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TikTok Spying Is Bad. So Is the Effect of TikTok Culture on Kids.

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TikTok has been a prominent part of the news cycle recently due to U.S. efforts to curb the app's alleged gathering of data on American citizens — data U.S. government officials say ends up in the hands of China's communist regime.

And while the spying issue is a major one with major national-security implications, there is another aspect of the TikTok question that does not receive as much focus: the influence that the app, and much modern social media in general, has on young people.

And this influence doesn't merely involve the deliberate influencing of the young by means of carefully designed algorithms that feed users content that is conveniently favorable to the CCP. Beyond this, there is a deeper way in which modern social media, particularly TikTok, is affecting the psyche of the nation's children.

In short, TikTok and platforms like it are contributing to the *dumbing down* of America.

This is not to say that TikTok and similar apps cannot be used in positive or constructive ways.

There are certainly creators on TikTok who share positive, educational, and uplifting content — people who share inspirational stories or wholesome life advice. And there are now a fair share of conservatives who have made a presence on the platform in order to introduce constitutionalist principles to younger generations.

And, of course, there's nothing wrong with kids having fun. The idea underlying TikTok — that of empowering the user with easy-to-use editing tools for making his own video content — is unique and creative.

Most technologies are not inherently good or evil. It's a question of how they are used. Nevertheless, certain technologies or platforms, by their nature, are more conducive to certain uses than others. And TikTok, by its nature, is a perfect storm for conditioning youth into the mindset of triviality.

One of the most notable features of TikTok is that it is intended as a short content platform. While the app has continually lengthened the maximum runtime of videos published on it (at 10 minutes as of the writing of this article), many decry the lengthening of runtime and most users stick approximately to the time restriction that was in place when the app was first introduced: 15 seconds.

The appeal for most TikTok users lies in the fact that it is a platform for short, bite-sized content. And

while time restraints, like restraints in any medium, can present an opportunity for creativity, this practice of extremely short content is contributing to the shortening of young people's attention spans, disdain for in-depth intellectual exercises, and their preference for trivialities over more significant interests.

In part, the fact that the content lasts only a few seconds is making young people more impatient. When a user's brain gets accustomed to the mental "high" of being hit with a different "fix" (a brand new video) every few seconds, he easily grows bored when confronted with things that take longer than that — whether it's listening to a church sermon, paying attention to his teacher in class, reading a book, or even simply trying to watch longer-form entertainment such as a feature-length film.

There's also the fact that the app allows users to rapidly toggle through new videos with the flick of a finger. If the image presented on the screen doesn't seem appealing, the kid on his smartphone can go to something else in less than a second.

Again, this fuels impatience. Now, when the user confronts things in the real world that he cannot so easily toggle through, such as a conversation with an actual person, he feels an inward sense of anxiety. He certainly finds himself hard-pressed to summon the patience to complete time-intensive projects, such as building an erector set or practicing a musical instrument.

The shortness of the content also minimizes the potential intellectual depth of the content. A few seconds is not a lot of time in which to say something profound or well thought-out.

Therefore, while some creators do succeed in crafting something intelligent or witty within the seconds that the average TikTok video lasts, most simply do the easy thing and make their videos about random stupid stuff — making an odd face, hitting someone on the head, jumping down the stairs and inevitably getting hurt, shaking a can of soda and then opening it even though they know it's going to get everywhere.

This ultimately creates a mentality of preferring cheap thrills and easy laughs over anything that demands more mental exertion. Young people's minds are conditioned to like loudness, coarseness, rudeness, and grossness over refinement and sophistication.

And this tendency has now crept into most children's entertainment in all its varieties. Kids' TV shows and movies used to have varying degrees of plot and pacing. They could make kids laugh, but would also inspire wonder, curiosity, and other higher emotions and modes of thought.

Now, children's programming has followed the example of TikTok culture — lots of yelling and toilet humor.

It doesn't help that other platforms have updated their apps to be similar to TikTok. YouTube, for example, has a "Shorts" section that is essentially its own modified version of TikTok — an area to make, share, and view videos that are only a few seconds long.

TikTok has at least stepped in the right direction with new limits on how long kids can use the app — now one hour max. Other platforms should do the same by default, and they all need stricter age-verification and parental permission systems in place, as many young people presently simply check the "adult" option when prompted to give their age.

And parents, naturally, should be the leaders in their own homes when it comes to encouraging responsible use of these apps. They might seem harmless, but the consequences of misuse and overuse are far-reaching