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Gen Z has nowhere to go: The erosion of third spaces in the U.S.

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TEEN CHAPERONE POLICY

Effective January 1, 2022

Town & Country Shopping Center is committed to providing an enjoyable shopping experience for our guests.

**Anyone under the age of 18
visiting Town and Country Shopping Center
must be accompanied by an adult.**

Visitors are responsible to carry acceptable proof of age (i.e. photo identification with date of birth including driver's license, state ID, military or college ID, passport or Visa.)



A telltale sign of an empire in serious decline is the degree to which the ruling class continuously gaslights my generation, Gen Z, saying that if we all want to stop feeling so lonely and depressed — an unresolved effect of the COVID-19 crisis almost

five years ago — we need to “get off TikTok and our damn phones and go outside to socialize.”

The same ruling class that created these material conditions by grooming us to become hyper-individualistic. Where exactly are we supposed to go to “socialize” when we neither have the time nor, most importantly, the **money** for it? What about those who are stuck having to live at home with their likely strict parents, either in towns or cities that are too far from where most of their friends currently are, or in suburban areas that severely lack third spaces?

If there’s one thing that living on my own as a post-grad has shown me so far, it is that there are increasingly less third spaces available for my friends/comrades and I to actually enjoy without having to pay an exorbitant amount of money and/or being subjected to ridiculous restrictions and rules that make these experiences not worth the energy.

A disgusting tactic that bowling alleys, escape rooms, and places like TopGolf employ to be able to offset their high commercial rent is the “variable pricing” model, which basically means that at noon, it could be \$15/person to play for only 1-2 hours, but then at 5 p.m., it will skyrocket up to \$45/person for only the same amount of time.

Then there are other spaces like arcades and skating rinks that still use a “fixed price” model with no imposed time limit per se, except that the admission fee and skate rental or the cost of a game card is inherently higher.

How long we end up staying in these spaces boils down to two key factors: 1) how much money we’re willing to burn, and/or 2) how much spare time we have before inevitably having to work the next day.

Don’t even get me started on food/drink costs in these establishments. Considering

that on average, we as a generation are spending as little as \$100-200 per week on groceries just to survive, what's the point in even paying \$25 for bland, unseasoned wings plus \$9-10 for alcoholic drinks at an arcade or bowling alley? We might as well just go down to the nearest gastropub, microbrewery or upscale club or lounge in the most gentrified part of town if those are the insane costs we must pay!

The last time I checked, these places were supposed to be a primary source of joy and relaxation, where we could spend hours upon hours just having a good time with our friends. Instead, we now get stressed out at the mere thought of trying to make fun plans, and some places don't even advertise their prices upfront online; they can only be seen inside the actual establishment, which creates more pressure.

The capitalists love feeding off this increased pressure and anxiety. When time's up and we can't afford to pay for more time, don't think that we're able to just freely hang around with our friends in these spaces either. These privatized places either want us to keep spending our money or go home, as doing either of those things constitutes "loitering," especially when it's teens doing it, and management won't hesitate to call the police on *anyone* they deem to be a "nuisance." Who amongst teens and young adults predominantly gets targeted?

In most (if not all) malls now, after 4 p.m. on weekends, anyone under 17 years old must be accompanied by either a parent or supervising adult who is 21 years old or older, or they have to leave the mall immediately. They also require both the youth and supervising adult to carry ID with them, as either one of them could be pulled to the side and asked this by a police officer at any time.

This draconian policy inherently targets Black and Brown children, especially from poor and single-parent households. Teens, like all of us, just want to spend time with their friends. This policy assumes parents even have the availability to come to the mall so their kids can socialize. It puts pressure on working families, and places an extra burden on single parents. Perhaps worst of all, it restricts kids who have no

adult figure.

End-stage capitalism has greatly strained personal relationships due to most people either having to work multiple jobs to barely survive, or are stuck living with their parents in their 20s and 30s, being nowhere near friends or a caring community.

Because of both the severe lack of third spaces and the insanely high costs to even access most of them, we have been forced to normalize the absolute mundane in life and forced to adopt very minimalist ways of thinking. I can clearly see that Gen Z and Gen Alpha are reaching a boiling point, especially considering that the U.S. government is hell-bent on fully banning TikTok next month if Bytedance does not divest from the app. What becomes of a generation that has been completely disinherited?

