

# TikTokology with Hank Green

## Ologies Podcast

### November 16, 2021

Oh heeey, hi, it's your fingers, who still smell somehow, like a burrito. Alie Ward, back with some *Ologies* action. We've covered a lot of things on this podshow, lot of scary things: pain, sharks, demons, the apocalypse, books made of human leather, but this?! This is the scariest. This is performance art, this is permanent, digital archives of tomfoolery, this is a public stage, this is a fear of trying too hard, this is TikTokology.

Did I invent the term for the sake of this episode? How dare you? This isn't like other ones where I've done that. TikTokology is a real word, okay? I've only invented a couple words, and this already existed. It's been used in headlines explaining the social media platform to weary teachers and parents wondering why their children are dancing so much. And actually, the handle @TikTokology is taken by a cool dude named Derek who studies how tech influences society, so it's out there.

Now, I'm privileged to have been introduced to this ologist who is one-half of YouTube's legendary vlogbrothers. He was an *EcoGeek* blogger, he's the starter-upper for media empire called Complexly, the co-founder of VidCon, and a philanthropist who does all kinds of really great fundraising for nonprofits including this year's sold out, Awesome Socks Club. Host of podcast and YouTube series like *SciShow* and *Crash Course*. Also, hello... novelist? What? Two-time novelist? How does he do it? I don't know. But *An Absolutely Remarkable Thing* is a 2018 sci-fi novel he wrote, there's a 2020 sequel, *A Beautifully Foolish Endeavor*, both are *New York Times* Best Sellers. I put links to buy them from Bookshop.org in the show notes because he's amazing.

So, I'm lucky enough to know this very cool guest, who since 2019 has amassed 5.7 million followers on the platform. And in an email dated October 14, he wrote, "I still want to come on *Ologies*, but I don't know what I'd talk about. TikTokology?" And I was like, "Hell yes, we will! Yes... yes."

So, some quick background on TikTok. It was founded in 2016 as Douyin, in China. Then merged with this lip sync app called Musical.ly and became TikTok. And in China, 82% of the folks who use the sister platform there are under 35. In the US, 33% are 19 years old and younger... I'm not in those age groups, folks, and I have one video I put up yesterday under the handle @Alie\_Ologies because both @AlieWard and @Ologies were taken by someone... I don't know them, but that's how late of an adopter I am. Why am I a late adopter? Because I'm scared; I don't know how to edit things, I don't dance, I don't know if I can talk fast enough. Can I point to bugs on a green screen? A lot of unknowns.

But first, something we do know, a quick thanks to everyone on Patreon.com/Ologies who submitted questions for the guest and who supports the show. Thank you to everyone telling friends and subscribing and leaving reviews, of which I read all, including this freshie, from LivLikesPodcasts who wrote:

*Amazing podcast full of weird and wonderful facts that you'll immediately want to share. I got my dad to listen, and his favorite episode is the one on butts.*

Also, happy birthday to birthday twin, JeriM.

Okay, onward to TikTokology. So, this guest saw my fear and is generously walking me through the ins and the outs of the tiks and the toks. We talk about the algorithmic ESP, disruptive media, dopamine, duets, hashtags, things lurking in your drafts folder, weird, instant TikTok fame, the

spreading of good (and less good) information, data concerns, idealized selves, self-expression, mental health community, authenticity, work-life boundaries, the lack of them perhaps, time limits, and milk sprinklers with vlogger, scicomm icon, and TikTokologist, Hank Green.

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**Alie:** Okay, number one, can you say your first and last name so I know how to pronounce them, and also your pronouns?

**Hank:** I'm Hank Green, he/him. H-A-N-K G-R-E-E-N.

**Alie:** Thank you, that's important. Okay, Hank Green. You have worked in so many medias... YouTubes... books... so many things.

**Hank:** I had a blog once.

**Alie:** Blooogs! What was it on?

**Hank:** It was called *EcoGeek*. Oh, it was on WordPress, on my own server.

**Alie:** Oh my gosh.

**Hank:** Yeah.

**Alie:** You have helped so many people do so many deep dives in so many ways. At what point were you like, "Hank Green, it's time to join the TikTok."?

**Hank:** [*laughs*] I don't know.

**Alie:** Do you remember the moment where you're like... Was it Musical.ly at that point?

**Hank:** It was. I downloaded Musical.ly on the floor of VidCon in, like, 2015. So, I have a very old TikTok account. My TikTok account is ancient. But the real question is when did I... Because I saw a bunch of kids being really excited about it. I downloaded it, and looked at it, and thought, "This is obviously not a place for me, I feel like I'm in a Claire's at the mall." [*Alie laughs*] I can't be here, it's all children, and they're having a great time. And that was interesting to me, and then I moved on. And then it was pandemic times that I was like, "People seem to be having a good time on this app. I need to understand it."

**Alie:** Did you feel like when you first got there, you were like, "I don't know what these buttons do..."

**Hank:** [*deep voice*] Oh yes.

**Alie:** ...I don't know how it works."? [*Hank laughs*] And I feel like I'm not the sharpest tool, but I'm not the dullest, and every time I go to see how it works, I'm like, "I'm confounded." And then I just go do something else.

**Hank:** It is confounding. And one of the really wonderful things about TikTok is that it is not static at all. So, even now after 18 months of being a semi-professional TikToker, I will go on the app and be like, "I do not know how to do anything with this button. I do not know what this button does. It's new and I'm confused by it." Which... I think they learned some lessons from some other platforms that get a little bit... everybody gets a little too comfortable and then when you change something, people get mad. But if you change something every day, nobody gets mad because the change is the normal. [*"I don't know what any of this shit is and I'm fucking scared."*]

**Alie:** So, okay that makes me feel a little bit better that I don't understand it because everyone is learning a little bit every day, right?

**Hank:** All the time, yeah.

**Alie:** Okay. So, tell me a little bit about what the format of TikTok is. Vine was 6 seconds, YouTubes can go for hours.

**Hank:** As long as you want.

**Alie:** As long as you want! So, what kind of time frame does it allow? And what do you like to do with it?

**Hank:** TikTok started at 15 seconds, and then it went to a minute, and now you can go to 3 minutes, which is like, "Are you kidding me?" When you had a 15-second constraint, 3 minutes feels like all of the moments that the universe contains. [*Alie laughs*] Which is great as a content creator, to be forced into that, try and share something interesting, or funny, or you know, even educational in 15 seconds... To really be put into that constraint and then allowed out of it where you can take that condensation attitude but fit a lot more in because you've got more moments.

But what do I like to do with it? I like to do the other things that people on TikTok do, which is jokes, and using the very rapidly evolving inside joke and meme space of TikTok to feel like you are part of a moment. But I also like to use it like a lot of people do, and this was what really shocked me when I got onto the platform, is that there's a lot of people doing educational content, really well, really interestingly, really effectively. And I like to do that; I like to answer questions and I like to expose people to how wonderful their universe is. [*clip of Hank on TikTok: "There's a few different things going on here. One, chins are weird. Humans are the only animal with a chin."*]

**Alie:** And I'm wondering because you are one of the foremost sci-commers, I feel like, out there today. Literally, we have questions from listeners who are like, "Thank you for helping me get my degree." [*both laugh*] How did you initially fit solid scientific concepts in 15 seconds? How did you do that?

**Hank:** Well, I don't think... I think that by the time I was on TikTok, I had up to a minute. So, I don't know that I ever really did... I don't know that you could do that. So, the expansion had already happened by the time I got there.

**Aside:** Just a little backstory here. So, when TikTok started, videos were 15 seconds long because of music licensing rules that allowed for 15 seconds of a song to be used. But it expanded to 60 seconds long when it merged with Musical.ly in 2018. And then this year, it hopped up to 3 minutes. But yes, the "Tik-Tok" of the name came from, [*light, quick woodwind music plays, Alie's voice goes quicker and quicker*] okay, you've got to say this really quick because time is running out. So, people tend to speak fast and point to titles above them to relay content, especially if it's informative or educational, it's kind of a thing.

**Alie:** I'm wondering too, is there a dialect that you feel has emerged from TikTok, in terms of really rapid speech and kind of punchy jokes? I almost feel like it's like listening to someone from Alabama or from the Midwest. [*Hank laughs*] It's like a certain dialect of its own, you know?

**Hank:** Yeah, one of the things I have noticed over the years of creating for different media is that the medium is in fact the message; it turns out it was true the whole time. And now, it is more true than ever and it's also the platform that becomes the new kind of media. So, it's almost like email created emails, you know? And YouTube created YouTube videos, TikTok created TikToks. These things are going to have their own visual language, they're going to

have their own attitude, they're going to have their own worldview, in addition to having their own linguistic approach, in addition to having their own way of speaking. And I definitely see the sort of TikTok way of speaking as an outgrowth of the YouTube way of speaking which goes all the way back to Ze Frank who was a sort of pre-YouTube vlogger.

**Aside:** So, you may know Ze Frank from his "True Facts" series on YouTube or from operating on a teddy bear and pulling out some silky wet chicken guts, 41 million views. Or the jump-cutty, self-deprecating videos that he made because they earnestly became the blueprint for all future vloggers. Ze Frank: truly iconic, online pioneer.

**Hank:** That evolution feels very clear to me, it feels very natural to me. But it also is just one piece of a much larger, sort of... the tools of a platform, and its users, and its algorithms, all come together to create a new form of media. A TikTok is almost as different from a YouTube video as a YouTube video is from, like, the radio. It's very weird.

**Alie:** What about the time you spend creating? How much has your life shifted post-pandemic, in the last 18 months, of making TikTok content as opposed to doing other things? And how do you manage that?

**Hank:** Well, I think it's really important for my mental health to not answer that question, thank you, next please.

**Alie:** Okay. Okay, perfect.

**Hank:** *[laughs]* No, no that was a joke. *[Alie laughs]* Yeah, I don't know. The great thing about my job is that I like it all so much and, in any given moment, I mostly do what I want to do. So, it doesn't ask me to put too much thought into keeping track of the time when I'm happy doing it.

Now, TikTok is an extremely addictive platform; it is very good at that. It is very easy for me to get caught in the scroll, like anyone else, and to lose touch with the interesting parts of it. And for me, the interesting parts are the kinds of creation that people do in collaboration with each other and the ways in which that inspires actual creativity and actual community. So, that's the pieces that actually drive me and get me really interested.

But as far as timing, I have no idea how I do all the things I do, Alie. *[Alie laughs]* If I tried to keep track of it, that would be a waste of time and I wouldn't get as much done, I guess. *[laughs]*

**Alie:** I did that once, I tried to add up how many hours a week I worked and it wasn't a good idea, I don't recommend it. *[laughs]*

**Hank:** Yeah, I have a pretty... I don't know. I don't know how healthy my relationship with work is, I bet if you asked my wife, she would disagree with me. But a lot of days, I don't... I'm not really at work until 10. And like, I do work a lot of non-work hours, but I love what I do. *["I feel the same."]*

**Alie:** What about all the people who look up to you and aspire to have a sci-comm career like yours? Maybe they see TikTok as a great place to share educational content. Where do you recommend they start? By they, I mean me, or others. *[both laugh]*

**Hank:** I mean, you start with interesting stories, but you also start with understanding the platform. So, you kind of can't show up and speak a different language. It was funny going through the transition... in the beginning of me on TikTok, it was like, "Oh my god, that guy who taught me chemistry made a funny TikTok and that was it." The funny part wasn't that

my TikTok was funny, it was me; it was that guy that you saw in high school chemistry class. So, that was a lot of the foundation of my jokes. Over that period of time, I had to switch and be like, "Okay, it's not funny that I'm here anymore. I'm just here. So, I have to actually do it. I have to do the job." I'm very lucky in that I have a lot of credibility built up and a lot of interest built up, so it's easier for me.

But the reality is that if you understand the universe and what is so interesting about it, and also you understand the... One of the great things about TikTok is that they haven't heard all my stories yet. *[Alie laughs]* They don't know about all of the coolest parts of the universe that I learned about when I was their age. So, if you know what's interesting and you can get into the minds of the audience, and of course, your audience is going to be different... that's always work, and it's always sort of magical work because you don't act... you're inferring a lot from a little bit of data.

And then you have to understand the platform, you have to understand how people communicate, you have to understand how the jokes work, you have to understand what is working right now and the fact that what is working right now probably will be quite different in three months because it all changes very, very fast.

**Aside:** It changes so fast, in fact, you may be confused. Is TikTok part of the Metaverse? Is it in the Zuckerberg portfolio? Or is it the disco playground of Jeff Bezos? It's none of the above. It's owned by a tech company headquartered in Beijing, but legally, based in the Cayman Islands. Okay. Hm, okay. Part of its parent company is owned by three state entities, which allowed the Chinese government to appoint a board director at Beijing ByteDance, who owns it. But the Chinese government isn't an actual stakeholder in TikTok itself.

Now, if you live in India, you may have noticed that TikTok is banned permanently, due to national security concerns. Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh also banned TikTok because of its indecent content and gambling concerns. Oh, and the US tried to ban it in 2020 for national security reasons via Donald Trump's executive order. But TikTok sued Trump, blocking the ban, and then President Biden was like, "Mmm, we're going to nix Trump's executive order, but also we're going to launch a Commerce Department review of any software designed, developed, manufactured, or supplied by a foreign adversary." Hm! So, even with the bans, it's expected to surpass 1.5 billion users in 2022. So, that's a lot of you, or I guess soon... us, on it. So, it's banned, it's domiciled in the Cayman Islands, what's happening here?

**Alie:** Should anyone be worried about the evil forces behind it? Data mining? Anything like that?

**Hank:** Oh yeah. Oh, of course.

**Alie:** Okay, just checking. *[laughs]*

**Hank:** I mean, I'm terrified of all of it. It's really weird to be... I don't know, I feel like I was a part of the growth of YouTube in a way. I knew people who worked there from the very beginning because it was quite small when we started; 200 people worked at YouTube when we started uploading videos, less than that actually... god. So, the reality that we are in a world where nothing does no harm, and that we don't have the systems for dealing with these new communications tools and also the only real clear motivation that these platforms have is profit. And also, hopefully, not completely destroying the world, because in that world it's hard to make money.

I'm overwhelmed by the negative impacts all of the platforms I am on have had; Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, all of them, Instagram also. You'd be hard-pressed to find a

really influential communications platform that is algorithmically based that doesn't have a lot of scary stuff that comes along with it.

**Aside:** Some of that scary stuff are the dopamine loops that simulate slot machines, like, "Just one more video before bed... That one was okay. One more." There's also comparison to others, seeing faces mostly through filters. But also, when a social media platform has access to your data and serves up very curated content, they hold a lot of power, power to influence thoughts and behavior and actions, and elections. Facebook may be serving up the same viral content of a bear in a hot tub but maybe we don't hear as much about its potential role in, say, providing a platform to incite genocide and atrocities in Myanmar, and then not disclosing the data about it, citing privacy concerns. Suddenly, all those goofy dance videos and pumpkin memes... they getting a little dicey.

**Hank:** Now, as far as privacy and data, and as far as like, Chinese corporation versus American corporation... I don't know. But what I do know is that revolutionary communications technologies are always very societally disruptive; that was true of the printing press, and it is true of the internet. And I am certainly worried that we will not be able to build up systems to deal with it as fast as we get new systems to revolutionize it. Which feels like a very 'now' problem and not like an old problem. So, that's something I think a lot about and I worry a lot about.

**Alie:** And that being said, what kind of good do you feel like it's done for you? Have you learned anything about yourself or your life that you just feel like you wouldn't have learned if you hadn't had a For Your Page? Is it called an FYP or a For Your Page?

**Hank:** You say, "For You page."

**Alie:** Ohh gawd! [*"How do you do, fellow kids?"*]

**Hank:** [*laughs*] For Your Page. No, it's for you! [*both laugh*] It's the page that is for you.

**Alie:** [*laughing*] So embarrassing. Has there been anything that you were like, "Holy shit balls? ...smokes? [*Hank laughs*] Whaaat?"

**Hank:** Yeah, yeah sure. There's this guy named Mamadou who has a channel that just constantly unloads about the bizarreness of the biological world. [*"One of the most dangerous animals in all of Africa is a cousin of the beaver, but it's not for the reason you might think. African crested porcupines have about 30,000 ways they can ruin your week."*] But also, every line is a joke, so it's so entertaining to watch and of course, that's resulted in a huge audience of people learning about the world from him.

I watched a video yesterday on a person talking about the different systems of notes that different cultures have. Like, we are, western, sort of European culture based on the A, B, C, D, E, F, G kind of scale. But that's not the same in all other cultures. And I was like, [*stutters*] "D-don't do that to me!" That was not enough time for you to share that information. And she was, of course, also just a beautiful singer, so she got to sort of share it in that way as well.

So, all of the time, I feel like I'm having my understanding of the world expanded. And sometimes it's like, "Wow..." I tend to think only of the very negative consequences of oil drilling. But when you watch a crew working hard on an oil drill, and what is kind of this very dirty, but beautiful, carefully orchestrated dance, that if anybody lets anybody else down, then everybody is in danger, you get a different connection to something you would normally never get a different connection to.

Now, what we all do in our society is that we find people who are most like us and vibe with us the most, and so the filter of course creates those bubbles. But also, those bubbles help me be more empathetic to people who are not like me, in a lot of ways. I don't think that they help everybody be more empathetic to those people because, of course, there are people who are not in the same bubble as me, but that's really useful and interesting. But yeah, it does not come without its costs.

**Alie:** Can I ask you some listener questions?

**Hank:** Oh yeah!

**Alie:** They know you're coming on, there's a lot of questions, I've narrowed it down to a couple.

**Aside:** Real quick though, a word from sponsors of *Ologies* who make it possible for us to donate to a charity of the ologist's choosing. This week, Mr. Green chose Partners in Health. PIH is a global help organization restoring social justice by bringing quality healthcare to the most vulnerable, in the world's poorest places, serving the health needs of millions of people. Hank's own nonprofit, Foundation to Decrease World Suck, has sent several grants their direction. So, to learn more about them, visit [PIH.org](http://PIH.org) and that donation was made possible by sponsors of the show.

[Ad break]

Okay, now that we have tossed some cash, let's lob questions at Hank's kind face.

**Alie:** Kyle Pawlik, Jessica Phillips, a few other people want to ask you: Who the F is Hank? If you know that?

**Hank:** Oh gosh. Do you know about this joke?

**Alie:** I don't, but I saw it asked so many times that I figured you'd appreciate if I asked it.

**Hank:** It is a thing, yeah. Well, Hank is a genus of waterbirds, characterized by a long beak and a large throat pouch, used for catching prey and draining water from the scooped-up contents before swallowing.

**Alie:** Appreciated, thank you for that. I'm now going to go on a deep dive to understand more about that question [*Hank laughs*] and that joke that went over my head.

**Aside:** Okay. So, for almost a decade it's been an internet joke that people don't know who Hank Green, again 5.6 million followers on just one of those platforms, is. So, when you ask, "Who the F is Hank?" you'll get a different nonsensical answer each time. Inside jokes are great, they're what the internet is built on. And they're great once you are inside as well, which is why I just explained that to you.

And TikTok trends change really quickly. So, folks go to the Discover page to see what's cool and then they make stuff based on that. For example, one week, it might be a geriatric pug dog named Noodles, who appears to be boneless on his bad days, kind of like a furry, exhausted chicken cutlet. Relatable content also does well there too. But don't try too hard to be trendy. That is called cheugy, and the fact that I just defined it for us means that cheugy just got cheugy. Also, the word cringe, is very cringe.

**Alie:** Sikwani Dana wants to know: The algorithm is built so that you have to post daily and when you are having a no bones day [*Hank laughs*] or several no bones days in a row, how do you keep up with posting regularly? She also wants to know: How many drafts do you currently have saved?

**Hank:** Oh my gosh that's a great question! I'm not affected by— Oh, I've opened TikTok, now I'm just watching a guy skateboard, Alie. *[both laugh]* So, I record... So, first of all, every day is a bones day in the Green household. *[Alie laughs]* No bad days, positive vibes only. *[laughs]* But I record almost everything beforehand. I have a TikTok assistant who captions my videos, suggests videos, goes through my mentions to catch people asking questions so I don't miss good ones. I also don't have to see people who are making content that will not make me happy. *[laughs]* I currently have 274 drafts.

**Alie:** *[gasps]* Dang! How many of those are post-able? Or are most of them absolute garbage?

**Hank:** Oh, none of them are post-able. No, probably three or four of them are post-able and they are from the last week or two. But a lot of what I use drafts for is when people ask me questions, I make a draft video with the question just so I don't lose it. It's like a way of saving the comment to make a piece of content later. So, if I don't have any ideas for content I can go through my drafts and look at questions people have asked me.

**Alie:** Smart. Shane Redstar wants to know: Is the algorithm affecting our brain chemistry? Do you think children growing up with an algorithm have a different point of view than people who grew up reading the newspaper?

**Hank:** Umm... Yes. I think that the algorithm... What is the algorithm? I don't think it's the algorithm that's affecting us, I think it's the algorithmic system, the system of algorithmic recommendation. I want to get away from the idea that the algorithm is doing something that is its own goal. The only inputs that these algorithms have are human decisions. Now, it can do whatever it wants with those human decisions, but when people 'like' content, by pushing a button or by watching it, by watching it several times, or by once you watch it you go to the profile of the person who posted it... all of those things are different data points that indicate different things, or that can be used, can be synthesized into decisions that an algorithm might make for recommendations.

I don't think an algorithm directly affects your brain chemistry, but I think a content feed that keeps you designed from leaving it certainly can because there are lots of reasons why I could keep scrolling. It might be mindless distraction and that's probably okay, we've always had mindless distraction. It might be self-destructive, kind of, examining lives that are better than mine, and that is something that keeps people coming back. It's a self-destructive impulse to look at people who are happier and wealthier and more beautiful than we are, and that is a real thing that I think we need to confront. It can also be a feeling of superiority over others that keeps you coming back over, and over, and over again. You can be continuously exposed to people who are different from you but are acting in ways that are worse than you.

That's the most negative consequence of a filter bubble; not that we don't ever see the perspectives of people different from us, it's that we see the worst of the perspectives of people who are different from us. So, that sort of outrage, superiority cycle, which I think has more to do... When we think outrage, we think anger, but I think it has more to do with a feeling of righteous superiority over others.

**Alie:** Well put, indeed.

**Aside:** So, patrons Hannah Nuest, Lindsay Mixer, Alli Barg, Nicole Kleinman, Sharika Elahi, Constance McRobert-Smith, and Beth Sauter all wanted to know about addiction and TikTok. And I went down some rabbit holes.

So, there was one study of Chinese students and they found via functional MRI imaging that nearly 6% of users have 'significant, problematic' use of TikTok and that design elements like the likes and the personalized and endless content available reinforces that. Scientists found that reward centers of the brain activated when watching curated TikToks while simultaneously, there was a decrease in activity in the part of the brain that exhibits self-control. So, it's not your fault you keep chasing the dragon, you're not alone.

There's this great study by Aparajita Bhandari and Sara Bimo and they found that TikTok is totally different from other platforms because instead of showing you your friends' and family's content, it shows you the content of mostly strangers who represent just what you like, or as Bhandari and Bimo call, "your algorithmized version of yourself." And then there was another study that found that the need for escapism predicted the level of TikTok consumption but that the need for self-expression was linked to how much content people made.

And then, what happens when you make a video that goes viral? Oh! So many chemicals. One psychologist named Yamalis Diaz was quoted as explaining "the intoxication a person feels from the combination of dopamine and adrenaline that's released when their posts go viral is unbelievable. Neurologically that high is like a drug." So, this is your brain on TikTok. Any questions? Yeah, more?

Okay, so a lot of you asked about the algorithm and how it knows you so well? Like for example, Patrons Em Kase, Alia Myers, McKenna Rinta, Dawn Ewald, Sara Eden, Grace Denehe, Casey Jones, both first-time question-askers. Casey asked: Why does the FYP know me so well? And Tess Hebert, who mentioned: I'm not superstitious, but I am... stitious. (I knew you were going to ask that.)

**Alie:** Tess Hebert wants to know: How does TikTok read my mind? [*Hank laughs*] I understand them using my search history, but I swear I think something and then 15 minutes later I see a video about it. And Jess Bauzá de Garcia asked: How did TikTok realize I'm queer before I even realized? [*Hank laughs*] Is it magic? Is it ESP? Is it dark matter? Is there something more than just search histories? Can it read our minds?

**Hank:** I think that what we have discovered, that what algorithms have discovered for us and what we always knew was true but doesn't feel very true, is that we are extremely social. We are a social species, we are individuals, but our individual roles happen inside of a very strong social and cultural framework. So, there are ways that are much more, sort of, common ways of being, that algorithms, you know... it's hard to not give them sentience, but you can say words like, "they notice," which they don't actually notice but the actions that they take, they segment us out and they can find similarities between groups of people that I don't think even humans have realized yet.

And I know people who work on this stuff and so the reality becomes very clear that they do not realize the true power of the tools that they have at their fingertips. And also, they don't *want* to realize it, they don't want to think about how much power they have. Because if changing an algorithm can make people more self-destructive, or happier, or more social, or less social, that's not a power that anyone should have on a society level. So, they don't like to think about the fact that they might have that power.

**Alie:** You know, a question from me. Has it changed anything for you, having to record something daily like this? Many times a day, with nearly 6 million people seeing it? Has it changed the way that you have seen yourself? I'm like, is this like a hot tub where it's customary to

probably bathe before hopping onto TikTok? Do I need to put on makeup again? [*Hank laughs*] Does your grooming have to change?

**Hank:** I'm a guy. So, that's one of the great things about being a guy is that our society does not judge us by looks first, usually. And that is not the case in many parts of our society for women. So, that's just an inherent privilege and advantage that you run into... Welcome. So, in that case, I don't. Though there are times when I look at myself and I'm like, how do I position my head so that I have a little bit less of whatever that is? [*both laugh*]

**Alie:** Understood. It'll be good though, to get back into doing my hair every day.

**Hank:** Maybe.

**Aside:** And as we know, there are many genders and a whole spectrum of gender expression. If you want to dive into the study of beauty ideals and how it affects us up in the noggin area, just look no further than the 2018, two-part Kalology episode with Dr. Renee Engeln, which I'll link in the show notes because it is a whopper.

**Alie:** Ali Vessels wants to know: Real talk: it seems like a lot of TikTok videos are just people superimposing their face on top of tweets and just pointing and making faces. How do we explain to Gen Z that Vanna White-ing someone else's original content is not engaging content?

**Aside:** Okay, heads up Gen Z. Vanna White is the lady who turns over the letter on *Wheel of Fortune*, which is a game show on television that you watch while you're eating pot roast at your uncle's house. Okay.

**Alie:** Any best practices you can recommend?

**Hank:** Yeah, I've seen less of that. That was definitely a thing when I first was on the platform. One of the things that... first of all, that's not unique to TikTok. That's the Reddit-to-Twitter pipeline, you know? [*Alie laughs*] Or the Twitter-to-Reddit pipeline, or the Everything-to-Facebook pipeline. [*both laugh*] But the trend speed is very fast and so people get wise to certain content types really quickly and if it sort of seems like the same thing they've been seeing for a while, they stop liking it and it stops getting surfaced and then it stops getting made.

In the world of content, rather than art, what succeeds is what gets made, and the result of that is that when something is working really well it's almost like the clock starts ticking and then it ends. And hopefully that will happen with just righteously outraged misinformation. Maybe people will be like, "That was a trend. That was a trend from 2021 and we got over that." Right? No. They just have to find new ways of doing it, unfortunately.

**Alie:** I thought Tigeryuri had a great question. Wanted to know: How can TikTok creators make their content more autism friendly? TikTok tends to be very visually and audially overstimulating to the point of pain for me. Do you see any types of TikTok content that are a little bit less flashy?

**Hank:** There's definitely a strong autism community on TikTok. In my experience, the most rewarding parts of any of these platforms are the parts where people are finding each other. That's not going to be 100% of your For You page, but you can curate your Following page pretty heavily and you can sort of be searching out people who are focused on, really, anything, whether it's woodworking or mental health. And that is a nice thing to be able to curate and I often find that I actually like my Following page more than my For You page.

**Alie:** Mm, good to know. It's also called a For Your page, just in case you need to know terminology. *[both laugh]* Last listener question, Moriah McGuier, I thought great question, said: Oh my god, both of my internet dads. Can you ask Hank what shadow banning is? And then there's a couple of interrobangs after that.

**Hank:** *[laughs]* Yeah. So, the simplest example of a shadow ban would be, if you are leaving a bunch of really abusive comments on YouTube, YouTube might make it look like you are posting a comment, and you can see it, the poster can see it, but nobody else can see it. So, that's a true shadow ban, where you don't know that you are banned but you are banned. And because you don't know that you are banned, shadow banning becomes a thing where people often can... you never know it happened for sure, unless you get a new account, log on, and look at every comment under a YouTube video.

**Alie:** Wow. It's like being ghosted but you don't realize it's like automated text being like... *[laughs]*

**Hank:** Ghosted by everyone.

**Alie:** Okay, good to know.

**Hank:** And then colloquially, shadow banning can also include... So, if I've got a TikTok account, maybe I post something on TikTok, and TikTok kind of turns the dial down and is like, "We feel like that was maybe a little bit too strong, we're not going to show this to as many people." Is that happening? I don't know. Who knows? No one knows. People don't usually go... If you're posting on TikTok, you don't usually go from 10,000 views a video to 0 views a video. But you can go from 10,000 views a video, to like, 100. And in that situation, is it because people just stopped liking your content? Or is it because you got, like, 90% shadow banned?

So, that's the sort of colloquial use of it. It has come to encompass a lot of different, mostly algorithmic demotion, nerfing of a creator that isn't outright like, "Sure you can upload videos, but we won't show them to anybody." And it isn't outright like, "We've taken your account down." But it is some kind of space in between and it's because that word, "shadow," meaning you don't actually even know if it happened, or why it happened, or what happened.

**Alie:** So spooky. Wow. What's scarier than a shadow ban?

**Hank:** Yeah, it's like you become a ghost and you're just walking around the world and you're like, "I can see me."

**Alie:** Yes, it's very *The Others*. I should have had a spoiler alert if you've never seen that but it's very... What's that Bruce Willis movie?

**Hank:** *Sixth Sense*. *["I see dead people."]*

**Alie:** Anyway. Okay, we have one more minute. I'm going to challenge you in 15 seconds to tell me the thing you dislike the most about TikTok. Go.

**Hank:** Least favorite thing... definitely just terrible people, *[Alie laughs]* of which there are plenty.

**Alie:** Great answer. Favorite thing. Favorite thing about TikTok?

**Hank:** Favorite thing about TikTok, got to be absurdist sketch comedy. I saw one yesterday where a girl walks up to the other girl's window and the girl says, "Can I have your money?" She's in a Starbucks apron and she gives her the money and then she says, "Do you want anything else?" And she's like, "Some milk." And then some milk starts to pour off of the roof of the

car into the girl's cup and then she put a lid on it and she turns it upside down and then she hands it into the car and there's milk everywhere! And then she walks away, and the other girl is rolling up the window and then she does like a quadruple spin and there's milk, centripetally being flown off of her body as she spins around, and then she just lands on the ground, on her face.

**Aside:** Okay, I need you to know, I spent no fewer than three hours so diligently looking for this clip to no avail. I had Jarrett on the case too, we could not find it anywhere. So, TikTok, click clock, shit is fleeting, and that's how they get ya. But let us not cry over losing a video of spilled milk, that's just the machine clicking and whirring behind the addictive, ephemeral beauty of the viral video.

**Hank:** It was amazing. Pure art.

**Alie:** Now I'm going to look at that and I'm also going to wonder how long she smelled like milk.

**Hank:** [*Hank laughs*] Also, the inside of the car got really milky.

**Alie:** Oh, I hope it was almond or oat, oh I hope that wasn't cow milk. That's going to get a little ripe. She's like, "It was worth it, Hank Green loved it." [*laughs*]

**Hank:** Yeah, thank you.

**Alie:** Thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for doing this, you're the best.

**Hank:** Yeah, thank you, bye-bye!

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So, ask heroic people not-stoic questions. And when in doubt I guess just be yourself but talk faster? I don't know.

Find all things Hank Green at [HankGreen.com](http://HankGreen.com). you can follow him on all of the social platforms linked in the show notes and of course, on TikTok [@HankGreen1](https://www.tiktok.com/@HankGreen1), which is somehow comforting to know that he did not get the handle [@HankGreen](https://www.tiktok.com/@HankGreen), so he doesn't have his name either. Whatever. I am [@Alie Ologies](https://www.tiktok.com/@AlieOlogies) for now on TikTok. We are [@Ologies](https://www.tiktok.com/@Ologies) on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/Ologies) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/Ologies). I'm [@AlieWard](https://www.tiktok.com/@AlieWard) on [@both](https://www.tiktok.com/@AlieWard) of those, come say hi. More links to all the stuff we discussed is at [AlieWard.com/Ologies/TikTokology](http://AlieWard.com/Ologies/TikTokology). I'm about to embark on actually making a video, and apparently, I hear that you can use other programs like InShot to do the editing and then you just upload it to that. But all I know is that you press the plus button and then I guess you go for it.

Okay, thank you Erin Talbert for adminning the *Ologies* Podcast [Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/OlogiesPodcast). Thank you, Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch who help with [merch](https://www.merch.com). Noel Dilworth and Susan Hale who do so much *Ologies* biz behind the scenes. Thanks, Caleb Patton who bleeps all the kid-safe episodes. Those are up for free at [AlieWard.com/Ologies/Extras](http://AlieWard.com/Ologies/Extras). You can look for *Smologies* episodes in the main feed, they're shorter, condensed versions, totally classroom and work safe. Thank you, Emily White of The Wordary who makes our professional transcripts. Kelly Dwyer makes my website, and she can make yours too. Thank you, Steven Ray Morris and Zeke Rodrigues Thomas who make *Smologies* with me. And of course, lead editor and [@IAMActuallyJarrett](https://www.tiktok.com/@IAMActuallyJarrett) on TikTok, feel free to see his *Dune* Halloween costume and horny music stylings there, Jarrett Sleeper. Nick Thorburn wrote and performed the *Ologies* theme music. I'm Alie Ward.

If you stay well past 15 seconds past the credits, I tell you a secret tidbit. And this week, I found the milk video. I found the milk video!

**Speaker 1:** Excuse me, can I have all your money?

**Speaker 2:** Sure... Can I get anything else for you today?

**Speaker 1:** Just some milk.

My god, thank god, I looked for *so* long. I looked for so many days for so long so well done creator Savannah Moss. Her spin at the end is so good. Anyway, I'm going to link it at [AlieWard.com/Ologies/TikTokology](https://www.alieward.com/Ologies/TikTokology), you can follow her, you can follow @HankGreen1 on TikTok, me your dad, @Alie\_Ologies. Please be nice to me and give me tips in the comments, I'm so scared and lost and I hope it's a worthy journey. Okay, I love you. Berbye.

*Transcribed by Aveline Malek at [TheWordary.com](https://www.thewordary.com)*

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