# The hidden meanings of emojis: Lessons from Netflix's Adolescence



Parents have been made aware of the disturbing implications behind the use of emojis amongst young people, a revelation that comes in the wake of Netflix’s latest drama series, *Adolescence*. The four-part thriller, which has surged to the top of Netflix's global viewing charts, focuses on the life of 13-year-old Jamie Miller, acted by Owen Cooper, who is imprisoned for the murder of a schoolgirl. The storyline delves into the controversial and often troubling aspects of incel culture, a community linked to misogynistic ideologies.

The series, created by Jack Thorne and Stephen Graham, shines a light on the obscure language and symbols used within incel circles – a term that stands for “involuntary celibate” and is part of a larger online community often referred to as the "manosphere". The character DI Luke Bascombe, played by Ashley Walters, discovers that he has misinterpreted a series of emojis sent by the victim, Katie, through her Instagram profile. A pivotal moment arises in the second episode when DI Bascombe’s son, Adam, portrayed by Amari Bacchus, decodes the emojis, revealing their more sinister meanings.

Allysa Czerwinsky, a researcher studying incel culture and a PhD student in criminology at the University of Manchester, commented on the use of emojis within the show. Speaking to the *Manchester Evening News*, Czerwinsky highlighted that these symbols are often utilised by social media influencers who promote misogynistic content, allowing them to navigate around content moderation systems. “There’s a lot of emoji work within the show that parents will look at and think it just means a symbol, but the ways in which the younger generation are using media in new innovative ways means that we don’t often catch onto it until it is potentially damaging and threatening,” she noted.

One of the emojis discussed in the series is the red pill, a reference to the film *The Matrix*, which ostensibly represents a choice between remaining in delusion or awakening to a controversial worldview on gender dynamics. Adam explains, “The red pill is like, 'I see the truth'. It’s a call to action by the manosphere.” This notion is part of a broader online rhetoric that suggests men must confront harsh realities allegedly perpetuated by feminist ideologies.

Czerwinsky further elaborated on the concept of the 'black pill', which amplifies the red pill ideology. It posits that certain individuals are fundamentally disadvantaged in social and romantic pursuits due to their perceived genetic and social shortcomings. This idea aligns with the interpretation of the '100' emoji, which is portrayed in the series as a representation of the '80/20 rule', asserting that a minority of men attract the majority of women, leaving others feeling marginalized and disenfranchised.

The show also extends beyond these symbols, revealing deeper connections between emoji usage and social interaction among the youth. For instance, the coloured hearts that are commonly used in messaging apps are explored to exhibit darker connotations. Adam elaborates on their meanings: red signifies love, purple indicates desire, yellow suggests mutual interest, pink indicates interest without sexual undertones, and orange offers reassurance. Czerwinsky remarks that these interpretations could go unnoticed by adults who may not be attuned to the evolving semantics of digital communication used by younger generations.

The drama’s narrative emphasizes that emojis can take on sinister meanings, indicating a need for vigilance among parents regarding their children's online interactions. According to Czerwinsky, this language may shape the dynamics of how children engage with each other in digital environments, often obscured from adult understanding. “It’s not mainstream enough that their kids are talking to them about or they’re hearing their other kids say, but it exists on the periphery for adults who are on social media who may be monitoring their kids’ online presence,” she explained, suggesting an ongoing evolution of online communication that necessitates awareness.

As *Adolescence* continues to spark discussions, it serves as a lens into the darker aspects of modern youth culture and digital vernacular.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://time.com/7267884/adolescence-netflix-explained/> - This article discusses how Netflix's series Adolescence explores themes of incel culture and the potential impact of social media on youth, particularly in terms of communication and relationships.
* <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/culture/culture-news/a64251997/adolescence-netflix-review-incel/> - This piece delves into how Adolescence portrays incel culture and its influence on young men, highlighting the societal factors that contribute to its spread.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhP9t2WjQo4> - This video features a discussion on The View about the Netflix series Adolescence, focusing on incel culture, toxic masculinity, and the role of social media in radicalizing youth.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incel> - This Wikipedia article provides an overview of incel culture, its roots, and its connection to violent acts, which aligns with themes presented in Adolescence.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/20/incel-violence-toxic-masculinity-jake-davison> - This article discusses how incel ideology can lead to violence, citing real-world cases like Jake Davison and the themes of toxic masculinity explored in Adolescence.