

“IT’S SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE NEED TO BE TALKING ABOUT”

The superb, yet disturbing and thought provoking Netflix limited series ‘Adolescence’ has certainly got people talking.

I can’t remember any TV or film creating so much discussion across all age groups and genders. The co-writers wanted ‘parents, aunties, uncles, family and friends’ to talk about it and they are. Stephen Graham, co-author who also played the role of the dad, Eddie, said this week that it is not just about parents, “we are all accountable”.

Adolescence, whilst not based on a true story, is real life. Well researched, it educates and showcases the devastating impact the rising popularity of ‘Manosphere’ and ‘Incel culture’ has on adolescents and in particular young men. (It also exposes different pressures on girls and how social media influences this. But this is for another blog!)

This so called dark hole of the internet. that are not actually that hard to find, are loaded with misogynistic propaganda and toxic masculinity from so called ‘influencers’.



Jamie, a 13 year old boy, like all adolescent boys and girls, has to navigate his way through the confusing time between childhood and adulthood. At times, the rollercoaster of emotions ranging from vulnerability, fear, anger, aggression and compassion could easily be passed for normal teenage brain behaviour. But, behind this is the corrosive impact of social media that entangled him in misogynistic propaganda. The hard hitting reality that parents and teachers were oblivious to and didn’t think would happen to ‘their son’.

As a mum and an auntie, I was shocked, scared and upset. As a professional working with young people, I was motivated to ‘do something’. I have talked endlessly about the programme and the issues it covered.

But the writers didn’t just want discussions; they wanted ‘Adolescence’ to bring about change. Which is why I am writing this piece. The four part series was a hard but necessary watch for parents and families but also a wake-up call for all of us who work with and support young people. A wake up, to urgently recognise the increasing risks and be part of the solution to address the problems.

As Chief Executive of a local charity that works with and supports young people, I can influence and bring about change. At our ‘The Youthy’ we provide all kinds of activities including a bespoke weekly session for 10-19 year olds. I won’t fluff it up; it can be a challenging evening. The school environment and the gripping scenes with Jamie and his child psychologist Briony, struck a chord.

As a Charity we provide young people, with a safe space where they can develop their social skills and improve their confidence. Our role is to support young people into adulthood. And we have noticed some challenging changes recently. An increase in what script writers call toxic masculinity as well as a rise in some not all young boys challenging authority and more specifically female authority with what is appearing to be less respect for girls and women.

The easiest thing to do is to exclude them from the sessions. But ... given some are already excluded from school, we have to ask ourselves, is this right? Where does their alternative role model come from then?

Exclusion whilst the easiest route is short term and will lead to long term societal issues. Instead, we need to look direct into the eye of male rage and do what Gareth Southgate, former England Manager said this week, provide better role models beyond the Andrew Tate’s of this world.

'Adolescence' brought home to me that if charities like Five Lamps and other agencies including education, police and politicians fail to recognise the risks and don't act now, then we will be letting vulnerable young people down.

The longer this harmful narrative goes unchallenged, more and more vulnerable young boys and men, will believe the ideology and this is dangerous.

It's dangerous for women and girls (and gender diverse communities). Throughout the last century we've battled to raise awareness of and tackle violence, aggression and inequality towards women. We can't stand back and allow a return of entrenched views where male authority goes unchallenged; women are subordinate, and violence and abuse rises again.

Yes ... I am passionate about equality for women. I want my daughter and all women to be safe, respected and valued. That's why I want action now.

But I also want action because it's dangerous for 'Jamie'; for every influential young boy who could succumb to the messaging. Jamie murdered a girl. This is inexcusable. But to prevent more deaths, including rising suicides, we need to understand how his ideas became polluted and led him to make bad choices and from here shape innovative solutions.

At the same time, we must tackle the pressures and risks which volunteers and professionals now face. The interaction with the psychologist will never leave me. We cannot and shouldn't walk away from these roles, yet we must acknowledge the toll this takes and the huge emotional pressure this has on colleagues; and better support and equip them to respond.

Professionals, like parents, need to adapt, to think and behave differently to support adolescents through an even more complex and challenging period in their lives.

I could and want to, go on and on... there are so many related topics to discuss. I want us to create more discussion and find solutions.

There's a cry for 'Adolescence' to be screened in schools but how long will this take and what about those who aren't in school? Formerly a cinema, The Five Lamps Youth and Community hub is going back to its roots and will be screening 'Adolescence' to young people and those involved, to stimulate discussions. We will also be:

- Hosting boys only sessions so they can talk, share experiences and hopefully tell us about their thoughts on how to tackle the issues.
- Organising partner events to bring likeminded people together, to facilitate solutions that will bring about change.

We need to work together and rethink our roles in supporting young people and provide access to positive role models. We need to listen, learn and adapt. This starts with the young people who are in the thick of navigating their way through adolescence.

Do you feel the same energy and passion? Have you been affected by 'Adolescence'? do you work with adolescents or are a parent. If you're interested in getting involved or supporting us to create the discussions and make change happen, then contact me on social media, or email lispickard@fivelamps.org.uk or contact The Youthy on 01642 673793 info@fivelamps.org.uk.

