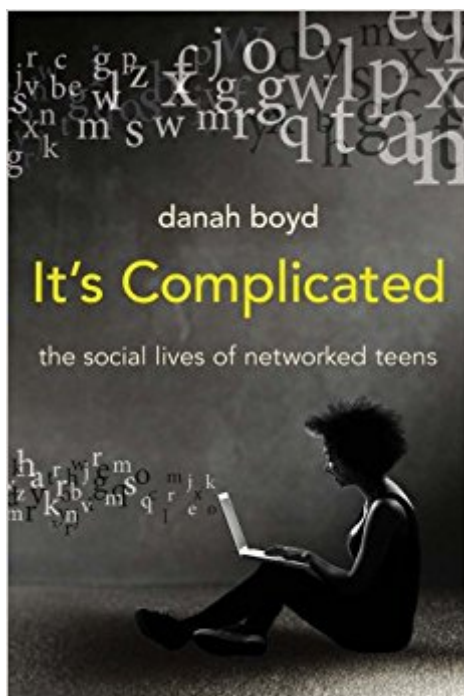


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It's Complicated: The Social Lives Of Networked Teens



Synopsis

An essential read, written by a leading expert, for anyone who wants to understand young people's use of social media. What is new about how teenagers communicate through services such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram? Do social media affect the quality of teens' lives? In this eye-opening book, youth culture and technology expert danah boyd uncovers some of the major myths regarding teens' use of social media. She explores tropes about identity, privacy, safety, danger, and bullying. Ultimately, boyd argues that society fails young people when paternalism and protectionism hinder teenagers' ability to become informed, thoughtful, and engaged citizens through their online interactions. Yet despite an environment of rampant fear-mongering, boyd finds that teens often find ways to engage and to develop a sense of identity. Boyd's conclusions are essential reading not only for parents, teachers, and others who work with teens but also for anyone interested in the impact of emerging technologies on society, culture, and commerce in years to come. Offering insights gleaned from more than a decade of original fieldwork interviewing teenagers across the United States, boyd concludes reassuringly that the kids are all right. At the same time, she acknowledges that coming to terms with life in a networked era is not easy or obvious. In a technologically mediated world, life is bound to be complicated.

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Customer Reviews

"danah boyd . . . is one of my favorite people to talk with about teenagers and technology.

That's not because I agree with her all the time. . . . But danah is the best kind of sparring partner because she always tells me something I didn't know along the way. That holds true with her new book, *It's Complicated* which offers interviews with teenagers in communities across the country. By filtering them through her distinct danah lens, she gleans valuable insights."

•Emily Bazelon, *Slate* "Based on a decade of research and interviews with adolescents from the suburbs to the inner city, *It's Complicated* is a persuasive anti-alarmist polemic that should help ease parents' concerns about all sorts of Internet bogeymen."

•Randy Hoder, *TIME Health & Family* "The key point is that social behaviour is adaptive, and people in power (i.e. parents) rarely understand the coping strategies being used by others. When adults start worrying about our children's use of the internet, we should also ask what we can learn from our children and then look in the mirror at our own behaviour too. And have the courage to give kids more freedom physically to roam in the 'real world' alongside their travels in cyberspace."

•Gillian Tett, *Financial Times* "The book took a decade to complete, and cites sociologists including Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman, but it's the voices of the 166 teenagers Boyd interviewed across America that make it a truly enlightening read."

•Jane Mulkerrins, *The Sunday Telegraph* "It's *Complicated*, a new book about teenagers and digital technology by the media scholar danah boyd, places today's smartphones, iPads and laptops in the context of this perennial power struggle between adolescents and parents. In doing so, it adds much to our understanding of a young generation of hyper-connected, hybrid consumer-producers – a cohort whose behaviour often unites parents, educators and investors in collective bewilderment."

•Gautam Malkani, *The Financial Times* "[T]here is something marvellously sensible about Boyd's resolutely academic style. . . . Boyd's anatomy of teenage life is penetrating."

•Jane Shilling, *The Sunday Telegraph* "boyd's new book is layered and smart . . . *It's Complicated* will update your mind."

•Alissa Quart, *New York Times Book Review* "Students, parents, and educators will find this a comprehensive study of how technology impacts teens' lives and how adults can help balance rather than vilify its inevitable use."

•Publishers Weekly "An exhaustively researched study of how teens use technology . . . and a manifesto on how parents as individuals and society as a whole let young people down when they insist on protection and paternalism over media literacy and critical thinking. Even readers who are not parents, or teens, may well find this one of the most interesting books of the year."

•Amy Benfer, *Los Angeles Times* "A passionate, scholarly, and vividly described account of the reality of young people's use of networked

technologies in America today. Painstakingly researched through interviews and close study for more than a decade, boyd's book is the most important analysis of networked culture I've yet to read."

•Cory Doctorow, BoingBoing "It's Complicated is both a report from the front lines and a larger social analysis. . . . It probes much deeper than just the latest fads in Twitter gossip or Snapchat goofiness . . . On one level it is designed to counter the paranoia and anxiety that many parents still feel about their children's engagement in social media. . . . But on another level it is a poignant critique of contemporary civilization . . . The briefest possible summary? The kids are all right, but society isn't."

•Andrew Leonard, Salon "A fascinating, well-researched and (mostly) reassuring look at how today's tech-savvy teenagers are using social media."

•People "boyd's extensive research illuminates the oft-misunderstood world of teens today, where social media is an extension of life. . . . Thorough information interwoven with common-sense advice from teens and the author enable readers, particularly parents, to relax a bit regarding this new media age. . . . Comprehensive new research that illuminates why and how social media is important to teens."

•Kirkus Reviews "In explaining the networked realm of teens, boyd has the insights of a sociologist, the eye of a reporter, and the savvy of a technologist. For parents puzzled about what their kids are doing online, this is an indispensable book."

•Walter Isaacson, CEO of the Aspen Institute, author of Steve Jobs "If you want to understand the digital worlds inhabited by today's young people, this is the book to read."

•Howard Gardner, coauthor of The App Generation "Boyd has done her homework and listened well. She is a high-tech medium translating the language and meaning of teenagers and social networking."

•Eve Ensler, author of The Vagina Monologues and In the Body of the World "I want to get this publication into the hands of every teacher, parent, policy maker, and journalist. Thoughtful in her analysis and adept at skewering the most common misunderstandings and anxieties about teens' online lives, boyd is the best possible person to write a book like this, and this book does not disappoint in any way."

•Henry Jenkins, coauthor of Spreadable Media: Creating Meaning and Value in a Networked Culture "Astute, nuanced, provocative and hopeful, boyd does it all in this must-read treatise on teens and their digital lives."

•Stephen Balkam, Founder and CEO, Family Online Safety Institute "My favourite work book this year is danah boyd's It's Complicated. Myth-busting, assumption-challenging and eye-opening, it brings real evidence to a crucial field. Well written, academically rigorous and enjoyable, it makes important points for adults as well as teens."

•Paul Bernal, THES. (Paul Bernal THE 2014-12-18)

danah boyd is Principal Researcher at Microsoft Research, Research Assistant Professor at New York University, and Fellow at Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. She lives in New York City.

"It's Complicated" was a fascinating read that shed light on a somewhat controversial aspect of our society today. The issue of teenagers and their interactions with technology is controversial because of the conflicted opinions shared between teenagers and adults. I am twenty-three years old, so it was easier for me to relate to Boyd's opinions expressed by younger people in today's culture. However, I also am an adult working in the professional world, so I do carry a diverse perspective. I found it very surprising and somewhat refreshing to hear her take such an optimistic role. I appreciated her point of view because she had done incredible amounts of research and conducted many interviews. Instead of acting solely on emotion or assumption, Boyd was focused on incorporating data and real-life examples. The ways that Boyd constructed her arguments throughout the book were honest and open-minded. In the "Danger" chapter, Boyd stated: "As always happens whenever adults obsess over child safety, restrictions emerge and fearful rhetoric abounds (pg. 103). I did notice how Boyd used absolutes like this throughout the book that weren't always accurate. To say that something "always happens" is an unrealistic extreme. I know parents who are overbearing when it comes to the safety of their children and they focus their fears by having healthy conversations, not automatically imposing restriction. Overall, the ways that Boyd argued were very fair in addressing both sides of the issue and giving teens a fair say in what was expressed. I found her stories to be engaging and accurate. One thing that I wished Boyd touched on more throughout the book was the issue of safety from a privacy standpoint for teens on the internet. A fear that I have for young people comes from the horror stories of young girls or boys getting involved with adults online and getting taken advantage of in vulnerable ways. I admit that this is an aspect of the digital world that I do not fully understand so I do want to know how I can better equip young people to not fall into those traps. I found it interesting when Boyd said: "When parents choose to hover, lurk, and track, they implicitly try to regulate teens' practices. Parents often engage in these acts out of love but fail to realize how surveillance is a form of oppression that limits teens' ability to make independent choices (pg. 74). I see what

Boyd is talking about here, but I do wonder how to achieve the balance of having some sort of surveillance without making teens feel limited. It would have been nice for Boyd to elaborate on this more. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed this read and appreciated Boyd's refreshing style of writing that provided clarity and perspective on a prevalent topic in our society today. I would recommend this book to be read by educators and parents who desire a holistic understanding on the social lives of networked teens. Boyd creates awareness about many aspects of the online world while also helping eliminate misconceptions that adults might have. If we are to better reach our students today, I think we need to be more like Boyd and try to understand their desire for an online presence from their point of view.

Boyd's book breaks down how teens' lives are, and aren't affected by social media, in a world where social media is mainstream. She explores what social media adds to the lives of teens, and what it takes away. She also challenges responses to social media including the way our media sensationalizes it and can make us fearful of it, but Boyd has a way of getting the reader to see positivity in what can so often be viewed as negative. Boyd does this by looking at seven different areas. Identity, privacy, addiction, danger, bullying, inequality and literacy are all discussed in this book, which are all important areas when talking about our children. I enjoyed the first six chapters the most as I found them to be relevant to my learning and more interesting than the last two chapters. Boyd's research shed a very different light on social media and teens in my eyes and I surprisingly agreed with most of her ideas presented in this book. For me, she brings to light how social media today is simply a modern day version of how we used to communicate in past generations. This book strives to make us understand social media from a teens vantage point and the author successfully shows us what kids are doing online, why they are doing it, and their perceptions which might surprise you. Boyd spent a lot of time talking to teens of all SES, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and I found reading what these teens had to say first hand as enlightening.

danah writes from experience and this translates well into the book. The content is straightforward and easy to grasp. The overall theme is that the kids are alright and parents can stop worrying. There are a lot of details and stories contained within to bolster this theme. Parenting hasn't changed much in the past century. The fact that kids go online to escape parents should be nothing new. My generation rode bikes and was away from the house from dawn to dusk. The same reasons apply to over-scheduled kids today and why they hang out online. If you're an mature adult

and a parent, this book will be easy to read and make sense to you.

I just finished the book and enjoyed it immensely. It's an insightful view of teenagers in networked publics. Parents of teens should definitely get a copy of this book for themselves as well as their teens. The book appears to be targeted at parents, but teachers, journalists, employers, software developers and social media experts can benefit from the wisdom that danah delivers in her amazing book. Not only does the book shine a bright light on teens in networked publics, but provides a visceral assessment of class, ethnic and cultural divides that exist in networked publics as it applies to teens and adults. danah boyd uses her expertise to show how the experiences we have in the digital world cross over into the physical world. There are so many pearls of wisdom in this book I can't wait for the book on social lives of networked adults.

In my own work I teach media both digital and non-digital and must say that Boyd's book is one of the best I have seen in recent years. Solid methodology and data collection combined with in-depth examinations of how teens actually use social media, moves us beyond the moral panic of media pundits and politicians to a much more nuanced understanding of teens using media to carve out autonomous spaces for themselves and their friends. As she says, "It's Complicated," and cannot be reduced to simple sound bites. I highly recommend this for college courses on the subject as well as the general reader for its easy to read format. This book operates as a nice counter-point to Sherry Turkle's, "Alone Together," which comes up with opposite conclusions to Boyd.

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