series dramatizes adolescent struggles revealing how media reflects and builds cultural understanding of youths. The narrative explores Jamie's relationships with his father Eddie, his peers and professionals such as Dr. Briony, a forensic psychologist. A main element of the series is the digital layer of communication particularly the use of emojis which functions as both a narrative device and a semiotic representation of adolescent identity, desire and social navigation.

The first episode opens with Jamie Miller's abrupt arrest which immediately establishes his position as both an accused criminal and a confused adolescent. Jamie is portrayed as withdrawn and emotionally knotted as the trauma of the arrest is immediately visible when he gets so scared that he wets himself. Episode 1 opens with the police officers forcing their way into Jamie's bedroom in the early morning hours a sequence followed by panic, disorientation and the abrupt collapse of adolescent privacy. The violent intrusion into his personal space immediately evokes Freud's notion of traumatic shock where the Ego is overwhelmed before it has time to defend itself (Freud, *Ego and the Id* 32). The officers occupy a world where language, rules and duty structure their reality unaware that they are about to shatter the structuring reality of a child. Jamie's bedroom, the private sanctuary in which adolescents explore identity is invaded by authority figures with guns breaking apart the most fundamental psychological boundary of privacy (*Adolescence, season 1, episode 1, 00:02:15–*

00:04:47). The frantic cries of Eddie and Mrs. Miller saying “He’s only a kid!” “You’ve got the wrong house!” reveal a family desperately trying to protect a child whose symbolic status as “child” has then been replaced by “suspect.” Erikson’s developmental theory makes this rupture even more profound as Jamie’s adolescent identity work is interrupted not by internal turmoil but by violent institutional labelling (Erikson 94). Elkind’s Imaginary Audience concept becomes literalised here as Jamie’s shame unfolds before neighbours, officers and family bringing about the feeling that the entire world is witnessing his humiliation (Elkind 121). His identity, already fragile begins to split. Throughout the arrest his denial of guilt is maintained creating initial doubt for the viewer and his father. Jamie’s emotional responses -shock, fear and inconsolable crying illustrate the clash between his Id impulses which seek immediate release of distress and the Superego represented by law enforcement and societal norms (Freud, *Ego and the Id* 25).

Upon arriving at the station Jamie undergoes the mechanical routines of custody processing of providing his name, confirming his rights, answering health related questions and being informed of his detention(*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 1, 00:02:20–00:20:10). These bureaucratic procedures exemplify Lacan’s Symbolic Order which are the rules, language and institutional rituals that strip the subject of personal meaning and reduce him to a legal category as a “juvenile suspect.” Jamie’s stammering responses, repeated “What?” and the inability to understand questions reflect Freud’s notion of disorientation under trauma where the Ego’s cognitive functions temporarily weaken (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 72). After Jamie is taken to the police station his father Eddie acts as his "appropriate adult". His fixation on wanting his father reveals Erikson’s developmental insight that adolescents still rely on primary caregivers during crisis even as they outwardly seek independence (Erikson 119). The interrogation

treated him not as a 13year old but as a criminal, alone and without parental support. DI Bascombe speaks with Eddie and Mrs. Miller and attempts at empathy saying that he completely understands their concerns that clashes with the parents' trauma. Eddie's fury, confusion and disbelief align with Freud's understanding of parental narcissistic injury where a parent's sense of self is wounded through accusations against the child (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 89). Mrs. Miller's insistence that Jamie "couldn't have done anything" reflects what psychoanalysis identifies as defensive denial, an instinctive refusal to accept unbearable information. Lacan would argue that both parents struggle to maintain a symbolic narrative in which Jamie is still the boy they know but the police evidence threatens to destabilise the foundational story of their family.

The medical assessment and evidence gathering at intensify Jamie's terror (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 1, 00:37:50–00:51:10). Blood tests, fingerprinting and the strip search represent extreme bodily vulnerability. Freud calls this ego humiliation where the subject experiences their body as exposed, inspected and invaded by authority (Freud, *Ego and the Id* 55). Eddie's trembling outrage by saying out loud "He's 13!" shows paternal protectiveness clashing with institutional procedures. Lacan sees the strip search as the ultimate reminder that Jamie's body is no longer his. It has become an evidence, a site of meaning for others than for himself. Jamie's soft statements saying "I don't mind" reveal resignation not consent. The arrest sequence is further complicated by the introduction of digital traces - the social media posts, emoji laden messages and interactions with peers. These digital symbols operate as a mechanism of socialisation and alienation. His outbursts against the police, his father Eddie and even his peers reflect the struggle of the Id demanding release while the Superego (represented by authority figures) attempts to restrain him (Freud 25). The

episode introduces early signs of Jamie's digital life where emojis and coded messages exchanged among peers increase his sense of alienation. The emoji caters as a displaced signifier allowing aggression to be expressed indirectly while it hides accountability.

Jamie represents Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development - Identity vs. Role Confusion where adolescents work to form a clear sense of who they are (Erikson 94). Jamie lacks personal narrative anchoring; he mirrors instead of defines, reacts instead of chooses and absorbs instead of asserts. Jamie's lack of self authorship becomes strikingly clear when his room is searched. Erikson notes that when individuals fail to develop a stable sense of self at this stage they often experience role confusion, insecurity and may even turn toward self destructive or outwardly harmful behaviors (Erikson 96).

Towards the end of the first episode it becomes clear that Jamie has undeniably committed the murder. His father Eddie is presented with the irrefutable truth that his own son is actually guilty. Even after the detectives reveal the CCTV visual, Jamie continues to deny it saying it was not him. Eddie's devastation upon seeing the footage is the shattering of his own Ego's defense mechanisms. The police station, the legal language and crucially the CCTV footage are instruments of the Symbolic Order - the realm of shared language, law and social structure. Jamie tries to follow Barlow's guidance to answer everything with "no comment" but under pressure and emotional confusion he trembles between silence and fragmented speech. Erikson's theory becomes central here as adolescents under stress sinks into dependency and confusion struggling to strengthen identity when external forces define them. When the detectives show CCTV of Jamie following Katie and later footage of their confrontation Jamie's panic heightens (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 1, 00:55:40–01:02:30). Freud interprets this as traumatic overload where the psyche shuts down in response to the indisputable

external narrative (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 81). Jamie breaks into sobs repeating “I haven’t done anything,” revealing Lacan’s notion of signifier failure he has no language powerful enough to defend his innocence against the symbolic machinery of evidence. The footage acts as an undeniable signifier that shatters Jamie's personal, internal and potentially Imaginary reality of his innocence. He is brutally placed within the Symbolic structure as a subject defined by the Law as "guilty" (Lacan 65-68). His continuous denial can be interpreted as the final remnants of his egocentric thinking fighting against an unbearable objective truth.

The episode ends at with Jamie and Eddie alone (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 1, 01:03:10–01:05:07). This final moment is really devastating. Eddie, overwhelmed and sobbing asks “What have you done?” a question that shatters the unconditional paternal belief that he had all along. Psychoanalytically this is the part where the collapse of the familial Imaginary occurs, here the father’s role as a protector fractures under institutional pressure. Freud calls this a moment of catastrophic identification where the child internalises the parent’s fear and doubt (Freud 118). Jamie’s voice repeatedly saying “It wasn’t me” echoes into void and neither authority nor family can fully hear him.

Episode two starkly portrays the issues of the new generation- the social media culture, bullying, harassment, racism and a lack of respect for authority. Episode two stretches into the exploration of digital semiotics and the adolescent identity. As DI Bascombe and DS Frank enter the school Mrs. Fenumore’s polite but anxious greetings reveal a faculty already destabilized by the murder (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 2, 00:02:10–00:05:30). All the hallway chatters, teachers sighing and the palpable tension communicates Lacan’s symbolic contamination where tragedy disrupts the stability of the communal structure (Lacan 81). The students’ whispered conversations about Jamie

talking around asking “Do you think he did it?” depicts Elkind’s imaginary audience where adolescents process collective trauma through rumours and moral speculations (Elkind 121). The students discuss police visits, knives and their own parents’ fear which demonstrates Erikson’s stage of identity formation through peer discourse where beliefs, anxieties and moral positions shape who they are becoming (Erikson 113). The scene taking place at the school office where Katie’s best friend Jade is brought in for questioning is really significant (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 2, 00:09:15–00:13:00). Her hostility and sarcasm when she says “I agreed, did I?” express Freud’s defensive anger, a shield against overwhelming grief (Freud 55). The investigators’ polite attempts to converse with Jade through her emotional rawness reveals the gap between the adolescent’s emotional nature and adult institutional language. Lacan interprets her dismissal of Bascombe’s business card as rejection of the Symbolic order she refuses the investigative framework because it cannot bring back the friend she lost (Lacan 72). When Jade states “She was the best person I knew” the depth of her loss surfaces beneath her hard exterior. Jade’s anger peaks as she accuses the police of blaming Katie. Her insistence “You should be sorting out the guy that killed her” reflects on Erikson’s identity turmoil that adolescents dealing with grief waver between vulnerability and aggression, trying to stabilize themselves within a narrative (Erikson 119). The school official Mrs. Fenumore’s attempts at decorum fail because Jade’s grief has no symbolic outlet so language collapses under those emotional weight. Her statements about overcrowded responsibilities show institutional strain. This can be interpreted with Lacan’s idea as she embodies the collapsing Symbolic authority of the school where teachers can no longer provide structure because tragedy has destabilised their role. The investigators address Jamie’s class where chaos erupts the moment Bascombe mentions the murder. Students’ outbursts and shouts saying “Did Jamie do

it?” “Oh shit, he did!” reveal the adolescent impulse toward unfiltered reaction (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 2, 00: 22:10–00:26:30). Freud notes that in youth, the Superego is still forming leading to impulsive speech and poor emotional regulation (Freud 62). Chaos intensifies in the scene when Jade attacks Ryan screaming that he “killed my friend” (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 2, 00: 33:15–00:36:05). Her grief morphs into violence, Erikson emphasises that adolescents express mourning in volatile ways due to still developing emotional regulation.

Then Bascombe and Misha interview Ryan who is one of Jamie’s close friends privately. When Ryan asks Bascombe about popularity it shows the adolescent obsession with social hierarchy, what Erikson calls “identity mirrors” shaped through peer validation (Erikson 127). The narrative shifts to Jade’s meltdown with Mrs. Bailey (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 2, 00: 47:00–00:49:30). Jade’s confession saying “She was the only one who actually thought I was okay” reveals attachment insecurity which actually aligns with Erikson’s concept of relational identity collapse after loss (Erikson 121).

DI Bascombe’s investigation introduces the concept of social media literacy as a barrier between adults and adolescents. One of the series’ key turning points is when DI Bascombe’s son Adam approaches him for a private talk. Here we can see Adam introducing him to the digital world that is beyond the perception of adults and this moment reframes the entire murder context. Lacan’s theory of signifiers becomes essential here where Adam demonstrates that digital symbols - the red hearts, dynamite and red pill emoji carry layers of meaning within adolescent culture that adults cannot possibly fathom. Adam guides his father to the online culture and different meaning underlying in various emojis - most notably the different meaning of the heart emoji that varies according to its colour. In psychoanalytic terms these symbols constrict

unconscious drives and social anxieties into simple interpretable signs which Jamie must navigate to maintain his social identity (Lacan 78). Also Adam says that he does not want to see his father “blunder about” in front of everyone” was embarrassing (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 2, 00:49:55–00:50:25) When Adam says, “You don’t call me son... you call other people son,” here the emotional fracture between them surfaces and perhaps Bascombe’s busy work life created a rift in their relationship.

Jamie’s interactions with his friends particularly Ryan reveal complex dynamics of loyalty, influence and coercion. Ryan when questioned about the murder weapon displays repression and evasion. His unwillingness to cooperate or reveal his knowledge about the knife suggests an active defense mechanism. Ryan’s involvement with the knife(the murder weapon) and how he runs out of the classroom when the investigators arrive come to question him accompanied by his classmates’ cheering and clapping, highlights the interplay of thrill seeking, social validation and the performative aspects of adolescent behaviour. This scene stresses how peer groups can widen risky or antisocial tendencies as the desire for acceptance and status often matter more than moral reasoning mirroring the tension between the Id’s impulses and the developing Ego (Freud 25).

The school environment acts as a perverse and cruel Superego for the adolescent subjects. Rather than enforcing healthy morality this social structure enforces compliance through humiliation and cyberbullying. The "incel" label functions as the ultimate social moral judgment that pushes Jamie out of the sanctioned group. Jamie's violent outburst (the murder) was the Id aggressively retaliating against the overwhelming psychological pressure of this toxic social Superego. Episode 2 acquaints us with the signifiers that defined Jamie’s identity and position within his peer group's form of language. The term "incel" and the "red pill" emoji function as

powerful, violent signifiers within the Symbolic Order of the school (Lacan 392). By labelling Jamie as such, Katie and her peers successfully designated him an "other" and exiled him from the legitimate social order which results in triggering his psychotic reaction. The act of cyberbullying where Katie publicly shaming Jamie via an emoji on Instagram is a performance for the Imaginary Audience. Both Katie and Jamie were acting in a way that assumed a mass of peers was constantly watching and judging their every interaction (Elkind 102-05). Katie sought validation for her perceived superiority and Jamie felt the humiliation hugely because he believed the entire school was watching his shaming. Jamie's immersion in the incel discourse is a severe form of the Personal Fable where he positions himself as a unique misunderstood victim whose suffering justifies an extreme unique response. The social media environment amplified his sense of unique persecution providing the psychological fuel for his crime.

The series also introduces the father-son B story focusing on Eddie's attempts to connect with his son. The difference between how earnest Eddie is but often fails to communicate with Jamie and his defensive stance highlights the generational divide in comprehending digital culture. The series shows that emojis are not just harmless graphics but powerful conveyors of social meanings that can cause misunderstanding and conflicts between adolescents and adults. A pivotal moment occurs when finally Jamie's father confronts him about his actions. The confrontation gives focus to Jamie's inner turmoil and the clash between his evolving identity and familial expectation. This scene brings out Erikson's notion that identity formation is influenced by social interactions and relationships (Erikson 96).

Adolescence Episode 3 focuses on Briony's psychological assessment of the 13-year old accused murderer, Jamie in a single interrogation room. The episode explores the complexities of masculinity, misogyny and online influences as Briony tries to

understand Jamie's actions by navigating their shifting dynamic which moves from friendly banter to dangerous resentment and anger. Briony starts guiding the conversation toward Jamie's father and grandfather who are his model of masculinity. Jamie is irritated as he says "This all started because I said you sounded like a granny" reveals his anxiety about being analysed. Masculinity here becomes not a trait but a perceived obligation like "men fix things, like sports, pub, making things." This reflects David Elkind's concept of adolescent idealism where teens adopt rigid stereotypes because they cannot yet steer through actual stuff. In this episode it becomes clear that Jamie is convicted of killing Katie.

Jamie grows frustrated and says "The first time you had actual questions... Now you're chatting shit" (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 3, 00:14:00–00:20:10). Briony's calmness contrasts his rising agitation, he needs her to stay consistent, predictable and soothing. When she tries to explore his fight with another boy he dismisses it labelling it as "not interesting." His minimisation is a defence against shame and scrutiny. As Briony asks about his father's reactions during sports, Jamie finally cracks and responds "He'd look away... didn't want me to see him looking sorry. Ashamed" (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 3, 00:20:10–00:24:20) This is one of the realest admissions in the series and it reveals his inner thoughts about how he cares about his father's reactions. Erikson would view this as the adolescent crisis of industry vs. inferiority carried unresolved into early adolescence the way Jamie associates failure with unworthiness. His plea for Briony to contradict him by stating "You're supposed to say he wasn't ashamed" shows his deep longing for reassurance. Jamie's rising agitation and him screaming "You do not control what I do in my life!" is pure Lacanian resistance to the Symbolic order. Elkind's imaginary audience is also visible as Jamie performs an imagined version of himself he thinks Briony expects. When Briony presents Katie's

Instagram comments and the emoji-coded incel insults Jamie finally reveals the depth of his humiliation and utters “Because I’m ugly.” Erikson’s crisis of identity manifests brutally as Jamie defines his whole being through rejection. He desires for Briony to say that he is wrong - “Aren’t you supposed to say I’m not ugly?” again reveals a longing for affirmation and assurance(*Adolescence*, season 1, Episode 3, 00:41:10-00:41:45).

Jamie explains to Briony what Katie’s emoji-themed attacks meant, he says he’s not an incel. He does see value in some of Andrew Tate’s manosphere stuff like the “80-20 thing,” as he puts it, or the idea that “80 percent of women are attracted to 20 percent of men.” It might seem like that in middle or high school when people are incredibly on guard about popularity, perception and everything. But then he calls Katie a “bitch” and says, “I should have killed her, but I didn’t.”

“I had a knife. I coulda touched her, but I didn’t. Other guys would have. But I didn’t.” The gravity of the act and the shocking nature of this offense committed by a 13-year old raises critical questions regarding the influence of peer dynamics and the atrocities that are injected into adolescent mind by the internet and peers.

Briony is taken aback because she realises that Jamie thinks he’s done “better” because he killed Katie with the knife instead of sexually assaulting her. That is why he thinks he did not do anything wrong. It is not that he does not understand what death is. For Jamie killing Katie was more moral than using the knife to make her “do things”. He’s already established that she is weak, was not going to have any friends, so she is not any better in his eyes. He establishes that she is weak as her naked photos got exposed on snapchat and he believes that a weak person like her should not have rejected him when he asked her out. This chilling logic presents the fragmentation of Jamie’s moral development and the influence of socialised perception of dominance

and vulnerability on adolescent the brain. Jamie's final pleas to Briony asking "Do you like me?... Don't you like me even a bit?" are agonising (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 3, 00:55:45–00:56:25).

The series also explores the parents' own unconscious drives. Manda, Jamie's mother often displays reaction formation and denial. Her extreme emotional outbursts alternating between blind defense of Jamie and blaming Eddie are a way to manage the unbearable truth of her son's guilt and her own perceived failure as a mother. Their arguments become a brutal exchange of accusations about past mistakes, arguing about who was too soft, who was too hard, who worked too much and who failed to see the signs. The episode is a painful deep dive into the Millers' family dynamics shifting the focus from Jamie's actions to the parental failures and the environment of the home that contributed to the tragedy. The police search disrupts and dismantles the family's privacy and forces the parents to confront the reality of their son's crime in their most intimate space. This physical invasion mirrors or reflects the psychological invasion of their lives and memories.

Episode 4 starts off with a seemingly normal atmosphere in the Miller family and it is Eddie's 50th birthday. But their illusion of normality is collapsed when Lisa discovers the van vandalised with "NONCE" (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 4, 00:04:30–00:09:00). The word graffitied functions as a Lacanian signifier of social death and becomes a mark branding the Miller family as morally contaminated by associating with Jamie. Erikson's framework of identity vs. role confusion operates at the familial level here as the Millers are stuck between the roles of victims and perpetrators. Eddie's attempt to clean the van with soap "It'll come off" becomes symbolic like a desperate attempt to "wash away" the shame of parenthood. The hardware store sequence is one of the episode's most devastating ones (*Adolescence*,

season 1, Episode 4, 00:15:00–00:25:00). The employee recognising Eddie, voicing his support and theories turn Eddie's shame into a spectacle. His sudden eruption at the teenagers outside yelling, throwing paint and slamming their bike can be understood as a result of his frustrated emotions as he cannot contain or articulate it.

The fourth episode communicates that the tragedy was not just caused by one person but by a culture. Jamie never openly expresses sadness, humiliation, anger or insecurity. These emotions are suppressed because of masculine conditioning, absence of emotional openness at homes and peer cultures that mocks vulnerability. Rather than articulating his pain Jamie acts it out. He is not exhibited as inherently evil but as a psychological subject of emotional neglects and rigid masculinity. One of the most powerful scenes takes place in the interrogation room where Jamie meets every question with silence. Freud interprets and renders such silence not as emptiness but as repression (Freud, 8). Jamie's inability to answer "Why?" does not show meaningless guilt but a broken identity struggling for language. Elkind's theory of the "imaginary audience" further explains this describing how adolescents often feel constantly watched and judged (Elkind 102). His silence becomes a defensive performance wherein he protects his vulnerability even under public scrutiny. In the episode when the question "Why did you do it?" is repeated the expectation is symbolic, it's meant to reveal a motive through language. But Jamie does not have the words or inner framework to express what he feels. His silence is not about refusal - it shows a deeper disconnect what Lacan calls "symbolic foreclosure" where someone literally cannot find the language to explain their inner turmoil (Lacan 72).

One of the episode's most heart rending scenes occurs when Jamie's mother pleads for communication. His averted gaze and emotional withdrawal mark a profound communicative rift. Freud would classify Jamie's reaction as a defense mechanism

specifically emotional avoidance developed when the Ego lacks the capacity to safely externalize affect (Freud 9). Developmental psychologist John C. Coleman points out that parental support is not enough if families lack a shared emotional language explaining that “affection without articulation leaves adolescents emotionally recognized but not emotionally understood” (Coleman 213). Elkind adds to this with his concept of the personal fable -the adolescent belief that no one can truly understand one’s inner experiences (Elkind 103). Jamie’s silence then is not a sign of emotional emptiness but of his belief that his feelings cannot be shared. Eddie’s breakdown on Jamie’s bed in the final scene tucking in the teddy bear, kissing its head and saying “I should’ve done better,” enacts the Freudian idea of mourning as the slow detachment from a lost ideal (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 4, 00:48:00–00:52:00). But Eddie cannot detach. His grief is not just because of Jamie but for the father he failed to be, the marriage he strained, the future that no longer seems to exist. The episode closes with the quiet, devastating decision to stay home, rent a film and eat Chinese food instead of going to the cinema (*Adolescence*, season 1, episode 4, 00:52:00–01:00:12). This gesture does not indicate failure, it is the family’s desperate attempt to reclaim a broken identity and to recreate the structure of a family even as its foundation has been destroyed.

Episode 4 of *Adolescence* functions less as a narrative finality and more like a emotional testimony. Instead of focusing on the motive or confession the episode roots its tragedy in a kind of silence, a space where feelings exist but words fail. This absence turns the episode into a rich ground for psychoanalytic and developmental examination showing how symbolic distance, identity confusion and teenage self centeredness combines to form a person who feels deeply yet struggles to tell their own story.

Chapter 3

Adolescent Crime in Contemporary India and Role of Parenting

Adolescent crime has emerged as a significant social and psychological concern in the contemporary India. With much urbanisation, digital exposure, family structures and increasing socio-economic inequalities adolescents today encounter complex pressures that influence their behaviour deeply. Crimes committed by juveniles legally below the age of eighteen range from petty theft and vandalism to serious violent offences such as murder, sexual assault and organised gang activities. According to the Crime in India reports published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) thousands of juveniles are apprehended annually for offences under the Indian Penal Code (NCRB, Crime in India). These crimes are not isolated acts of deviance but are often rooted in environmental factors such as poverty, lack of parental supervision, school dropout, substance use, peer pressure and exposure to violence.

Indian adolescents grow up within a deeply collectivist social structure where family, religion and social reputation play a decisive role in moulding their identity. Unlike Western societies that focus individual autonomy Indian society often prioritise obedience, conformity and respect for authority. As a result adolescents in India experience a unique tension between their emerging sense of self and the expectation imposed on them by parents, schools and society. This tension becomes high especially during late adolescence when identity formation, peer influences and emotional vulnerability reaches its peak. From a psychosocial perspective Erik Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion is relevant in understanding Indian adolescence (Erikson 125-35). Adolescents are expected to explore personal values, beliefs and roles. However Indian social structures often limit such exploration by

prescribing fixed life paths related to academic success, career choices and gender roles. This restriction frequently leads to internal conflict, confusion and suppressed emotions. Many adolescents struggle to navigate between who they are expected to be and who they wish to become which leads to anxiety, frustration and sometimes risk taking behaviours. The impact of globalisation, digital media and social networking platforms has further transformed adolescence in India. Exposure to global lifestyles, online communities and digital identities has also caused feelings of inadequacy, alienation and identity confusion. David Elkind's concept of adolescent egocentrism particularly the imaginary audience and personal fable is evident in how Indian adolescents increasingly perceive themselves as being constantly observed, judged or misunderstood (Elkind 91-95). This high self consciousness can amplify emotional reactions and impulsive decision making. When emotional needs remain unmet and identity conflicts are unresolved some adolescents may express distress through antisocial or criminal behaviour (Elkind 98). Thus adolescent crime in India cannot be viewed in isolation but should be examined as a symptom of broader psychosocial, familial and cultural dynamics.

Parenting in India is traditionally characterised by authority, protection and high involvement in their childrens' life. While such involvement is rooted in care and responsibility it frequently limits adolescents' individual freedom, emotional expression and identity exploration during a critical developmental stage. Indian parents often equate successful parenting with academic achievement and discipline. As a result adolescence becomes a period where parental surveillance intensifies rather than relaxes. Decisions related to education, friendships, appearance, career choices and even emotional relationships are closely monitored or controlled. In accordance with Erik Erikson's book *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) psychosocial

perspective of this excessive regulation interferes with the adolescent's task of resolving the crisis of identity versus role confusion. When adolescents are denied opportunities to experiment with roles and express individuality, they may experience confusion, resentment or emotional withdrawal. Moreover Indian parenting largely operates within a structure where open dialogues and serious conversations between parents and adolescents is limited. Emotional struggles such as anxiety, confusion, anger or curiosity are often dismissed as silly phases or acts of disobedience. This lack of emotional validation contributes to what psychoanalytic theorists describe as internalised conflict where adolescents suppress emotions to maintain parental approval. Over time this suppression may result in impulsive behaviour, aggression, secrecy or rebellion. And these responses are frequently misinterpreted by parents as moral failure than psychological distress. Parental expectations in India are also deeply gendered. Adolescent girls often face stricter monitoring of behaviour, actions and sexuality while boys may experience pressure to display strength, emotional restraint and dominance. Such differential socialisation reinforces rigid gender roles and affects emotional development. Girls may internalise distress leading to anxiety or depression whereas boys may externalise frustration through aggression or risk taking behaviour including involvement in delinquency or crime. In recent times the gap between parents and adolescents has widened due to rapid socio-cultural changes. While adolescents are increasingly influenced by digital media, peer culture and global ideologies many parents continue to operate within traditional frameworks of authority and discipline. This generational disconnect often results in misunderstanding, moral panic and control rather than empathetic engagement. The absence of adaptive parenting strategies during adolescence induces many adolescents navigating identity conflicts without guidance or emotional security.

It is also crucial to understand that there is a tendency in society to put the blame on the parents for their children's wrongdoings. A child's emotional distancing is not a failure of parenting but perhaps a developmental necessity. We must clearly understand that modern parents cannot realistically monitor every influence shaping their child. It is as if when parents are at fault, then tragedy feels preventable. Parents can provide care, values and presence but they cannot fully govern an adolescent's inner conflicts, digital encounters or moral choices. Holding parents entirely responsible is something that people do because it is the easier way out. In traditional thinking parents are viewed as the primary shapers of a child. They are indeed but only to an extent as it is not practically possible to monitor or help their child in every single step of the way. Some things are for them to figure out and by the adolescent age they definitely are capable of recognising and distinguishing between what is good for them and what is not. They are slowly developing their critical thinking skills and they are at the age to really understand what is happening around them. By the time a child reaches adolescence much of their identity formation happens outside the home, like in peer groups, online spaces, educational platform and private imagination. Parenting simply does not occupy the central position it once did in childhood.

One of the most widely discussed cases involving an adolescent offender was the Ryan International School murder case (2017) in which a sixteen-year old student was accused of killing a younger child inside school premises in Gurugram ("Class 11 Student"). Investigations suggested that the accused adolescent was struggling academically, emotionally and had allegedly committed the act to postpone an examination. The case shocked the nation because it challenged the assumption that school environments are inherently safe and highlighted how academic pressure, lack of

emotional support and impulsivity during adolescence can lead to extreme outcomes. It reflects Erikson's perspective that adolescents appear to have been trapped in role confusion not being able to reconcile personal inadequacy with external expectations of success (Erikson 132). The absence of emotional support and healthy identity likely induced feelings of incompetence and alienation. In Kerala a fifteen-year old schoolboy was taken into custody in 2021 for killing his friend following an argument over personal issues ("15-yr-old Arrested"). Media reports suggested that the act was not planned but resulted from a sudden emotional outburst. Such cases reveal how adolescents often lack the emotional maturity to process anger, jealousy or humiliation making them prone to reactive violence rather than calculated criminal intention.

Property crimes involving younger adolescents have also been widely reported. In Nagpur a group of boys aged between thirteen and fifteen were apprehended for repeatedly breaking into houses and stealing valuables (Bose). Police investigations revealed that the juveniles were influenced by older peers and driven by the desire for quick money and excitement. These acts can be viewed as expressions of the pleasure principle where the id seeks immediate gratification like money, excitement and peer approval without thinking about the consequences (Freud, *Ego and the Id* 22-25). Erikson's framework suggests that early adolescents often struggle with emotional regulation while attempting to define their social identity (Erikson 129). The inability to manage humiliation, rejection or rivalry can result in violent responses when the adolescent lacks mature coping mechanisms. Elkind's notion of the imaginary audience further explains how adolescents often feel constantly judged by peers exaggerating the significance of social belonging (91).

The role of social media and digital validation is evident in cases where fourteen and fifteen-year old minors stole motorcycles for fun and online display. Erikson's theory highlights the adolescent need for recognition and identity affirmation which in the digital age is increasingly measured through online visibility. Elkind's imaginary audience becomes amplified through social media platforms where adolescents feel constantly watched and validated through likes, comments and shares. National data from the National Crime Records Bureau reinforce these interpretations showing that a substantial proportion of juvenile crimes are committed by adolescents below sixteen years of age (National Crime Records Bureau). These figures suggest that criminal behaviour during adolescence is closely linked to developmental immaturity rather than fixed criminal intent. Erikson points out that failure to resolve the identity crisis can lead to confusion, rebellion and deviance while Elkind highlighted how cognitive distortions in adolescence impair judgement and risk assessment.

In another case from Mumbai a thirteen year old boy was detained for repeatedly stabbing a peer over a trivial dispute ("13-yr-old Booked"). Reports suggested that the adolescent had experienced sustained emotional humiliation without adequate adult intervention. Erikson stressed on how adolescents require stable support systems to navigate identity formation. When such systems fail anger and frustration may be internalised through violence. In Delhi, a surge in murders by minors has become a major concern with some juveniles exhibiting extreme brutality such as stabbing victims over minor disputes (Mehta). This "brazen" behaviour reflects Elkind's notion of the personal fable where adolescents believe they are invincible or above the law often boasting about their crimes on social media to seek peer validation (Elkind 94). In Uttar Pradesh several minors were apprehended for damaging public property and engaging in coordinated thefts as part of a neighbourhood peer group. Police

reports indicated that the juveniles viewed these acts as adventurous rather than criminal. Erikson's theory suggests that peer groups often function as substitute identities during adolescence. Elkind's theory complements this by explaining how adolescents underestimate consequences believing that punishment applies to others not themselves. The idea of punishment differs here.

The influence of digital spaces on adolescent identity formation is increasingly visible in crime patterns. Online spaces often treat social interactions as "quests" or "levels." When real life conflict is viewed through a digital lens the adolescent may withdraw from reality viewing a violent act as just a "task" to be completed for status rather than an act with human consequences. For teenagers an "online dare" provides a sense of belonging and competence that they may be lacking in a high pressure academic environment. Perhaps losing face online feels like an existential death in the adolescent eyes. Erikson's theory suggests that adolescents experiment with identities and the internet provides an unregulated arena for such experimentation. Elkind's adolescent egocentrism becomes amplified online as adolescents believe their actions are constantly visible and meaningful. Elkind's concept of the imaginary audience is particularly relevant in understanding why adolescents often react disproportionately to embarrassment or conflict.

For a thirteen or fourteen-year old a public insult, academic failure or social rejection can feel like a permanent mark on their identity. When adolescents commit crimes following such experiences it is not much about the act itself and more about escaping the perceived shame. Erikson viewed shame and doubt as unresolved conflicts that resurface during adolescence if it is not seriously addressed in earlier stages of development. Perhaps losing face online feels like an existential death in the

adolescent eyes. Rather than just focusing solely on punishments, addressing the root cause of adolescent crime is essential for meaningful reform and rehabilitation.

Addressing adolescent crime therefore requires supportive educational environment, psychological intervention and opportunities for healthy identity formation.

Conclusion

Adolescence emerges not as a transitional but as a psychologically intense and vulnerable stage of development. The developmental theories consistently demonstrate that adolescents experience heightened emotionality, fragile identity formation and incomplete emotional regulation. The study uses Freudian theory and its associated ideas to illustrate that adolescent behavior is directed by powerful drives (instincts) however, adolescents do not have a developed enough Ego to mediate between their desires and consequences. Furthermore, using Erikson's theoretical framework illustrates that adolescent identity development is heavily reliant upon social validation and experimentation and is shaped by a multitude of symbolic, emotional and environmental influences. The study presents a synthesis of classical psychological theories, contemporary media and cultural representations along with real world examples of adolescent identity development to present a picture of adolescence as being a time of increased susceptibility and that identity development occurs in an environment characterized by both extreme internal struggle and external pressures.

This study has examined adolescence as a psychologically vulnerable and socially challenged stage of development demonstrating that adolescent behaviour cannot be understood in isolation. It is induced by the emotional, symbolic and environmental forces that shape young individuals. Therefore adolescent identity is seen as fundamentally relational and symbolic as opposed to autonomous. In the current day, digital platforms function as continuous mirrors and increase self surveillance and comparison. Symbols, emojis, memes and other forms of digital communication function as compressed signifiers that express feelings of belonging,

rejection, aggression or desire most of the time with little to no emotional depth. Therefore these symbols create a platform for misunderstandings and emotional misinterpretations.

Adolescent identity is seen as fundamentally relational and symbolic as opposed to autonomous. Lacan's theory of the mirror stage and Symbolic Order reveals that adolescents do not discover identity internally but construct it through language, images, peer perception and social recognition. In the current day, digital platforms function as continuous mirrors and increase self surveillance and comparison. Symbols, emojis, memes and other forms of digital communication function as compressed signifiers that express feelings of belonging, rejection, aggression or desire most of the time with little to no emotional depth. Therefore these symbols create a platform for misunderstandings and emotional misinterpretations.

The analysis of the Netflix series *Adolescence* demonstrates that adolescent violence cannot be understood as a individual pathology alone. Jamie Miller's behaviors can be viewed as the result of emotional neglect, peer humiliation, adherence to strict definitions of masculinity and ideological exposure as opposed to his having been born with some form of innate tendency towards criminal behaviour. Jamie does not have the emotional vocabulary to describe his pain and therefore; he expresses himself through silence, denial and displaced aggression. The series portrays the manner in which institutions i.e., law enforcement and school systems place adult symbolic frameworks onto an adolescent mind that is still developing. Parenting emerges as a crucial yet overlooked factor. Adolescents in this series are not devoid of care but deprived of emotional understanding. In addition the series portrays emojis and digital labels such as "incel" as being significant contributors to

psychological deterioration due to their ability to facilitate social exclusion. The study shows that emojis and digital labels are used as significant signs within peer cultures that can convey rejection and aggression as simple and reduced symbols further exemplifying humiliation. Ultimately the series illustrates that adolescent male psychological deterioration is caused by the combination of rigid norms of masculinity, online radicalisation and peer shaming as opposed to accountability. In the Indian context this vulnerability is further intensified by collectivist family structures, rigid academic expectations, gendered socialisation and limited emotional dialogue within households and institutions.

While parental involvement is often rooted in care and protection excessive control and emotional invalidation can inadvertently suppress self expression and intensify internal conflict. However holding parents solely responsible for adolescent crime oversimplifies a far more intricate reality. By adolescence, identity formation increasingly unfolds within peer groups, digital spaces and private psychological worlds that extend beyond parental supervision. Adolescence must be understood as a structurally vulnerable phase shaped by psychological immaturity, symbolic pressure and social environment. Adolescent crime and deviance are not anomalies but symptoms of unmet developmental needs.

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