

Matt (host): Hello, and welcome back to Nimble Youth, the podcast for anyone who cares about pediatric mental health, youth development, and helping young people navigate challenging times. I'm your host, Matt Butterman. And today, we're driving into a powerful, timely piece of television, the British series *Adolescence*, which many of you may have seen earlier in the year. It's continuing to stream on Netflix. And to discuss this very powerful series, I'm joined as always by my colleague and partner, Doctor Gretchen Hoyle, pediatrician with twenty five years of clinical experience, to help us unpack not only the story itself, but what it signals about youth today.

So let's start with some context. *Adolescence* premiered on 03/13/2025, and quickly became a global phenomenon. In his first two weeks, it racked up something on the order of 66,000,000 global views, making it the highest streaming total ever in that span for a limited series on Netflix. And by his third month, it had reportedly reached around 141,000,000 views, placing it among the most watched English language series on the platform.

Although precise US only numbers are harder to isolate, the series charted in Netflix's top 10 across dozens of countries, including The US in its early weeks. And the critics have loved it, with aggregated reviews giving it a universal acclaim mention, a Metacritic score of 91 out of 100, and reviews calling it the closest thing to TV perfection in decades. So for a short show about a 13 year old boy accused of murdering his classmate is causing major ripples. We'll talk today about why it's resonating and what it means for us as clinicians, parents, educators, and youth advocates. Joining me now is Doctor.

Gretchen Hoyle. Doctor. Hoyle, welcome back.

Dr. Hoyle: Thanks so much for having me. I'm really looking forward to this conversation.

Matt (host): Yes. Great. Let's jump right in. So for the listeners who may not have seen the show or only got partway through it, we'll lay out a quick synopsis. So *Adolescence* is a four episode British psychological crime drama that was created by Jack Thorne and Stephen Graham and directed by Philip Barrantini.

The narrative centers on Jamie Miller, a 13 year old boy in a Yorkshire school who's arrested for the murder of a classmate. We then see the police investigation, the school's response, the family's reaction, and through flashbacks and interviews, we uncover how Jamie arrived at this point: the bullying, the social media, the misogyny, and the manosphere influences, the pressure of teenage identity. Notably, each episode is filmed in one continuous take, which makes it very powerful, a single camera sequence, which gives the series a kind of immersive, unrelenting feeling. And in that sense, it's different from many teen dramas. It's very raw, intense, unflinching in examining adolescent stress and masculinity, peer pressure, and social media toxicity.

Dr. Hoyle: Exactly. I mean, from a developmental pediatrics lens, it spotlights several themes that we see every day in clinic. The impact of digital culture, the normalization of misogynistic

peer cultures, the fragility of identity in early adolescence, the family system strain when a child goes off track.

Matt (host): Yeah. So why has the show resonated so strongly, globally and also within US audiences even without a lot of explicit US specific data?

Dr. Hoyle: Sure. So a few things. That show really pulls back the curtain on what many teens experience but really never see dramatized. The sense of invisibility combined with really high stakes, the cruelty of pure culture, the romanticization of the underdog anger, and then the male entitlement narratives. So we also see, because it's done in a series, the cinematic style, so the single take filming is really long and uninterrupted scenes, and it takes young adolescent experience seriously.

It doesn't talk down to it and that attracts more mature teens and adult viewers. The global streaming platform means cross cultural resonance, meaning that countries are facing similar issues around smartphone usage, social media radicalization, teenage isolation, early violence. So while the setting is in The UK, it feels very much like something that could happen here or wherever the viewer is. From a parent or educator standpoint, many of us are hungry for media that gives access to the reality behind the headline of teen violence stories rather than superficial portrayals.

Matt (host): Yeah, for sure. And you mentioned earlier the role of digital culture and pure dynamics, so we'll get into that right now. Let's unpack some of the themes that emerged in the show and reflect on how they map what we're seeing in your practice. Now I've picked five main ones. One is pure culture and social media pressure.

Number two would be masculinity, entitlement, and the manosphere influences. Number three would be family system breakdown and parenting fatigue. Four would be early early adolescent identity and the sharp inflection point of age 13 through 15. And then number five would be school community response, crisis management, and prevention. So let's go through those a little more in-depth.

Dr. Hoyle: Sure. So, I guess we'll start with the first one, the peer culture and social media pressure. And, you know, we talked about this a good deal on our previous podcasts. It's really well covered in the anxious generation. But in this series, Jamie's story involves relentless mocking, exclusion, and, like, a viral moment of rejection that drives him towards resentment and radicalization.

Social media is not just a backdrop it's integral to the story. In real life, we know that early adolescents ages eleven-fifteen are especially vulnerable to peer feedback loops and then online shame, micro bullying via apps they have on their phone with them all the time. The show really captures that very well. The second theme you mentioned was masculinity, entitlement, and manosphere influences. One of the critical strands of the show is how Jamie is influenced by online forums and peer groups and misogynistic rhetoric.

The idea of the incel involuntary celibate ethos, a belief of being owed more than he gets the resentment of female peers. While the show is British, many U. S. Clinicians note the same emergent phenomenon boys feeling disenfranchised, invisible, disconnected, hurling towards toxic identity groups as a solution. And of course Jonathan Hite really emphasizes this in The Anxious Generation in the chapter that he has on boys.

So I encourage folks to cross reference that text as well. And the third

Matt (host): Richard Reeves' book, A Boys and Men, and then True.

Dr. Hoyle: A Boys and Men as well. Absolutely.

Matt (host): Scott Galloway has talked a lot about this as well.

Dr. Hoyle: Yep, yep. All of those are completely valid sources for information. So yeah, I think it's an emerging area of study, an emerging area of dialogue and discourse. And I think it's just really important for us to kind of unpack it. And so then the third theme that you mentioned was family system and parenting fatigue.

So Jamie's parents in the show are attempting to engage and protect and manage shame for him, but they are overwhelmed. And I see that all the time in practice and clinic. Parents are juggling jobs and screens and multiple demands. Sometimes they're taking care of their own parents. They're unaware of what's brewing in their child's online world.

The show invites viewing of the aftershock of a crisis, like what can we do before this happens? And actually that fourth episode of the show was really just the fallout within the family. And it was just extremely helpful to get that context so that we can see what we're trying to intervene for. And then your fourth theme was early adolescent identity and an inflection point. So the fact that Jamie is 13, matters.

That age is a major developmental pivot of puberty cognition, and social reorientation from a familial to peer brain restructuring. This show uses that moment to heighten tension. Clinically, I've always reminded people that the stakes at age 13 to 15 are much higher than many assume. And I've done a lot of a deep dive on sort of the data within our own practice about when, at what age I see kids have sort of a spike in their visits for mental health conditions. And 13 is a really big time for that.

And so I really encourage folks to consider that as your children are reaching that early adolescent phase.

Matt (host): Yeah, it's a critical time certainly.

Dr. Hoyle: It is. And then the theme of the school and community response and then crisis management and prevention. So in adolescence, the school, the police, the community all scramble once the incident has occurred, but the lead up is less visible. This offers a teachable moment. So how can schools, families, and communities intervene earlier, not just respond after the damage is done?

Matt (host): Great. Thank you, Doctor. Hoyle. So let's shift now to how we might use the series and its lessons as practical settings for parents and educators perhaps. So we'll talk about what we do now.

So if someone watches adolescence or sees part of it with friends or whatever, what are the questions that we should follow-up with and how do we turn media engagement into action? So I'll go to you, Doctor. Hoyle, for your thoughts on that.

Dr. Hoyle: Sure. So I think specifically for parents, I would say that after your teen watches the show, you would potentially ask them some questions that help get their insight on it. Which character do you identify with? Which one scared you the most or felt the most familiar? Framing the conversation through identification really helps.

It's a great conversation starter of the show in general and so you can start a sentence with like Jamie felt invisible, has that ever happened to you? Or What would you do if you saw someone being excluded or mocked online? And then a screen time check as well. So this shows a depiction of social media loops to ask how much do you spend online when you're upset or bored. So how much time do you spend online when you're upset or bored to help your teen build intentional offline coping strategies.

And this is back to our real focus on embodied experiences as opposed to online experiences. You really build community in the embodied world, and so we want to be deliberate about looking for those opportunities. So that's sort of for parents. So for educators and maybe school counselors, you could consider showing a selected safe clip with appropriate warnings. And then break into small group discussion, peer pressure, masculinity, online behavior, all of those things could be great topics.

And then also use it as a pre crisis tool rather than a post crisis. This show is really helpful for prevention as much as for response. And then for youth advocates and therapists, using the themes of identity, belonging, exclusion as entry points in therapy or group work. So Jamie's turning point was a rejection moment. What are turning points in your story?

So asking that question can be really helpful to sort of be able to connect with patients and see what their experience has been like. And then looking at masculinity and entitlement narratives, we want to help young males articulate alternative routes of belonging, purpose. Sorry, I'm going take that back again. Alright, so we want to help young males articulate alternative routes of belonging, purpose, peer leadership that aren't rooted in resentment or exclusion of other people. Yeah and that's an important thing because there is a lot of content out there right now

that is building resentment between genders within these, let's say, Gen Z and maybe some of Gen Alpha, that age group. And it's a pretty consequential reality if people in that age group are on such different pages based on gender breakdown.

Matt (host): Right. Yeah. But just a few caveats. It's British and so while it's slightly different, perhaps the stage is slightly different than it might be in The US. It's its typical British potty mouth.

So sure. Language is rough, but it's very you know, it's it's it's very authentic and realistic. It does include some very intense scenes. The murder, of course, is never never really shown, but it may be triggering for some youth. So, it's not necessarily for all teens to watch unsupervised, certainly.

Dr. Hoyle: Right. Absolutely.

Matt (host): Yep. Yeah. So a new thing we're doing on the podcast. We invited some listener questions ahead of time, and here are two that came in. And so, I'll read them, and then doctor Hohan, maybe you can give a quick response.

So question one comes from a parent. They say I watched adolescence with my 14 year old son. He said all the peer pressure stuff wasn't realistic for his school. Kids here are chill. How do I bring the conversation forward without making him feel attacked or like his world is dangerous?

Dr. Hoyle: Yeah. That's a great question. So, it is important to validate his experience. You could say something like, it sounds like you haven't seen things like this in your school and that's good. But then you can pivot to curiosity and not an accusation.

And so by saying something like, if you did see someone who was isolated, what would you want to do? And use the show's scenarios as what ifs and invite brainstorming rather than a critique.

Matt (host): Right. So question number two comes from a school counselor, and this person asks, could we run a youth group session around adolescence, and what kind of structure might you recommend, how long, and which themes, then how to debrief safely?

Dr. Hoyle: Sure. Yeah. That would be a great idea. So if you were, let's say you were doing, like, a ninety minute session, you could do a ten minute introduction about to the show and what it is and what the content warnings are. And then twenty minutes of a short clip, maybe the first five minutes or scene of the peer rejection.

I think that was helpful. And then for thirty minutes, into small groups like, what did you feel? Were any of those scenes relatable? See if we can get some conversation going amongst the teenagers. And then sort of reunify for a full group discussion.

What could someone have done differently? What support do we have in this school or in this church or in this organization that could potentially intervene. And then in closing, for maybe ten minutes, can provide resources, counselor contacts, peer support, safe online tips, reassure students about the confidentiality and help seeking. Throughout the session you'd want to emphasize that the show dramatizes extreme consequences but the themes of isolation, exclusion, online anger certainly exist and exist in their world. Encourage students to reflect on preventing escalation.

Matt (host): Yes, excellent. So we have a discussion guide which we'll include in a download link in the show notes for this. So in wrapping up here, I just want to offer each of us sort of one closing takeaway message for our audience, which includes parents, clinicians, educators about the relevance of adolescence? So I'll start with you, Doctor Hoyle.

Dr. Hoyle: Sure. I mean, so my takeaway would be that the media matters. When a show like adolescence resonates globally, it's not just entertainment. It's a window into what young people are experiencing or what they could experience. So we want to take the opportunity to use it as a catalyst to ask, so what are our teens seen for who they are, and are their peer worlds healthy?

Do they have alternatives to exclusion, anger, and anonymity?

Matt (host): Yeah. For sure. Mhmm. So I guess mine would be a common theme of this podcast, Engage early, and do it with curiosity, not fear. Because the moment of crisis in the show is the extreme.

What happens when things are not, you know, sort of nipped in the bud. But the buildup behind that, the subtle isolation, the mocking, all the online sort of the digital shadows, those are what you see, I'm sure, in your own practice. It's a theme not only in this country but worldwide. And so as we always say, the sooner we open discussion, whether that's with parents, whether that's with a therapist or with a pediatrician, the better. The easier it will be to get a hold on problems that may come down the road.

Absolutely. Yeah. Yep. So Doctor. Hoyle, thank you so much for joining me again today.

We appreciate your wisdom and your insight, and thanks to our listeners for joining us. If you've watched adolescence or are using it in your youth work, we'd love to hear your reflections. Please drop us a note on social media or send us an email to [infonyouthpodcast](mailto:infonyouthpodcast@gmail.com) and we may share thoughts, and honestly of course, on a future show. So until next time, stay nimble, stay attentive, and keep investing in the young people in your world. Bye for now.