

Boiling Frog, Part 1: The Slow Burn of Social Media Harm

Social media is a double-edged sword. On one side, it offers real-time connection, the rapid spread of information, and powerful platforms for social movements. On the other hand, it enables misinformation, cyberbullying, and an unhealthy culture of comparison, where young people can become fixated on their perceived inadequacies by scrolling through endless images of curated, “glamorous” lives.

Whether social media is a force for good or harm often depends on the individual using it. But personal choice doesn’t operate in a vacuum. It is shaped by the platforms themselves and how they’re designed to keep us engaged, often at the expense of our well-being.

This recalls the well-known *boiling frog* analogy. If a frog is thrown into boiling water, it jumps out. But if it’s placed in lukewarm water that’s slowly heated, it won’t perceive the danger until it’s too late. It’s a metaphor for how people fail to recognize threats that increase gradually.

Social media works in much the same way. We might feel jolted by a graphic post or toxic comment—that’s like being tossed into boiling water. In those moments, we have the option to delete the app, take a break, or reevaluate who we follow.

But often, we’re the frog in warming water. We open TikTok “just for a few minutes” before bed, and an hour later, we’re still scrolling, emotionally drained, and unsure how we got there. I’ve been in that spiral more times than I can count.

A striking example of this slow, harmful immersion is the case of American YouTuber and internet personality [Eugenia Cooney](#). Cooney began her online presence in 2011 on YouNow

before shifting to YouTube, where her fashion hauls, cosplay looks, and makeup tutorials gained rapid popularity. Today, she has over 2.6 million followers on TikTok and streams live regularly.

But behind her bubbly online persona lies a deeply troubling reality. Cooney appears to suffer from a life-threatening eating disorder—something she’s vaguely acknowledged in the past but refuses to address openly. Over the years, concerned fans have watched her condition visibly deteriorate. Despite this, she continues to post regularly, ignoring comments about her health and brushing off incidents where she’s been caught “accidentally” flashing the camera. These incidents that have raised alarm, especially given the following she has among young, impressionable viewers.

Even more disturbing is the niche group of men who fetishize eating disorders and financially support her streams. The question is no longer whether Cooney is struggling—it's why she continues to post in ways that potentially glamorize her illness and why platforms like TikTok continue to allow it.

The obvious answers might be “money” and “fame.” But the deeper issues, platform accountability, viewer vulnerability, and the slow normalization of harm are what we need to examine more closely.

I’ll explore these themes further in *Boiling Frog, Part 2*.