

TikTok is Breeding a New Batch of Child Stars. Psychologists Say What Comes Next Won't Be Pretty.

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In 1968, Andy Warhol predicted that in the future, “everyone will be world famous for 15 minutes.” He was right, and that was before TikTok, where all it takes to blow up is an iPhone and a pretty face. But Warhol couldn't have predicted that TikTok's algorithm would quickly sweep up a huge group of children, making them some of the most famous people in the world in the blink of an eye.

The most-followed creator on TikTok, Charli D'Amelio, turned 16 on May 1. Loren Gray, whom D'Amelio recently overtook for the top spot on the short-form video platform, turned 18 in April.

The young age of the app's biggest stars was on full display [amid recent drama](#), as D'Amelio and Chase Hudson, 18, fought over their relationship publicly on Twitter. A series of tweets from both of them implicated other TikTok megastars in the saga, too, including Josh Richards, 18, and Nessa Barrett, 17.

Experts warn that these young influencers will face the typical hurdles of child fame, but with the additional complication of real-time social media surveillance by millions and an algorithmically programmed addiction to the instant gratification of a never-ending barrage of notifications.

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While the advent of social media apps like TikTok and Instagram have given the world more ways to connect, it's also changed the meaning of fame and reshaped the path to becoming a celebrity. Perhaps most notably is the fact that everyday children are so easily vaulted into the spotlight with little predictability.

“Your ability to assess risk, your ability to make some cognitive judgments to plan ahead — all of those things are cognitive skills that develop over that period of time,” said media psychologist [Pamela Rutledge](#), PhD, speaking about the period of life before 25, before the “rational” part of the brain is [fully developed](#). Experiencing fame during adolescence, Rutledge said, makes it even harder for celebrities to keep a handle on reality. “Everyone wants to be famous. But in fact, for most of us, that's not the real world.”

These influencer-celebrities are at risk for the same challenges faced by traditional Hollywood child stars, made infamous by the likes of Lindsay Lohan, Drew Barrymore, and Michael Jackson.

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Many child celebrities turn to drug use and alcohol because of their need to satisfy an addiction to fame. “You get a physiological reward when people like you. It triggers your reward system. And so if you lose that, then you start looking for other means of triggering that,” Rutledge said, explaining that

becoming addicted to fame leaves you “vulnerable” to other drugs.

Both Rutledge and Mc Mahon compared this phenomenon to the experience of a singer performing for a stadium of fans. They become high off of that energy. “It’s an incredible feeling,” Mc Mahon said of fame.

But at the end of the night, they go back to their hotel room, and they’re often alone. “There’s always a risk if there’s that vulnerability, if you really are feeding off that fandom as something that’s fueling you rather than a fueling of a sort of a larger life goal that you have,” Rutledge said.

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