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# Representations of students and educational institutions in the Netflix series *Adolescence*: a roundtable discussion

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This roundtable discussion explores how adolescence, student identity and educational institutions are framed and positioned in the Netflix series *Adolescence***.** The creators of *Adolescence* wished to "provoke a conversation" about young people's experiences in the digital age, male violence and the manosphere. In this roundtable discussion, six UK-based educators reflect on the series and engage in a critical discussion regarding its representations of students on screen.

## Introduction

The Netflix series *Adolescence* was released in 2025 as a limited series and focuses on a 13-year-old boy, Jamie, who is accused of the murder of a female classmate. The four-part series examines the events that took place and seeks to understand his motivations for such a horrific crime (Netflix 2025). The series explores issues relating to the impact of digital technology, toxic masculinities and misogyny. Series creators Stephen Graham and Jack Thorne explain inspiration for the series stemmed from a number of disturbing real-life events in which teenage boys committed violent acts against teenage girls (Hibbs and Moss 2025). Thorne explains how they seek to "look into the eye of male rage" (Hogan 2025) and that "we made this show to provoke a conversation. We wanted to pose the question – how do we help stop this growing crisis?" (Gov 2025).

The aim of provoking a conversation has certainly been achieved as the series has become Netflix's second most popular English-language series. The series has attracted significant public interest and has been referred to as "a wakeup call" to parents about the complexities of being an adolescent and the perils of navigating harmful content online (Thorpe 2025). Several organisations and charities have joined the discussion through offering advice to concerned parents and calls for action to address issues relating to digital safety and misogyny (for example, Mental Health Foundation 2025).

In March 2025, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer held a meeting at Downing Street to discuss the influence of toxic materials online. Series creator Jack Thorne and producer Jo Johnson were invited, alongside key charities and young people (Youngs 2025). The conversation focused "on rethinking adolescent safety and how to prevent young boys being dragged into a 'whirlpool of hatred and misogyny'" (Gov 2025). The discussions at Downing Street also focused on banning the use of smartphones in schools and a digital age of consent, drawing on policies from Australia. It has been agreed that *Adolescence* will be available to screen for free in secondary schools to raise awareness of the influence of toxic materials online. The Netflix series *Adolescence* can therefore be seen as a highly commercially successful drama, but also a series which has sparked national debate and policy discussions.

In this roundtable discussion, we explore how adolescence, student identity and educational institutions are framed and positioned in the series. We argue that the series positions adults as unknowing about the realities of this adolescent world and reflect on how it has sparked concern and panic among the public.

## Participants

Dr Kay Calver, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Bedfordshire

Dr Bethan Michael-Fox, Lecturer in English and Creative Writing, Open University

Dr Oli Belas, Senior Lecturer Education and English, University of Bedfordshire

Shelby Davies, PhD student, University of Bedfordshire

Maisie Glazier, Primary PGCE student, University of Bedfordshire

Josh Habimana, Secondary School Teacher (Maths)

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**Beth**: For the purposes of the roundtable, what were your overall impressions of the series? What was your gut reaction to it?

**Josh**: I think I'm probably watching at the wrong time in the sense that I had already heard quite a few messages about it, but I had also heard a lot about the cinematography, which I couldn't escape. It's like one shot throughout. I thought that was amazing. The acting was brilliant, and some things are realistic. I think the school is probably an exaggeration of a failing school, but not that unrealistic. I was impressed by several things. Firstly, that regardless of what's going on in the school, there's always some teacher who seems to have some sort of authority and there's always that caring teacher whom a child can connect with, so there were a lot of realistic things. However, I thought the choice of a 13-year-old was really unrealistic. If you've ever stood in front of a 13-year-old, dear God, they are children, they really are. And so whilst the acting was really good, there was a sense of like this is.... what I might find believable, dealing with a 15/16 year old, maybe, but I thought that bit wasn't realistic. The trouble is, statistically, anything that went on there could happen; it just isn't representative. I looked up how many knife crimes have actually happened. And essentially, you know, statistically, you don't even hit 1,000, which, when we think of how many young people are actually in Britain, serious crime of that nature is so low.

**Beth**: It's great to get your insights. Shelby, can we jump to you, please? With your first initial response to the series?

**Shelby**: Yeah, sure. I think what stood out the most to me through *Adolescence* was actually the themes that demonstrate how young people now grow up in the digital age and how the use of technology, social media and that space is now influencing our

young people. I think it was accurate in its representation. I think it did well to show both sides of people who understand it and interact with it that way and then also students who maybe understand the language but try and steer away from it. But I think it slightly missed the mark in terms of showcasing how the other side of education and the community in a sense that like, obviously, we're losing our youth spaces and that kind of stuff. I think there was a big focus on the individuals, but not as much focus on the social and systemic factors and the contributions those issues bring to the topics that *Adolescence* is trying to showcase.

**Beth**: Thank you so much, Maisie. You're up.

**Maisie**: So I think one thing that really screamed out at me was the dad, the main police officer, didn't understand [messages left on social media] until his son pointed it out. So that made me start to think, OK, how are young people communicating with each other, realising this then led me on to another documentary on Channel 5 called *The Real Adolescents* and Josh, I'm going to pinpoint something you said, you noted that it's slightly unrealistic, I can understand that, but then when you watch these documentaries which showcase that it isn't and are full of these children aged 13 to 16 year olds that were carrying knives and that were committing these crimes – that were stabbing people. After every scene, there was a new slang word; one of them was 'cheffer'. I'm not that old, really, I'm part of the younger generation, and even I had no understanding of the meaning of that word, and many others. I thought, I don't know what that means. Luckily, they had the definition for cheffer – it's carrying a sharp-bladed object on your person. I didn't know that, and it linked to what was in *Adolescence*. There's this whole dialect that these young people are communicating through social media. My stance is we've opened Pandora's box, nobody knows how to stop it and now it's just an evolving situation – the issue is getting bigger and bigger. So now they can communicate without anyone really understanding what the true meaning is behind it. So therefore when professionals are presented with issues, how do we help resolve the issues if we can't understand them fully?

**Kay**: I would like to pick up on something you mentioned there as well, Maisie. I think something that came out in the series is that the police officers actually thought she [the murder victim] was being nice. They thought she'd written nice comments on his Instagram account but she was being mean. So, you might come across as being nice and polite and quite complimentary about people's posts or pictures, but actually there are hidden meanings behind those comments that are part of the adolescent world and not understandable from an adult world. So you might look at that and be like, "oh look, people are saying really nice things about my son's post", but actually maybe they're not nice at all.

**Maisie**: Yeah, yeah.

**Kay**: It was the idea that you could read something and you think it's nice, but in their world, it's not and it's an insult and that definitely struck a chord.

**Beth**: Yeah, the representation of adults as being not in the know was reinforced quite a few times. I thought that when the psychologist confused Facebook and Instagram as potentially the same thing, but Oli, can we get your initial views of the series?

**Oli**: Yeah, I think in some ways that's really what the series stages isn't it, that adults and young people are living, quite literally, in different social and linguistic worlds. And when we think about the reason we're having this conversation – the special issue of *Students on Screen*, how students are represented – in some ways, students, as we would tend to think of them, or young people, aren't represented all that much. Across the four episodes, the kind of primary drama are these moments of awful revelation for adults, where they have these moments of "Oh, I didn't understand *that*", "I didn't know" or "I didn't know that's what *that* meant." So the show is really these series of kind of awful revelations for adults. I know this sounds like a bit of a cheap trick, but in some ways, the show does kind of stage the adults as the students: they're going on this very sharp, very traumatic learning journey and they're kind of having to understand, piecemeal, little parts of this adolescent world that they've been locked off from. In some ways, that's quite an interesting drama to stage. But to come back to Josh's points, you know, and Maisie, you picked up on this: I do think that in Episode 2, the representation of the school is really problematic. Yes, it's an exaggeration of an almost-certainly failing school. I think that's a point really well made, Josh. It also seemed to me – and again, I know the focus is supposed to be on student representation – but it was a problem with the writing of that episode. There were all these strange kinds of failure. I thought even if the school is struggling, even if the school is, in Ofsted terms, "failing", there's no teacher in that school who, when they hear the name Andrew Tate, goes "Oh, yes, I've heard the students talking of him." They go "Oh, yeah. He's been a safeguarding trigger-word since 2021." And so there's a kind of sense in which the series doesn't quite understand its own brief or its own mission, at least in that episode.

I just think there's almost like a veil there between the writers or between show runners and their subject matter. The drama that's being staged is this lack of understanding that adults have of adolescent worlds. But the writing also displays a kind of lack of understanding of the writers' own subject matter, at least in that episode.

**Beth**: Yeah, I spotted in Episode 2 a bit of irony in the staging of the series. Maybe I am being cynical, but the line from the female police officer at the school about how she

finds it upsetting that it is always the boy who gets the focus not the girl seemed to me to be a way of addressing quite unsuccessfully the fact that this series does exactly that. There is no sense of the victim and who she is. You know, there's a kind of really strange absence of her.

But coming back to my overall impressions, I think on a kind of personal level I was thinking, gosh, why is he allowed to stay up so late on a computer and why is he out so late? But then I had to question those kind of moral judgements. They weren't awful parents and actually they weren't doing much different to anyone else. So like, why this kid? Did anything kind of anger you or feel like it really didn't sit true with your own experiences of young people in recent years? Or the opposite, perhaps it really resonated?

**Kay**: I think I'll pick up on what you mentioned, Beth, in the sense that the series is called *Adolescence* and a lot of the discussion about it has been about young people, but central to the storyline is really masculinity, and it's following Jamie and his male friendship groups. And while it is meant to be about adolescence, it's from that male perspective. We don't really know much about the girl, apart from Jamie saying "she's a mean bitch". So we never really get much of her story. And in a different scene it is alluded that her best friend has previously experienced trauma and engaged with therapy. But apart from like a 30-second reference, it's not really unpacked across the four episodes. So I suppose it made me think – is it a series about adolescence, which suggests all children and young people, but would a better name for it have been maybe masculinity or something?

I didn't like the fact that it's really targeted at working class young people, I suppose I'm worried about the stigmatisation of young people from working class areas. It represents these students as engaging in antisocial behaviour, having a strong opposition to authority, not engaged in school and it concerned me to what extent the series might reinforce some of those stereotypes of working-class adolescents.

**Josh**: I guess one of the things I liked about the series was that it presented the fact that as a teacher, you are always trained to know that a perpetrator has got two sides to them. First, they are a perpetrator, but they're also vulnerable because that's the thing that's never lost when you're dealing with children, they are all vulnerable. All of them, including the worst of the worst, they're vulnerable to something. And so the fact that it didn't lose that, the series really highlighted Jamie's vulnerability.

I guess when I said it was not realistic, it's not that it couldn't happen. I live in Luton, so I am aware of it and we kind of have to live with it, but what is unrealistic is

when there is a knife crime it's very rare the young people are not connected with gangs or have been groomed into it so. Individual knife crime is very rare. It's quite hard to find. I think on masculinity, and this is not a very popular opinion, but generally in my experience, the boys who struggle with this kind of stuff, it is so rare that they've got a compassionate, kind and caring stable male adult at home. It's rare that kids with a positive male role model engage in violence.

**Kay**: I think that's intentional Josh, in the sense that people would be watching *Adolescence* feeling like it could be anyone's child, and that it could happen to you, your family or your children. And you know I hate this terminology from government policy, but it's not just "dysfunctional families" that this might apply to, you know. And I think in the series, there are initial hints and concerns about the dad being abusive. The detective in charge wonders whether Jamie has been abused and if this might have been a contributing factor to this violent murder. This is one of the guiding questions at the beginning when the police officers are trying to understand his motivation to commit the crime. Is the reason for the murder a response to some kind of trauma? But I suppose the series is quite clever in the sense it shows that Jamie does not have a history of family abuse, but has been repeatedly exposed to extreme views online – that this toxic online material has altered and shaped his psychology.

**Josh**: Yeah.

**Kay**: And I think that in itself is much scarier than the idea that people only commit these kinds of really horrific crimes because something horrific also happened to them. And I think the idea that it's through this repeated exposure to extreme and violent content, which let's face it, anyone can access and be a victim of. I think that's actually a powerful message portrayed in the series. Maisie, I know you've looked at Andrew Tate in your undergraduate dissertation, and we've had many a conversation about Andrew Tate! There were some passing references to him as part of the series, how do you think it ties in?

**Maisie**: So I think as professionals, we know that children and young people are vulnerable, all of them in so many ways. All it takes is for them to go online, see the misogyny that is put out there and think, yeah, this is good. They then adopt those thoughts, they adopt those ways of thinking and they almost find that place to belong. They find something to speak to somebody about and that they can engage in conversation. But because they are vulnerable, they don't realise that that is the wrong outlook to have. And we all know of Andrew Tate and the powerful influence he holds. He is such a big part in the digital world, for years people have presented the complications surrounding Andrew Tate.

I think something that angered me through *Adolescence* was that misogynistic views weren't spoken about enough. And when you compare that to what Josh was saying, a standalone independent knife crime is quite unheard of – it's the children that are involved in gangs. Why was misogyny not delved into a lot more? Because that is a huge problem, especially with the fact that everybody is online. You can't survive without being online. Some children are believed to be born with a dent in their finger to hold the iPhone. It's such a relevant part of life and even if you don't follow things like that it can't be ignored. Statistics show 13% of Twitter is pornographic content and you don't have to follow anything relevant for this to be the case. It's just what comes up without even searching for it. So an innocent child or an innocent young person who hasn't even searched it can stumble across pornography, they can stumble across Andrew Tate, they can stumble across these views and because they are vulnerable, they're like a sponge, they're going to take in this information, something's going to stick. And what? What do we do?

**Kay**: I think in some ways I was disappointed that there was a murder and that might sound really odd, but I felt like the murder overshadowed what was actually really important content in terms of the lived realities of children and young people. And I suppose maybe the murder happened as that shock factor of like what the cumulative consequences of this can be. But I'm with you, Maisie. For me, I wanted more about the Andrew Tate effect. Looking at misogyny, opposition to feminism, a real critique of the school system – these aspects were there and were the bits that I was interested in, but in lots of ways, it was kind of glossed over. How does it relate to your work or ideas, Shelby?

**Shelby**: I totally agree with you that the murder overshadowed the importance of the content. I think the biggest standout for me was Episode 3 and how it brought together both Jamie's identities of being viewed by people as an aggressor and a vulnerable young person. For me Episode 3 really showed the audience a glance at what it is like for a teenage boy to grow up in today's world, balancing many different spaces such as home, school, friends and the digital world. The scenes between Jamie and the psychologist, where he talks about being ugly, showed the audience how self-esteem, identity, and the absence of positive role models can influence behaviour, like what Maisie was just saying we're now in a world where it's so hard to avoid those kinds of topics. It is definitely a challenge as we have to engage with young people about these topics in a sensitive way and do our best to educate them and keep them safe, but these topics are evolving so quickly that as practitioners it is hard to keep up with a rapidly changing world especially trying to watch and understand the digital space and the

real world space at the same time. Coming back to the discussion on dialect earlier, I think even our generation we use like blue love hearts and the 100% sign, but that's like love and we agree with you. But now that's like, really, really bad. And actually, it's funny because me and Maisie had a conversation before this roundtable started saying how like adolescence was kind of a surreal sort of come back to both our undergraduate dissertations. So Maisie did all the Andrew Tate stuff, but I actually thought from my own dissertation as well, it was kind of another form of parental gaze. In the sense that everyone's like, get it into schools, get it into schools [agreement to screen *Adolescence* in schools]. But I actually think it's another series that is written for the adult world, and I think it's there for parents and adults to teach them about the world that the adolescents are living in. I don't think it's the best series to teach young people about those topics.

**Kay**: Yeah, it was definitely written for an adult audience, wasn't it? But I think for me some of the themes that the series explores, like popularity, exploring your sexuality and friendships are things that cut across time, so some of the themes explored in the series aren't new. The new dimension to this really is the social media aspect in terms of how it shapes and influences our popularity and our standing within school. For example, considerations like, "How many followers have you got?" "How many people are liking my posts?" and "Do I look cool online?" In terms of sexuality, there are references as part of the series about sexting and sending nudes. And the series, briefly, explores the consequences of the murder victim sending a nude and then it being distributed across the school, and the repercussions of being called a slag because she sent it, and then being called flat-chested, so there was some really interesting content there. But that shaming of women and women's body is, as you know, has always been around. But it's now the fact that there's these, like, digital legacies there now.

Something I didn't like personally is the entire last episode was all about the parents and I felt the takeaway message was "we didn't do enough", "we weren't there enough", "we didn't watch him enough", "we didn't check in on him enough" and I suppose it kind of put the blame and the onus on parents to supervise and control their children to prevent bad things happening to them. But does that therefore mean it's your fault if bad things do happen to them? I would have liked a more a nuanced ending in terms of where that blame or change might come from. What did anyone else think about the role of the parents?

**Maisie**: I mean, I completely agree with the last episode. I think they could have used that hour for something to change and really draw in on the message, because what

was the message? Because we're sat here, the six of us debating what was the message, the message to me might be something completely different to Kay, to Oli, to Shelby, to Josh, to Beth, the message is different to all of us. So what was the overriding message? And I think that poses the question to me, and people may disagree – did it get so much popularity because somebody was murdered, or did it get popularity because of the influx of social media in the world that we live in, this misogynistic content, this pornographic content? The children are just surrounded by it, in 2022 Ofcom wrote a report saying that 97% of 3 to 17 year olds are online, that might be through a laptop, an Xbox or a mobile phone, that's 97%. I only heard two days ago on the radio that Ofcom are saying there has to be bigger safety measures. Why is that now three years later, why have we waited three years for that to become something that we need to put in place, so again, what was the message? Why did it then switch back to the parents? That, that's my question.

**Beth**: I think that's really interesting Maisie and I think for me, I do a lot of analysis of film and TV and it's so great to get different perspectives on it and how it functions. And I often think with things like this, it's a drama, so it's not a documentary. Part of its success is that we have all interpreted it in somewhat different ways. I know that you're a bit of a film buff as well Oli, but for me one of the things that stood out – as I used to teach this movie called *This is England* and the character of Eddie in *Adolescence* is the same actor who played a central character in the movie. *This is England* and *Adolescence* to me seem to be about youth in crisis, about the idea of what it is from an adult point of view, to try and figure out what's happening for young people and in society when things are changing. Where are these ideological ideas coming from? Why might someone behave in this way? The total disbelief from all of the adult characters that this kid could have done it. But you knew quite early on that he did, as Jamie's house gets broken into by the police – you wouldn't have this extreme response if they didn't have some strong evidence. The solicitor states they haven't arrested him without evidence, so you are going to know straight away that he did it especially as it is part of the knowledge most people have about the series before watching, and then it's the unpacking for the rest of the series. Why did they do this thing and why as an adult world did we not grasp that this is something young students would do? What do you reckon Oli? Did you see that connection with *This is England* and the idea of youth in crisis and social change?

**Oli**: I hadn't considered it alongside *This is England*. Trying to bring together what you just said, Beth, and what Kay was saying, I think that last episode and that final scene, to come back to your point: it's a drama, not a documentary. I think that moment

of touching the boy's pillow and his teddy bear and apologising, you know, it's a confessional moment. Part of me wonders – and this is not a profound thing to say – but part of me wonders if the thinking there was "this wraps this season up neatly". You know, "this puts a bow around the series". But in many ways, that last shot and the comments Kay's made about the last episode, I think they confirm what the entire series is about. I know I've already said this, but it's all about adulthood, it's not really about adolescence.

Episode 1 sets the whole thing up, and, in quite a neat way, it scotches the idea that this is going to be a mystery show. This is not a whodunit, we know who done it. Episode 2 is about the police not understanding what it is they're dealing with and having a bit of a learning arc. And then Episode 3, although that does feature Jamie in many ways, one way of reading Episode 3 is it's all about the child psychologist not quite understanding what it is that she's dealing with until the end, and she has that moment of emotional break after Jamie leaves the room. It's slightly strange because that's Jamie and the psychologist's last of a number of meetings they've had. So for the psychologist's moment of revelation to come now, as a surprise, works dramatically but perhaps not logically, as surely she has seen this before, and the moment of shock would make more sense in the first or second meeting. But again, it's a drama, not a documentary. And then Episode 4, which Kay's already gone over... So I think I keep coming back to this idea that it's really about adults who are on a rough learning trajectory.

But I'm sidestepping your question. Coming back to what Shelby said, I wonder about this whole Keir Starmer in conversation with Netflix, and let's get it all in school's thing. We were hoping that Emily Arthur, who's a school lead on Relationships and Sex Education, but she wasn't able to make it. She was saying that she's got quite a clear line on showing *Adolescence* in schools, and it's this: no, there's little if any benefit to it being shown in schools. It's not going to teach young people anything they don't already know; it could fuel certain kinds of moral panic; and unless we educators are very, very careful about the kinds of conversations we're going to have around the show and how we frame those conversations, it will either do nothing or it could make things slightly worse.

**Beth**: It reminds me of the moment I found most painful in the series, which was actually when they go into the school and ask questions and there's that one boy who's just laughing and that absolute disregard for human life. I found that really painful to watch. I would agree with you Oli, and with Emily, who unfortunately isn't here, but I would not want to see this utilised in schools because my sister, who's a teacher, told me a story about going into a classroom where they were showing *12 Years a Slave*

without any context and students were laughing at sexual assault scenes – no context viewing without support for students in group settings to manage difficult feelings and responses is a bad idea, though definitely film and televisual texts can be great teaching tools. It would also be ironic if they do use it in schools given the scenes of teachers putting videos on and zoning out, and it makes me wonder if the people advocating for the showing of *Adolescence* have watched it because Episode 2 was largely about the problem of going into classrooms and seeing people just showing video after video! Though I am confident most teachers don't do this.

**Kay**: I suppose going to Episode 2 in terms of the construction of schools and schooling, I think kind of, as Josh said, the school definitely wouldn't be classed as you know necessarily a high flying or successful school and there's lots of really great quotes in that episode that I really liked and thought were quite interesting. But I think there was definitely questions there for me about whether schools represent safe spaces in themselves. There was a lot of violence within the school environment and really hierarchical approaches in the school, with some class teachers being really aggressive, like shouting in students faces and barking orders at them.

There are two quotes that I've written down and these quotes do have swear words in them. One of the quotes is "these kids are fucking impossible". and the other is "school as a fucking holding pen" and I think those two quotes for me were just really interesting in terms of the positioning of students, you know, what's the point in trying because they don't listen, they're not capable of the work, like they're impossible. And then the idea about schools being that holding pen like, it's just something to occupy their time so they're not on the streets. And I thought it was just quite an interesting way in which to frame schools and the education system, or rather schools which might be classed as being in working-class or deprived areas.

I suppose it just made me feel quite sad about the conceptualisation of working-class schools. There's some really great practice out there, but I think, sorry, Josh and I'm sorry Maisie, I know you're about to be or are towards the end of your newly qualified teacher status, but it was really slamming newly qualified teachers and saying that they don't really know what they are doing. And then you have the other end that as you said, Josh, that some staff are really empathetic. So it's a very broad spectrum of teaching approaches. What did other people think about the ways in which the secondary school was represented? Would you want to work there or would you want to be a student there?

Oli's laughing – that's a no!

**Oli**: I mean, I'll jump in, if it's OK, with a couple of responses. I think some of it we've covered, like the depiction of the school, how committed they were to showing incompetence rather than struggle. It seemed an odd choice to me. And I don't think the series was unaware of it because there's the moment that Beth pointed to, the moment towards the end of Episode 2 where the police are outside the school. It's this odd, almost manifesto, moment from the writers where they sort-of-almost try and roll back from the caricature they've just given us by going, "Oh, we recognise it's the system and stuff is difficult. And of course, you know, when I was at school, there was the one teacher who…" You know, so there's this kind of like rolling back on the way they've just presented the school when they didn't have to present it that way in the first place. But I think to show incompetence and lack of care rather than struggle seemed a really strange, objectionable choice. But what were the other points I was supposed to be responding to? Something else I wanted to say. What were the points you raised, Kay?

**Kay**: Do you want me to read the swear word quotes out again?!

**Oli**: "A fucking holding pen". Oh, that. That's the other thing. I know they're setting themselves certain technical constraints. And because I've been quite critical, I should say, you know, I do recognise the many technical strengths of this series as well. But there was space in that episode. They sort of gestured to it with that one teacher being compassionate. But there was space in that episode to remind people that yes, schools can be very difficult places to navigate. Adolescence is a difficult time in managing social relationships; really, really tricky. And yeah, there are moments of violence in school and there are spaces in schools where some students will not feel safe. At the same time – and this is always the conversation I have with a colleague of ours who's a committed deschooler – there are also students for whom school is a safe space, or is the one safe space. And I think there was scope in Episode 2 to have acknowledged that as well and also space where you didn't necessarily need to swing between two extremes. There would have been space to also illustrate student-staff relationships that are just perfectly OK. You know, it's not always the case that relationships are either absolutely terrible or you're the only person in my life who gets me. There are also plenty of occasions when things are fine.

**Kay**: I think there is a hint at schools being safe spaces. I can't remember the other character's name but the best friend of the girl who was murdered she comes into school after the death of her best friend, and she punches a boy at the school. And then the school calls her mum and the member of staff says I told you not to come in today, I told you to take some time. But the girl replies "but Mum doesn't want me at home, I'm

better coming here. Why have you called her? She's going to be really annoyed". And there are hints that actually being at school is a much more supportive and nurturing space for her, because I think certainly a theme that runs across all the young people is problematic relationships with parents.

**Oli**: Yeah.

**Kay**: And parents not really knowing how to talk with their children, not understanding them, not listening. Also, in some cases, being quite undermining. So even when his son is trying to explain to his copper dad about the language on social media, the dad is quite condescending about it, even though he's giving him really good intel. But he's kind of like, well, why would you know something that I don't? And so I think it also highlights some of those complexities between parent-child relationships. And I think all of the children that are featured have problematic relationships..... Go on, Shelby.

**Shelby**: I was just going to say, I do think *Adolescence* is a bit of a downfall in that space and jumping into my PhD a bit, but I think where identity does shift and transforms these adolescents as a whole spend half their life in schools. And I think you look up to teachers as role models and things like that, and I think *Adolescence* missed the mark. I think schools are full of power, cultural and social dynamics. And I think the fact that the teachers are portrayed in like a way of shouting and not dressing smart and all that kind of stuff, I think you already build this sort of negative depiction of school and of these people that are already shouting down to you, I think it pushes adolescents to think these sorts of behaviours are okay. So I think if school can't be the role model and home can't either then where do you turn as an adolescent because your role models don't understand the current teenage landscape. Your parent don't know how to deal with these conversations and similarly the lack of understanding of these topics makes teachers come across that they just don't care about the students either. You know, where do you go when all your role models are negative?

**Kay**: And it often shows young people spending their spare time just hanging about on the street. So it's not like they've got access to good quality youth provision or anything where they might have those safe and supportive spaces.

**Oli**: There's another moment in that episode where – and again, coming back to this idea of students on screen, that overarches this conversation – there was another kind of missed opportunity in Episode 2. This again is a comment that comes from Emily Arthur (RSE Lead). In the first scene, in which the police are interviewing the friend of the victim and the woman – the slightly skittish woman from middle school who's

never heard of Andrew Tate – is the teacher in the room. And she introduces herself and says "I'm Miss So-and-So, but you don't know me, I'm from the middle school". Well, Emily was saying that it's not impossible, but it's highly unlikely that situation would arise. If the police were coming in to interview certain students, they will have named those students in advance, and a trusted adult will be with that student. So there was a moment there where you could have, you know, in the context of a difficult, challenging school, you could also have staged quite elegantly a trusted student-teacher relationships because that person should have been known to the student and should have been there by request of or agreement with the student, and that was a real missed opportunity when we think about adult-child or adult-youth relationships.

**Maisie**: Yeah, I think they failed to show and I'm sure Josh would agree with me on this, how much work teachers do put in. OK Josh is secondary, I'm primary, but we put in so much work – part of our professional standards is to build those relationships with children. They're completely turning a blind eye to all these teachers that go out and do that. So it can be quite disheartening as a teacher sitting there watching it thinking, OK so if that's how you portray us in that series, there are parents that already believe that and now more parents are going believe it and we work so hard to build those relationships, not every child is going to have the best relationship with you, but then there's going to be another safe adult that they have that relationship with. So it was quite saddening, almost, and upsetting to watch that, especially when you live it and you put in so much hard work everyday.

**Shelby**: It's a good way to put it. I feel they lacked sort of showing the responsible and safe adults in the space, like they didn't do it in the teachers, there was no youth work provision to show that kind of side of it, there was no parent... you know, they could have shown a parent that really cared and had that conversation with the child, that didn't happen, like there was no safe adult.

**Maisie**: So did they have a lack of understanding of a school? Because in a primary school, you know, you've got all these people, you've got your SLT, you've got your youth workers, you've got your school nurse, you've got your teachers, you've got your safeguarding, you've got your SENCO, you've got everything in a primary school. Josh can jump in, what have you got in a secondary school that they failed to show in that episode?

**Josh**: Well, I mean safeguarding is certainly the big one and it's the majority of what we do and also the message to teachers is always this is your first and primary role, your most important role. I think a lot of people think it's teaching, it isn't. The

one thing that's drilled into you in any training, above all things, your number one priority, the one thing that trumps everything else, is safeguarding. That's the first thing they missed and also they missed that pretty much since 2000 and definitely by 2010 because that's when Facebook was on a lot of safeguarding training, pretty much 90% of safeguarding concerns moved from physical things to online, so it's not as if we're new to this online thing. We've been at this for a while and yes we always talk with the kids language. And so one of the things you get at the safeguarding training in September, when you're first doing it is first of all introducing you to the language the kids are using and what it means. Because you can't safeguard kids if you can't decipher the code they're using. So that's lost. And. And so the idea that this conversation online would never have somehow manifested in school and no adult would have been made aware of it. It is so unlikely that these kind of exchanges would have happened and not filtered into the school. And especially if a school is where confrontation is happening, the confrontation would have happened in school first and there would have been a meeting about that, so there is a lot there that is missing.

But also there's something I do want to talk about in terms of my background. When I left sixth form, I did some youth work and I worked in schools, so this is going back about 20 years ago. So since then, when I was at university, I was a mentor to other underachieving kids or kids who had been kicked out of school or in danger of being kicked out of school. When I left that I largely trained young people in secondary schools. So essentially, I realised the other day that pretty much all my working career I've been working with people between the age of 8 and 23. I have never panicked about anything people say about young people, and part of the reason is firstly the story is always more complex. That's the first thing the story's almost always more complex. They still need to be nurtured and so that's the other thing. And also, almost everyone who has got a strong opinion on any of these issues, I've always felt they have one thing in common none of them are talking to the kids. Not one of them is talking to the kids and actually asking them what they feel. So I think this is why I've never panicked about anything that comes out about young people, they are almost always slightly more resilient than and a little bit wiser than everybody's giving them credit for and their stories are almost always complex. And the people who have strong opinions aren't talking to the kids.

**Shelby**: Such an interesting one.

**Josh**: They really want a caring adult. I have just been working with 16-year-olds about to take their GCSEs but guess what they want more than anything else? A mumsy kind of teacher, a really nurturing teacher, that's what they want to be around. They're still

kids. So I didn't panic, I never panic now, everything that I've seen, every single time I've seen something like this, I've been like, actually give it time, wait and see.

**Shelby**: I've never thought about it till now, but you have made me think like did it get popular because everyone panicked about it. And then like for us lot as practitioners we're let down by it because nothing in it is surprising because if you work with children and young people, you literally live the life and the skill set of a social worker, youth worker, practitioner day in day out whereas you know has it got popular because of the panic of the world outside of people that work in it all the time.

**Kay**: Yeah, and I think a quote from the last episode from the parents, they say "all kids are like that these days away in their bedrooms, watching whatever, we can't control it". And then they also say, "but he was in his room, we thought he was safe". And as you say, it's kind of tied into that moral panic of the crisis of youth. They're not safe at home, they're not safe out in the community and then the way in which Episode 2 is depicted, I think it's also created a lot of concerns about schools. A lot of people I know are concerned about their children's online identities, relationships and engagement, but they're now also worried about them in their school environments that they are not safe, supported, nurtured, or experiencing particularly good learning environments. I think it has created a lot of panic around not understanding these worlds and young people being seen to be very different. But that lack of safe space both at home, in the online world and in school environments, I think it's created that, not hysteria, but kind of like hysteria. You know, lots of people saying, you know, the state of youth today and we should take away their phones...

**Oli**: Yeah.

**Kay**: And I suppose, what is the solution to this? A lot of the discussion is focused around tighter controls about children's online usage. And is that the solution? I mean, I wouldn't say that it is, it's about educating.

**Maisie**: I'm going to jump in Kay. I hope that the panic is a good thing, because without the panic, we're not going to have any action without the panic. We're not going to raise awareness, so my hope is that this panic from absolutely everybody is going to raise awareness, it is going to force people to work together, whether that be tighter controls, what are we going to do? We need to panic, to spread the awareness. That's what *Adolescence* has done. We can sit here and I'm sure we could sit here all night and pick apart the series, but it's brought that panic, and I really, really do hope and I have everything crossed that that panic raises awareness in order for professionals and

society to work together to actually tackle this societal problem that we can't seem to control. How that looks, I don't know. I'd love to have a crystal ball and tell everybody this is how we can resolve it, but that's me living in a complete fantasy world. I just hope that the panic has raised awareness for people to start working together to protect children and young people.

**Beth**: It's a beautiful note to end on Maisie, thank you and thank you to everyone who has made the time to come and talk about *Adolescence* this evening. It's been great to get so many insights on what's been a controversial and highly commercially successful drama about students, for adults.

## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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