# Exploring the dark side of kidfluencing in new documentary



The Guardian reports on a new documentary titled "Bad Influence: The Dark Side of Kidfluencing," which delves into the complex and troubling world of child influencers and the dynamics that govern their online presence. The three-part series presents an in-depth examination of the rise of social media star Piper Rockelle and her mother and manager, Tiffany Smith, amid a backdrop of alarming allegations regarding child welfare and exploitation.

The documentary takes viewers through Rockelle's emergence from the uniquely American child pageantry circuit to social media stardom, propelled by her mother’s ambitions. Smith, aiming to enhance her daughter's appeal and bolster her YouTube channel's views, incorporated other young performers into Rockelle's videos, forming a group affectionately known as “the Squad.” At the height of her success, Rockelle reportedly earned over $500,000 a month, illustrating the lucrative potential of child-driven social media content.

However, the narrative takes a dark turn as it explores the allegations that led to a lawsuit filed in 2022 by eleven former members of the Squad against Smith and her boyfriend, Hunter Hill. The suit claimed violations of child labour laws and described a climate of “inappropriate, offensive, and abusive treatment” alongside disturbing sexualised comments made by Smith. One former Squad member, Corinne, recounted a particularly troubling incident from her early teens involving Smith sending off what appeared to be Rockelle’s underwear, to which Smith reportedly responded, “Old men like to smell it.” Both Smith and Hill have denied the allegations, and the lawsuit was settled in 2022 without any admission of liability.

Throughout the series, interviews with former performers—many still in their teens—highlight concerns voiced by family members regarding the filming process and Rockelle’s prolonged absence from school, which began at the tender age of eight. The documentary paints a portrait of Smith as a manipulative figure with a notable business acumen that found its niche within the precarious realm of children’s online content. The blurred lines between professional engagement and family life raise probing questions about the scope of child labour laws in this context, particularly given the potential for exploitation when minors are monetised for their online visibility.

Compounding these issues is a concerning statistic noted in the documentary, which indicates that approximately 60% of content found on devices belonging to individuals with a sexual interest in children originates from social media platforms. Moreover, nearly 92% of the audience for teen girl influencers consists of adult men, highlighting the unsettling implications of young girls creating content that is savoured by such demographics.

As the documentary unfolds, it reveals not only allegations concerning Smith's treatment of the children involved but also the broader implications of parental and adult responsibility within these hybrid professional-domestic environments. The documentary includes reflections from individuals who describe feeling entranced or manipulated by Smith, with one relative noting, “Sometimes you didn’t understand how she was getting you to do these things.” The issues of control and influence are further emphasised by the apparent isolation of adult family members from filming activities, suggesting a cult-like atmosphere that inhibited open dissent.

The creators of "Bad Influence" navigate a sensitive terrain filled with serious implications for child welfare, yet some critics argue that the documentary may not adequately address the roles and responsibilities of parents in such scenarios. The exploration of these themes invites viewers to consider the contemporary landscape of social media and its multifaceted impact on youth culture, leaving the future of "kidfluencing" hanging in the balance as technological and social dynamics continue to evolve.

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

## References

* <https://people.com/settlement-reached-in-child-abuse-lawsuit-against-youtube-piper-rockelle-mom-tiffany-smith-8725209> - This article reports on the lawsuit and settlement involving Tiffany Smith and the allegations of child abuse and exploitation, corroborating the documentary's portrayal of serious misconduct within the 'Piper Squad'. It highlights the alleged abusive environment created by Smith and how the plaintiffs sought damages.
* <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2024-10-10/youtube-influencer-piper-rockelle-mother-lawsuit-settlement> - The Los Angeles Times article details the lawsuit settlement and the broader implications of child labor laws in the context of social media influencers like Piper Rockelle. It provides insight into the financial aspects of Rockelle’s content creation and the legal challenges faced by her and her mother.
* <https://www.biography.com/movies-tv/a64364284/piper-rockelle-youtube-controversy-now> - This biography piece covers Piper Rockelle’s rise to fame and the controversy surrounding her mother, Tiffany Smith, including allegations of abuse and exploitation. It discusses the upcoming documentary 'Bad Influence', which delves into these issues.
* <https://people.com/piper-rockelle-mom-tiffany-smith-speaks-out-on-lawsuit-settlement/> - Not found; however, People magazine has covered the settlement and Smith's statements about prioritizing Piper Rockelle's mental health and career amidst litigation.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/> - The Guardian is known for reporting on social and cultural issues, but a specific article related to Piper Rockelle or the documentary 'Bad Influence' is not available in the search results. However, it often reports on broader topics such as child welfare and media.