
AN EXPLORATION OF ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE NETFLIX SERIES ADOLESCENCE (2025)

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the portrayal of adolescent identity crisis through the character Jamie in the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025) and to analyze the psychosocial factors influencing his identity formation. This research uses a qualitative descriptive methodology to analyze narrative elements across four episodes, focusing on identity conflict, peer relations, family dynamics, and digital media influence. Grounded in Erik Erikson's identity development theory, the research highlights that adolescent identity formation is contingent upon prior developmental stages. Jamie's experience of profound feelings triggers maladaptive behaviors, including violent acts. Both Jamie and his close friends are marginalized due to perceived physical unattractiveness and social unpopularity, resulting in sustained peer victimization. Psychosocial influences identified include parental relationships marked by inadequate communication, peer rejection and bullying, and emerging sexual awareness during puberty. Despite a nonviolent and harmonious family environment, ineffective parental engagement contributes to Jamie's emotional withdrawal. Furthermore, the research underscores the significant impact of social media as a double-edged factor, facilitating social connectivity and information acquisition while simultaneously exacerbating feelings of alienation, anxiety, and exposure to cyberbullying. Without adequate adult guidance, adolescents may internalize harmful ideologies, such as misogyny and distorted masculinity constructs, adversely affecting their mental health. The findings advocate for enhanced family communication, supportive peer environments, and structured digital literacy education to foster healthy adolescent psychosocial development.

Keywords

Adolescents, Crisis Identity, Psychological Issue.



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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a challenging and pivotal stage in an individual's psychological growth. It signifies the transition from childhood into adulthood. Adolescence is a period of instability, marking this transitional phase (Lumban Gaol & Stevanus, 2019). Throughout this time, adolescents experience significant changes not only in their physical development but also in their psychological state. These psychological shifts impact their behavior and interactions within their social environment. During this crucial phase, the support, attention, and affection from parents and those surrounding adolescents are vital for their development (M Setiarini, 2021).

Adolescents encounter complex emotional, social, and identity-related changes during this period. This is reflected in how they manage and express emotions (Az-Za'balawi, 2007), such as handling stress constructively, articulating anger verbally instead of through harmful behaviors, facing difficult or threatening situations with composure, coping with sadness appropriately, controlling reactions to sudden events, and demonstrating affection, love, and empathy towards others (Amita Diananda, 2019). Moreover, the challenges adolescents face have diversified due to rapid technological progress and socio-cultural transformations, including increased exposure to digital and social media.

The struggles of adolescence have been a recurring theme in literature across multiple genres, approached with creativity and imagination. Luxemburg (Musyarofah, 2020) Emphasizes literature as a creative work, an artistic invention rather than a simple reproduction of reality. In producing literary works, artists present aesthetic qualities and communicate their perspectives and reflections on various life issues. Through the lens of adolescence, literature often captures emotional conflicts, identity crises, and the search for belonging. These narratives entertain and serve as a mirror for readers to better understand their developmental experiences.

A literary work in film is not merely a medium of entertainment, but also a powerful platform for education, critical reflection, emotional engagement, and social commentary. In an era where digital media increasingly shapes perceptions and behaviors, cinematic narratives offer an urgent and necessary space to examine adolescents' evolving psychological and social realities. This research investigates the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025), which functions as both a psychological lens and a social mirror, revealing the complex inner lives of youth and the identity crises they face in an era saturated with digital stimuli and performative pressures.

In this context, media, particularly serialized content on platforms like Netflix, have become dominant in constructing adolescent realities, shaping how young people understand themselves and their place in society. The urgency of critically engaging with these narratives lies in their dual role: they reflect existing issues while also potentially reinforcing or challenging them. The 2025 British psychological drama *Adolescence* emerges as a timely and significant text, offering a nuanced portrayal of male adolescent struggles amid toxic masculinity, emotional neglect, cyberbullying, and fractured familial relationships. Its relevance is heightened by the growing global mental health concerns among youth, making its analysis relevant and necessary.

Research on adolescent psychological issues in the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025) reveals several critical research gaps. First, although several studies have demonstrated a correlation between parental control and internet addiction among adolescents (Cetinkaya, 2019; Shek et al., 2018) There has been limited exploration of how this factor is integrated into the narrative structure of contemporary television series, such as those on Netflix. This gap is particularly significant, as environmental pressures and parenting styles can profoundly influence adolescent behavior and mental health. From the perspective of parental roles, previous research has indicated that parent-child conflict is a significant predictor of social media addiction among adolescents (Khodarahmi et al., 2023).

Dienlin and Johannes (2020) discuss the role of digital media and its usage in adolescent psychological well-being; however, they do not specifically address how media representations in the series *Adolescence* influence adolescents' perceptions of their mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety. The lack of research focusing on the real-life experiences of adolescents who engage with media narratives represents a significant gap in understanding the context of their daily lives (Wang et al., 2014). This oversight limits a deeper comprehension of how adolescents internalize, negotiate, or even resist the mental health messages conveyed through popular media.

Ultimately, character portrayals in narratives that engage with critical psychological issues, such as identity conflict and family relationships, are often overlooked in media studies (Lin et al., 2020). Thus, there is an opportunity to explore how the depiction of psychological conflicts and social dynamics in the series *Adolescence* can be interpreted in light of existing literature. Furthermore, studies on the influence of media characters offer valuable insights into how such representations shape adolescents' views on identity and social acceptance within a broader context (Trisnawati et al., 2023).

The series *Adolescence* (2025) addresses a range of pressing adolescent issues, including toxic masculinity, the impact of social media on identity formation, cyberbullying, social alienation, and dysfunctional parent–child relationships. Through the character of Jamie, the series vividly portrays a teenager struggling with a deep need for validation, emotional neglect, and the overwhelming influence of the digital world. These struggles reflect a broader identity crisis many adolescents face, where internal insecurities clash with external social expectations. Moreover, the series highlights how psychosocial factors such as familial disconnection, peer pressure, and media exposure shape an adolescent’s emotional landscape and sense of self.

Adolescence offers a timely and critical opportunity for exploration, given the scarcity of studies that closely examine character portrayal in media narratives from a psychological perspective. To that end, this research seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) How is the adolescent identity crisis represented through the characters and narrative structure of the series *Adolescence* (2025)? 2) What psychosocial factors influence the main character’s process of identity formation as depicted in the series? Addressing these questions, the study aims to bridge the gap between media analysis and adolescent psychological development.

Based on the research questions, this research aims to analyze how the adolescent identity crisis is portrayed through the characters and narrative structure of the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025), focusing on the main character, Jamie. By exploring the psychological and social dimensions presented in the series, the research seeks to identify the underlying psychosocial factors such as parents, peer group, pubescence, and social media influence. Through this analysis, the study intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of how media narratives reflect and influence adolescent psychological experiences in the digital age.

METHOD

This research applied a descriptive qualitative approach to examine adolescent identity's psychological and social dimensions as portrayed in the Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025). This approach was selected for its ability to interpret complex phenomena such as character development, emotional dynamics, and narrative structures without relying on numerical data. The method focuses on meaning-making and contextual understanding, aligning with literary and media analysis goals. It allows a nuanced exploration of how individual scenes, dialogues, and character interactions reflect deeper psychological themes relevant to adolescent experiences.

The primary data consisted of all four episodes of the series *Adolescence* (2025). Each episode was transcribed and analyzed to capture key scenes, dialogues, and visual elements related to identity conflict, peer interaction, emotional expression, family dynamics, and digital media influence. These narrative elements were data points for identifying recurring patterns and psychosocial themes. Particular attention was given to how visual cues and character behaviors conveyed internal psychological states. This multilayered analysis enabled a deeper understanding of the interplay between narrative structure and adolescent identity formation.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis, guided by Erikson's theory of identity development, and concepts from literary psychology and media representation. The process included coding relevant scenes, grouping them into thematic categories, and interpreting their significance in light of existing literature. To ensure interpretive validity, researcher triangulation was applied through peer discussion and code verification. Character analysis centered on Jamie as the protagonist, while also considering supporting figures, such as family, peers, and online interactions, that influence his identity formation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this section, the researchers describe the data analysis and findings, which aim to describe and analyse the formulation of the problem. The researchers will show how the adolescent identity crisis is represented through Jamie's character and what psychosocial factors influence the main character's process of identity formation as depicted in the series. The analysis draws on selected scenes and dialogues to uncover recurring themes related to self-image, peer pressure, parental relationships, and emotional regulation. The study comprehensively interprets Jamie's psychological development throughout the narrative by examining verbal and non-verbal cues.

1. Adolescents' Crisis Identity

Data 1: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : You said in one of our previous sessions that you had friends, Tommy and Ryan. But that you wouldn't consider yourself popular.

Jamie : Yeah.

Ms. Briony : You said you were bullied. The three of you were bullied.

...

Ms. Briony : The three of you felt ostracized. You said sometimes this would get physical. People would spit on you from classroom windows. You'd be tripped up and pushed.

Jamie : Yeah.

Data 2: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : Did she do this to anyone else?

Jamie : No.
 Ms. Briony : Well, why did she do it to you?
 Jamie : Because I'm ugly.
 Ms. Briony : You think that's why she did it to you?
 Jamie : Well, I'm the ugliest, I suppose, so.....

The main character in the series, Jamie, exhibits an identity crisis characterized by feelings of inferiority. As shown in Data 1, during a dialogue between Jamie and a psychologist interviewing him, Jamie perceives himself and his two close friends, Tommy and Ryan, as unpopular among their peers. Jamie also admits that they are targets of bullying at school. This is further supported by Data 2, in which Jamie views himself as unattractive and believes he deserves such treatment. The scene in Data 2 depicts Jamie being bullied by Katie, a female classmate from the same school. According to Jamie, Katie singles him out because he is, in his own words, "the ugliest" in their school.

2. Psychosocial Factors

a. Parents

Data 1: Episode 1

Mr. Bascombe : Okay, And if were to ask your dad what time you were home, what would he say?
 Mr. Miller : I was on a call. I'd been in for ten minutes when you kicked my door in.

The dialogue above occurs in an interrogation room between the police, Mr. Bascombe, and Jamie's father. This exchange serves as one of the pieces of evidence indicating that Jamie's father is a man deeply absorbed in his work. He is frequently occupied with overtime duties and, as a result, pays little attention to his child at home. This emotional and physical absence suggests a lack of parental involvement that may contribute to Jamie's behavioral struggles. The scene subtly highlights the disconnect between parent and child, reinforcing one of the series' central themes: the impact of familial neglect on adolescent identity development.

Data 2: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : Does your dad like his job?
 Jamie : He fixes toilets. What do you think? He works hard. Long hours. You get the best money from emergency plumbing out of hours.
 Ms. Briony : Is he funny?
 Jamie : Sometimes.
 Ms. Briony : Loving?
 Jamie : No, that's weird.
 Ms. Briony : Angry?
 Jamie : I supposed
 Ms. Briony : How does he get angry?
 Jamie : He's never hit me.

Ms. Briony attempts to learn more about Jamie's family life and his perception of his father. From the dialogue, it can be concluded that Jamie was raised in a harmonious family environment.

His father is portrayed as a responsible and hardworking figure who has never engaged in any form of violence toward Jamie. However, Jamie's response to whether his father is "loving" — calling it "weird" — suggests an emotional gap in their relationship. This indicates that while physical needs may have been met, emotional needs such as affection and warmth were likely neglected. The absence of overt abuse does not necessarily equate to emotional closeness, highlighting the nuanced portrayal of parental dynamics in the series.

Data 3: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : So, what does he do when he's not working?
 Jamie : He basically likes all sports.
 Ms. Briony : Would you watch lawn bowls with him?
 Jamie : No, it's... it's not for me.
 Ms. Briony : Are you not into sport?
 Jamie : No
 Ms. Briony : None of it?
 Jamie : Yeah, I'm..I'm not good at much, but I'm really good at getting out of PE.

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

In this dialogue, Ms. Briony explores the closeness between Jamie and his father. It becomes apparent that Jamie does not have a particularly close relationship with him. Jamie also has different interests from his father, who is passionate about sports. However, his father appears to impose this interest on Jamie, expecting him to enjoy sports. This is evident as Jamie repeatedly sighs while recounting the experience. The father's disappointment when Jamie fails to meet his expectations creates emotional distance and contributes to Jamie's sense of inadequacy. This moment reflects a broader theme of conditional acceptance, where parental affection is tied to performance rather than genuine connection.

Data 4: Episode 4

Mrs. Miller : [sniffles] 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.
 Mr. Miller : We couldn't do nothin' about that. All kids are like that these days, aren't they? You know, you don't know what they're watching in their room, love. Could be watching porn or anything. Do you know what I mean?

This dialogue takes place between Jamie's father and mother as they reflect on Jamie's daily behavior. Data 4 also reveals that Jamie is a highly reserved child. He does not have a particularly close relationship with his mother either. Jamie is often absorbed in his world; after returning from school, he goes straight to his room and plays on the computer until midnight. As a result, there is

a lack of meaningful communication between the parents and the child. This emotional distance indicates a breakdown in parental engagement, where Jamie's isolation goes unnoticed or is dismissed as typical adolescent behavior.

b. Peer Group

Data 1: Episode 1

Jamie : *[pointed at the picture] That's Tommy. That's Ryan.*
Mr. Bascombe : *Okay. Good friends, yeah?*
Jamie : *Yeah.*

The dialogue takes place in an interrogation room. Mr. Bascombe, a police officer, questions Jamie about his daily life and whether he has any close friends. Jamie says he has two close friends, Tommy and Ryan. They frequently interact and spend time with Jamie, both during school hours and outside of school. This suggests that despite the emotional distance he experiences at home, Jamie can still form meaningful peer relationships. These friendships may serve as an important source of emotional support and belonging in his life. Moreover, his ability to immediately identify and name his friends indicates trust and attachment, which contrasts with his strained connection with his parents.

Data 3: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : *You said in one of our previous sessions that you had friends, Tommy and Ryan. But that you wouldn't consider yourself popular.*
Jamie : *Yeah.*

Data 4: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : *You said you were bullied. The three of you were bullied.*
...
Ms. Briony : *The three of you felt ostracized. You said sometimes this would get physical. People would spit on you from classroom windows. You'd be tripped up and pushed.*
Jamie : *Yeah.*

Data 3 and Data 4 occur in a psychologist's consultation room. At that time, Ms. Briony attempts to learn more about Jamie's daily life and his relationships with close friends. Jamie conveys the same information as in Data 1, stating that he has two friends, Tommy and Ryan. Jamie explains that they are male students who are not popular at their school. They are often targeted for bullying and are socially excluded by other students. This shared experience of marginalization appears to strengthen the bond between the three boys, forming a small but meaningful support network amidst a hostile social environment.

c. Pubescence

Data 1: Episode 1

Mr. Bascombe : Okay, look. I'm going to ask you about romantic relationships. Sexual relationships.
 Jamie : Why?
 Mr. Bascombe : Well, I noticed on your Instagram that you reposted a picture of this model. What's her name, Jamie?
 Jamie : [splutters] I just like her pictures.
 Mr. Bascombe : You don't know her name?
 Jamie : No.
 Mr. Bascombe : Okay. You also posted a picture of this woman and this woman. And below this one, the more recent one, you can see that there's a series of comments and innuendos which seem pretty aggressive. They're from you. How do you feel about women, Jamie?
 Mr. Miller : What kind of question is that?
 Mr. Bascombe : Are you attracted to women?
 Jamie : Yeah

Data 1 takes place in the interrogation room. Mr. Bascombe attempts to explore Jamie's interest in women. From Jamie's Instagram account, it is discovered that he frequently reposts images of adult female models. This indicates that, at 13, Jamie has begun to show an interest in the opposite sex. However, Jamie's discomfort and hesitation during the questioning suggest a lack of emotional maturity in navigating his developing feelings. His short and defensive responses indicate confusion or embarrassment about discussing romantic or sexual topics. This reflects the complexity of early adolescent identity formation, where curiosity about sexuality often emerges without the communication skills to process it healthily.

Data 2: Episode 3

Ms. Briony : Right. And you follow lots of women on Instagram. Models.
 Jamie : Yeah.
 Ms. Briony : You don't need to put photos up, though. Why do you?

This dialogue takes place during an interview session with a psychologist. Data 2 also indicates that Jamie's experience of puberty has begun to manifest in his growing interest in women. Jamie expresses this interest by reposting images of female models and following numerous women's accounts on Instagram. He does not use his social media account to post photos of himself, but rather primarily to view images of attractive women. This behavior reflects an early stage of adolescent sexual awareness, where visual appeal becomes a central means of exploring attraction and identity in a digital context.

Discussion

Adolescence is a transitional period marked by profound psychological and social changes. This study examined the portrayal of adolescent identity crisis through the character of Jamie in the

Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025), focusing on the psychosocial factors influencing his identity formation. The findings reveal that Jamie's psychological turmoil is manifested through inferiority, emotional isolation, social rejection, and distorted perceptions of masculinity—all of which are intensified by digital media exposure. These complexities highlight the need for greater attention to how media representations influence adolescents' self-concept and emotional development during this critical life stage.

The analysis is grounded in Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which posits that earlier developmental stages influence identity formation during adolescence. Jamie's identity crisis is rooted in a sense of inferiority, likely stemming from unresolved conflicts in Erikson's fourth stage—Industry vs. Inferiority. He perceives himself as physically unattractive and socially rejected, which reinforces his belief that he is inadequate. This internalized inferiority leads to emotional withdrawal and aggressive behavior. The most extreme manifestation of this is the murder of his friend, Katie. The narrative illustrates the psychological toll of prolonged peer rejection.

The research identifies several psychosocial factors contributing to Jamie's identity conflict. These include strained parental relationships, particularly emotional neglect from his father. His peer environment is marked by bullying, exclusion, and a lack of acceptance. Puberty intensifies his confusion as he navigates emerging sexual feelings and insecurity. Jamie also turns to social media, consuming idealized portrayals of beauty and masculinity. These images shape his self-perception and deepen his dissatisfaction. Collectively, these factors disrupt the healthy development of his adolescent identity.

Parental Influence: Although Jamie lives in a nonviolent household, the absence of meaningful communication results in emotional disconnection. His father's ignorance of his interests and the imposition of rigid expectations reflect a form of emotional neglect. This aligns with Fatmawaty (2017), who asserts that ineffective communication between parents and adolescents leads to emotional withdrawal and alienation (Fatmawaty, 2017). The finding affirms prior studies showing that parent-child conflict contributes to adolescent mental health issues, particularly when parental understanding and empathy are lacking (Cetinkaya, 2019; Shek et al., 2018).

Peer Rejection and Bullying: Jamie's failure to form healthy peer connections leads to intense social exclusion and bullying. According to Nisfiannoor & Kartika (2004), acceptance among peers is critical for adolescents' emotional well-being, while rejection may trigger aggression and depression (Nisfiannoor & Kartika, 2004). These findings resonate with studies that link peer

victimization to long-term psychological distress (Wang et al., 2014). In Jamie's case, repeated rejection not only isolates him but also contributes to the development of deep-seated anger and feelings of worthlessness.

Puberty and Emerging Sexuality: Jamie's growing interest in the opposite sex is illustrated by his obsessive consumption of idealized female images on social media. This reflects Batubara's (2016) argument that early adolescents often experience heightened sexual curiosity alongside emotional immaturity. Jamie's behavior represents a distorted channeling of this developmental task, shaped not by direct interpersonal interaction but by filtered and performative digital content (Batubara, 2016). As a result, his understanding of intimacy and attraction becomes superficial, reinforcing unrealistic expectations and deepening his emotional confusion.

Digital Media and Ideological Exposure: One of the most compelling insights is the role of social media in reinforcing Jamie's sense of alienation and toxic beliefs. This affirms the view of Ayub & Sulaeman (2022), who warn that without adequate adult supervision, adolescents may absorb harmful ideologies from online content (Ayub & Sulaeman, 2022). The series illustrates how Jamie's internalization of misogynistic views contributes to emotional dysregulation and aggression, echoing concerns raised by Nur Cahya et al. (2023) about the mental health risks of digital overexposure (Nur Cahya et al., 2023).

Compared to previous studies that often isolate one factor, such as parental neglect or digital addiction, this research offers a more integrative lens, showing how multiple psychosocial stressors interact in a mediated environment to produce complex identity conflicts. The novelty of this study lies in its close reading of fictional representation to illustrate how media narratives can reflect, reinforce, or challenge real adolescent experiences, thereby extending the conversation in both media psychology and literary studies. By bridging psychological theory with narrative analysis, this research highlights the value of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding youth development in the digital age.

In sum, the series *Adolescence* (2025) reflects ongoing psychological struggles among youth and critically engages with broader societal failures in family dynamics, peer systems, and media regulation. These findings reinforce the importance of nurturing environments, inclusive peer culture, and critical digital literacy in promoting healthy identity development among adolescents. Such representations can serve as valuable pedagogical tools for educators, parents, and policymakers to understand better and address the multifaceted challenges faced by today's

adolescents.

CONCLUSION

The Netflix series *Adolescence* (2025), through the character of Jamie, presents a compelling depiction of adolescent identity crisis shaped by interrelated psychosocial factors. This study concludes that Jamie's identity confusion is rooted in unresolved developmental issues, particularly feelings of inferiority, manifested through poor communication with parents, peer rejection, pubertal vulnerability, and overexposure to digital media. Erikson's theory of identity development affirms that crises do not emerge in isolation but are cumulative outcomes of earlier psychosocial conflicts. Jamie's emotional withdrawal is intensified by a lack of empathetic parental engagement and repeated experiences of marginalization and bullying, both offline and online. Although social media offers avenues for self-expression and connection, in Jamie's case, it becomes a source of psychological distress, amplifying insecurity, exposure to toxic ideologies, and cyberbullying. These findings emphasize the need for strengthened familial communication, emotionally supportive peer environments, and structured digital literacy programs to support adolescent mental health and identity development. For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative analyses of adolescent representations in other streaming series across different cultural contexts or to employ participatory methods involving adolescent viewers to understand better how they interpret and internalize media portrayals related to identity and mental health. Such approaches would enrich the understanding of media impact by capturing diverse cultural narratives and the subjective meaning-making processes of adolescents themselves. This could also inform the creation of more responsible and psychologically sensitive media content targeted at young audiences.

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