it's **complicated**

the social lives of networked teens

danah boyd

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For Peter Lyman (1940–2007), who took a
chance on me and helped me find solid ground

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preface

The year was 2006, and I was in northern California chatting with teenagers about their use of social media. There, I met Mike, a white fifteen-year-old who loved YouTube.[1] He was passionately describing the "Extreme Diet Coke and Mentos Experiments" video that had recently gained widespread attention, as viewers went to YouTube in droves to witness the geysers that could be produced when the diet soda and mint candy were combined. Various teens had taken to mixing Mentos and Diet Coke just to see what would happen, and Mike was among them. He was ecstatic to show me the homemade video he and his friends had made while experimenting with common food items. As he walked me through his many other YouTube videos, Mike explained that his school allowed him to borrow a video camera for school assignments. Students were actively encouraged to make videos or other media as part of group projects to display their classroom knowledge. He and his friends had taken to borrowing the camera on Fridays, making sure to tape their homework assignment before spending the rest of the weekend making more entertaining videos. None of the videos they made were of especially high quality, and while they shared them publicly on YouTube, only their friends watched them. Still, whenever they got an additional view—even if only because they forced a friend to watch the video—they got excited.

As we were talking and laughing and exploring Mike's online videos, Mike paused and turned to me with a serious look on his face. "Can you do me a favor?" he asked, "Can you talk to my mom? Can you tell her that I'm not doing anything wrong on the internet?" I didn't immediately respond, and so he jumped in to clarify. "I

mean, she thinks that everything online is bad, and you seem to get it, and you're an adult. Will you talk to her?" I smiled and promised him that I would.

This book is just that: my attempt to describe and explain the networked lives of teens to the people who worry about them—parents, teachers, policy makers, journalists, sometimes even other teens. It is the product of an eight-year effort to explore various aspects of teens' engagement with social media and other networked technologies.

To get at teens' practices, I crisscrossed the United States from 2005 to 2012, talking with and observing teens from eighteen states and a wide array of socioeconomic and ethnic communities. I spent countless hours observing teens through the traces they left online via social network sites, blogs, and other genres of social media. I hung out with teens in physical spaces like schools, public parks, malls, churches, and fast food restaurants.

To dive deeper into particular issues, I conducted 166 formal, semi-structured interviews with teens during the period 2007–2010.[2] I interviewed teens in their homes, at school, and in various public settings. In addition, I talked with parents, teachers, librarians, youth ministers, and others who worked directly with youth. I became an expert on youth culture. In addition, my technical background and experience working with and for technology companies building social media tools gave me firsthand knowledge about how social media was designed, implemented, and introduced to the public. Together, these two strains of expertise allowed me to enter into broader policy conversations, serve on commissions focused on youth practices, and help influence public conversations about networked sociality.

As I began to get a feel for the passions and frustrations of teens and to speak to broader audiences, I recognized that teens' voices rarely shaped the public discourse surrounding their networked lives. So many people talk about youth engagement with social media, but very few of them are willing to take the time to listen to teens, to hear them, or to pay attention to what they have to say about their lives,

online and off. I wrote this book to address that gap. Throughout this book, I draw on the voices of teens I've interviewed as well as those I've observed or met more informally. At times, I also pull stories from the media or introduce adults' perspectives to help provide context or offer additional examples.

I wrote this book to reflect the experiences and perspectives of the teens that I encountered. Their voices shape this book just as their stories shaped my understanding of the role of social media in their lives. My hope is that this book will shed light on the complex and fascinating practices of contemporary American youth as they try to find themselves in a networked world.

As you read this book, my hope is that you will suspend your assumptions about youth in an effort to understand the social lives of networked teens. By and large, the kids are all right. But they want to be understood. This book is my attempt to do precisely that.

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Not far from my hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I met a white, middle-class sixteen-year-old named Emily. As she told me about her life and what she liked to do, I couldn't help but feel nostalgic. Although she lived in a different town and went to a different school, so many of her cultural touchstones were familiar to me, including the Turkey Hill convenience stores that dotted the area and Park City, the shopping mall that attracted people for miles around. Emily told me that she loved the mall and attended many school sporting events. But as I probed, I also learned that she didn't particularly care about shopping and that she had never watched a football game or wrestling match in her life, even though she had attended many such events.

For Emily, going to places where her peers gather is a freedom—even if she isn't actually watching the game or buying clothes. When she's out in public, "It's a time when you can just fool around and be free and do whatever you want. It's not fair to be tied down to chores or school. You need that little bit of freedom." Her younger brother prefers hanging out at friends' houses, but Emily would much rather gather in public places because these settings expand the social possibilities. "If you go [out] with your friends, there might be other people you run into that are your friends too. I would say it's more of an opportunity to see more of your friends than just going over to a friend's house. Going over to a friend's house, there might be one friend or maybe three. Whereas going to the mall, it can be seven or

twelve." Emily told me that she takes any opportunity possible to gather with friends in public settings. She attends basketball games, track meets, and any other school sports event that her friends might attend. She goes to the movies whenever she can get a ride, even if the film her friends choose doesn't particularly excite her. She wants the opportunity to hang out in the theater before the show.

Emily looks for places where she can hang out, joke around with friends, and simply be herself. Park City is one place that offers her this freedom. That very mall was the go-to place for my peer group as well. Back then, we never had any money to buy anything more luxurious than an Auntie Anne's pretzel, but shopping was never the point. We wanted to go to the mall because the people we knew went there.

Unlike Emily, I was often forbidden from going to Park City. When I was in high school, the local business community had teamed up with the school district to create an alternative high school for students who were not succeeding in traditional schools. They decided to place this experimental school at Park City because that's where so many of the students they were seeking to attract were hanging out. Those kids—and, by extension, the mall—had a bad reputation for violence, truancy, and delinquency more generally. Park City has changed tremendously in the twenty years since that school first opened; it is now considered an upscale establishment with both midrange and high-end brands. Although Emily and her friends meet up at the food court, the presence of teenagers there pales in comparison to what I remember growing up. Whenever I go home, I'm always surprised at how pristine, respectable, and boring Park City feels. As I talked with other teens in the area, I learned that the mall was still seen as dangerous even though it had none of the grime or grit that was present in my teen years. Most teens were allowed to hang out there.

Many of the teens that I met—both in Pennsylvania and elsewhere—craved the freedoms that Emily had. They were desperate for the opportunity to leave their homes to gather with friends. Although not universal, most could attend school functions. Some could get together with friends in public venues on weekends. Yet

over and over again and across the country, teens complained to me that they never had enough time, freedom, or ability to meet up with friends when and where they wanted. To make up for this, they turned to social media to create and inhabit networked publics.

The Creation of Networked Publics

The topics addressed in this book often hinge on teens' interest in getting meaningful access to public spaces and their desire to connect to their peers. Rather than fighting to reclaim the places and spaces that earlier cohorts had occupied, many teens have taken a different approach: they've created their own publics. Teens find social media appealing because it allows them access to their friends and provides an opportunity to be a part of a broader public world while still situated physically in their bedrooms. Through social media, they build networks of people and information. As a result, they both participate in and help create networked publics.

As discussed in the Introduction and throughout the book, networked publics serve as publics that both rely on networked technologies and also network people into meaningful imagined communities in new ways. Publics are important, not just for enabling political action, but also for providing a mechanism through which we construct our social world. In essence, publics are the fabric of society.

Through engagement with publics, people develop a sense of others that ideally manifests as tolerance and respect. Although laws provide concrete rules for what is and is not acceptable in a particular jurisdiction, social norms shape most interactions. People develop a sense for what is normative by collectively adjusting their behavior based on what they see in the publics they inhabit and understand. This does not mean that the world is inherently safe or that people always respect their neighbors but that social processes underpinning publics buffer people from hatred by creating common cultural ground.

Teens want access to publics to see and be seen, to socialize, and to feel as if they have the freedoms to explore a world beyond the heavily

constrained one shaped by parents and school. By and large, just as society formerly wrote women out of civic life, we now prohibit teenagers from many aspects of public life. Adults justify the exclusion of youth as being for their own good or as a necessary response to their limited experience and cognitive capacity.

Rather than accepting their social position, many teens have clamored to find ways to access and participate in a whole host of publics, from social publics to political ones. Often, they turn to social media and other networked technologies to do so.

What teens do online cannot be separated from their broader desires and interests, attitudes and values. Their relation to networked publics signals their interest in being a part of public life. It does not suggest that they're trying to go virtual or that they're using technology to escape reality. Teens' engagement with social media and other technologies is a way of engaging with their broader social world.

The world that American teens live in is highly circumscribed. Their lives are regulated both by their parents and by institutional forces. Compulsory schooling is a contemporary reality, even if homeschooling provides an alternative. Laws that define when, where, and how they can gather shape teens' activities and mobility. In the same vein, teens' worldviews are influenced by cultural dynamics that underpin American society more generally. They are exposed to media narratives that convey broader cultural values, and they are living within a system that is both consumerist and commercial in nature.

The networked publics that teens inhabit are not public in the sense of being state-run. In fact, most of the public spaces that teens encounter are private, whether at the mall or on Facebook.[1] Their presence and the traces that they leave are often used for commercial interests. They are targets of marketing online, at school, and in most spaces they visit.[2] This trend in American childhood predates the internet, but there is little doubt that it is being reinforced by social media and playing out in networked publics. Rather than critiquing that dynamic, as many excellent scholars have done, this book instead takes it at face value because this is the only world that

today's teens know.[3] Teens accept this version of networked publics because, however flawed, the spaces and communities provided by social media are what they have available to them in their quest to meaningfully access public life. The commercial worlds that they have access to may not be ideal, but neither is the limited mobility that they experience nor the heavily structured lives that they lead.

To Be Public and To Be in Public

Enamored with Parisian society, French poet Charles Baudelaire documented the public life that unfolded as people strolled along city streets. He wrote of *flâneurs*—individuals who came to the streets not to go anywhere in particular but in order to see and be seen. In Baudelaire's conception, the flâneur is neither fully an exhibitionist nor fully a voyeur at any moment, but a little of both all the time. The flâneur is an intimate part of the city, gaining from both seeing and being seen, performing and watching others.

When teens turn to networked publics, they do so to hang out with friends and be recognized by peers. They share in order to see and be seen. They want to look respectable and interesting, while simultaneously warding off unwanted attention. They choose to share in order to be a part of the public, but how much they share is shaped by how public they want to be. They are, in effect, *digital flâneurs*.

As teens stroll the digital streets, they must contend with aspects of networked technologies that complicate the social dynamics in front of them. The issues of persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability that I introduced in the first chapter and addressed throughout the book fundamentally affect their experiences in networked publics. They must negotiate invisible audiences and the collapsing of contexts. They must develop strategies for handling ongoing surveillance and attempts to undermine their agency when they seek to control social situations.

Although most youth are simply trying to be a part of public life, the visibility of their online activities creates tremendous consternation among adults who are uncomfortable with the possibility that

teens might share something inappropriate on Instagram or interact with strangers on Twitter. This is where anxieties around online safety and privacy get coupled with broader societal concerns about race and class, sometimes becoming a source of tension. Teens are not ignorant of their parents' fears, but by and large, they see the opportunities presented by participating in public life as far outweighing the possible consequences they may face.

As teens work through the various issues that emerge around networked publics, they must struggle with what it means both to *be* public and to be *in* public. This often is framed through the language of privacy, and indeed, the tension between being public and being in public comes down to the ability to control the social situation. But the distinction also has to do with how teens relate to public life.

In North Carolina, I met Manu, a seventeen-year-old boy of Indian descent who was active on both Facebook and Twitter. Initially, I assumed that he was using Twitter to create a public presence while keeping Facebook as a more intimate space. I was wrong. Facebook had become so pervasive in his peer group that he felt forced to connect with everyone he'd ever met. Twitter was different because Twitter had not yet become particularly popular in his community. The difference in audience—and how people on each site responded to his sharing—shaped his understanding of Facebook and Twitter. Whenever Manu posted something on Facebook, he felt that he was forcing everyone he'd ever met to consume it, whereas on Twitter, people opted in when they felt that what he was sharing was interesting. As he explained, "I guess Facebook is like yelling it out to a crowd, and then Twitter is just like talking in a room."[4] He posted messages he wanted to broadcast widely on Facebook while sharing whatever intimate thoughts were on his mind on Twitter. Manu's practice contradicts the assumptions then held by adults, who often saw Facebook as a more intimate site than Twitter because of each site's technical affordances and defaults.

What makes a particular site or service more or less public is not necessarily about the design of the system but rather how it is situated

within the broader social ecosystem. Although Facebook was initially built to provide an intimate, private alternative to MySpace, Manu's practice reveals how—by becoming the de facto social media site for one billion people—it's often more experientially public than more publicly accessible sites that are not nearly as popular. In this way, the technical architecture of the system matters less than how users understand their relationship to it and how the public perceives any particular site.

The tensions between the technologies that help create networked publics and the publics that are created through networked technologies reveal how the nature of public-ness is actually being remade every day in people's lives. Twitter is not inherently public even if the content is broadly accessible, nor are people's experiences of Facebook private just because the content can be restricted. Both help create networked publics, but the nature of public-ness for teens ends up depending on how the people around them use available tools.

What teens want from being in public—and how they understand publics—varies. Some teens see publics as a site of freedom, and they want to be able to roam free from adult surveillance. Whereas these teens want to be in public, other teens are looking to be public. They use the same technologies that allow them to engage in networked publics to magnify their voices, gather audiences, and connect with others on a large scale.

Some teens who are seeking to be public are enamored by the stories presented by media, including the "reality" of reality TV, the rich narratives of exploratory youth in novels, and the raucous adventures of celebrities. Teens often reference celebrities as individuals who achieve freedom and opportunities by being public. In this way, they blur the lines between being public and being in public.

Long before the internet, there were teens who dreamed of or actively sought out broader engagement and tried to create publics from their own homes. Teens who want to be public often use media or new technologies to do so. In the 1980s and 1990s, some youth turned to pirate radio and homemade magazines, or zines, to connect

with others.[5] Even though teen adoption of these technologies was not universal, popular films like *Pump Up the Volume* and *Wayne's World* celebrated these practices and the fun that could be had by being public.

Social media has made being public much more accessible to teens, and many embrace popular technologies to build an audience and contribute their thoughts to the broader cultural ethos. I met teens who had cultivated hundreds of thousands—and even millions—of followers on MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Some shared homemade videos, fashion commentary, or music they made with their friends. Others posted risqué photos or problematic content in an effort to entice strangers. Their reasons varied, but an interest in attention is common. These teens relish the opportunity to be seen and be part of a broader conversation.

Although some teens are looking for the attention that comes with being public, most teens are simply looking to be in public. Most are focused on what it means to be a part of a broader social world. They want to connect with and participate in culture, both to develop a sense of self and to feel as though they are a part of society. Some even see publics as an opportunity for activism. These teens are looking to actively participate in public life in order to make the world a better place.

When Networked Publics Get Political

Not only has social media enabled new ways of being public and being in public, but these same technologies have been used to reconfigure political publics as we know them.[6] Teens are often eschewed for being apolitical, but some teens are deeply and explicitly political in their activities, both online and off.[7] A networked public is not inherently a political public sphere, but some teens can and do bring their politics to their online engagement and use technology to help them be political.[8]

Around the world, people have leveraged social media and networked technologies to instantiate meaningful political activities.

Using the internet and mobile phones to coordinate and communicate, activists have banded together and engaged different constituencies to resist political regimes.[9] Even the simple act of hanging out online to see and be seen has enormous potential for creating the civic networks that support real-world political engagement.[10] Teens' practices in social media are neither frivolous nor without impact in other parts of public and civic life, whether they are trying to be political or not.

The majority of teens' engagement with networked publics is never expressly political, but there are notable exceptions that often go unacknowledged. In 2005, Congress introduced HR4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigrant Control Act. This bill, directed at undocumented people living in the United States, was rife with measures that would have had serious social justice and humanitarian consequences. Immigration advocates described it as draconian and opposed it. As HR4437 gained traction among anti-immigrant groups, opponents began taking to the streets in protest.

In March 2006, immigrant rights groups organized massive protests through Spanish-speaking media and traditional advocacy networks. Many teen children of undocumented parents felt disconnected from the protests organized by more seasoned activists. They turned to MySpace and used text messaging to coordinate their own public stance.[11]

On March 27, 2006, only a few days after immigrant rights groups hosted a massive protest, thousands of California high school students walked out of school and took to the streets to demand rights on behalf of their families.[12] In Los Angeles alone, more than twenty thousand students marched in protest. Students talked about how the bill represented a form of racist oppression that would permit racial profiling. Others spoke about the fundamental problems with the economic system, about how Mexicans are a critical labor force that is systematically oppressed. Still others described how their parents came to America to give them a chance for a better life. They crafted banners and posters, brought flags to signify the diversity of cultures that people came from, and invoked Cesar Chavez and human rights in their chants.

These teens were doing recognizable political work, despite adults' frequent dismissal of teens as having no civic interests and being otherwise politically disengaged. Were they celebrated? No. Rather than being complimented for their willingness to step forward and take a stance, the students were summarily dismissed.

Public officials and school administrators spoke out against the students' actions and their use of technology for creating a disruptive situation by encouraging fellow students to skip school. They chastised the students for using political issues to justify mass truancy. The press, using the fear-mongering tactics discussed throughout this book, gave the impression that administrators were concerned for students' safety.

In admonishing the students, administrators told the press that the students should return to school, where they could have conversations about immigration in a "productive" way. When Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa spoke to the young protesters, he said: "You've come today, you registered your commitment to your families, your opposition to the Sensenbrenner legislation, but it's time to go back to school."[13] His tone was condescending, implying that a day at school was more important than this political act. Some adults invoked Cesar Chavez by telling students that the well-respected civil rights leader would be ashamed of them. The discussions on MySpace painted a different logic to these criticisms as students discussed how schools would be docked anywhere from thirty to fifty dollars in state funding for each student who did not attend class.

The students faced steep consequences for their decision to protest. In some towns, authorities charged them with truancy for participating. Many faced school detention and other punishments. Few adults recognized the teens for their ingenuity in using the tools available to them to engage directly in political action. Activists regularly face punishment for their activities, but these teens weren't even recognized as activists.

Teens' engagement around HR4437 was in many ways a typical protest, but many of the other forms of activism that teens engage in

are far less commonplace among adults. Overwhelmingly, public leaders and journalists deem many actions that teens and young adults take in the name of protest as illegitimate. For example, during my fieldwork, I met a handful of teens who proudly associated themselves with Anonymous, an ad hoc collective that initially emerged to mock Scientology and question other powerful institutions. Anonymous' practices and the groups that they affiliate themselves with are a source of significant consternation for powerful adults.

Anonymous is a moniker for a loosely coordinated group of people who share a commitment to challenging powerful entities anonymously. As an entity, Anonymous gained notoriety when people associated with the network engaged in "hacktivist" tactics against the US government and American companies in December 2010.[14] After the nonprofit group WikiLeaks released classified US State Department diplomatic cables, the US government was outraged and put pressure on American companies to stop supporting the organization. Amazon deleted WikiLeaks' account and stopped hosting its content, and PayPal canceled the organization's financial account. The founder of WikiLeaks, Australian citizen Julian Assange, became persona non grata, and the US government initiated a grand jury investigation to indict him. In response, hacktivists sought to bring down the servers of anti-WikiLeaks governmental and corporate entities and otherwise challenge the security of these organizations.

As the incident unfolded, authorities arrested mostly teenagers and twenty-somethings in both the United States and the United Kingdom for their role in challenging authorities using technology.[15] The teens I met who identified themselves as part of Anonymous were not arrested, but many participated in the various political protests that those who used the moniker claimed as Anonymous activities, relishing the Guy Fawkes symbolism and the group's Robin Hood tactics. All the teens I met who were engaged with this movement saw their acts as political protests, even if authorities saw them as anarchic and destructive, terrorists and traitors. These young people saw themselves as political, even if adults did not sanction their approach to political engagement.

Political engagement takes many forms. Although often even less recognized as political, many teens have used the tools of internet culture to express themselves politically. For example, the production and distribution of internet *memes* is a common form of self-expression, but it can also be a form of political speech. Memes start when a particular digital artifact—be it an image, a song, a hashtag, or a video—is juxtaposed with other text or other media to produce a loosely connected collection of media that share a similar base referent.[16] Not only are these artifacts spread online, but people also iterate on them, creating new artifacts.

In the second chapter, I referenced the rise of lolcats, a meme that emerges when people take pictures of cats and add captions using a consistent though not standard English grammar. Many memes, like lolcats, are simply entertaining. Others have more political components. Consider, for example, the Hitler Downfall meme. This meme is based on a video scene from a 2004 German film called *Der Untergang* that depicts Adolf Hitler getting angry with his subordinates. The meme works by people subtitling the German-language film with other possible political and nonpolitical situations that Hitler could be getting upset about. Over the years, these have included the US subprime mortgage debate, the use of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act to silence parodies and memes, the US government's frustration with National Security Administration whistleblower Edward Snowden, and Hitler learning that his Xbox Live account has been banned.[17] This meme mixes commentary with humor, all juxtaposed against a familiar historical reference.

Even though not all Hitler Downfall videos are made by teens—and, in fact, it's not clear how many were—I met numerous teens who had made and shared the videos, as well as a few who had come up with their own. Producing—or even consuming—these videos requires understanding a historical context and developing a rich sense of media literacy. Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, we cannot take teens' technical or media acumen for granted, we must also not ignore that there are youth who are deeply and meaningfully

engaged in using the skills they have to help construct publics that are, in fact, political.

Not all teens are politically engaged, and many of the ways in which they do engage in political action are unrecognizable by adults because they take the form of commentary or involve acts of protest adults deem unacceptable. Their activities, controversial as they may be, reveal the more political side of networked publics.

Living in and with Networked Publics

Social media has become an integral part of American society. Today's teens—regardless of their personal levels of participation—are coming of age in an era defined by easy access to information and mediated communication. Innovations in social media will continue to emerge, making possible new interaction forms and complicating social dynamics in interesting ways. The rise of mobile devices is introducing even more challenges, taking the already widespread notion of being "always on" to new levels and creating new pathways for navigating physical spaces. As social media becomes increasingly ubiquitous, the physical and digital will be permanently entangled and blurry. New innovations will introduce new challenges, as people try to reimagine privacy, assert their sense of identity, and renegotiate everyday social dynamics. And if history is any indication, adults are bound to project the same fears and anxieties they have about social media onto whatever new technology captures the imagination of future youth.[18]

Although in this book I describe the dynamics of American youth at a particular time, notably defined by the widespread adoption of social media, the underlying issues are by no means new. In using teen engagement with social media to think about a variety of sociotechnical dynamics, my goal has been to shed light on broader cultural constructs and values that we take for granted. Claims about youth practices can be divisive, particularly when we judge individuals, cohorts, and artifacts through twisted portrayals.

It is easy to make technology the target of our hopes and anxieties. Newness makes it the perfect punching bag. But one of the hardest—

and yet most important—things we as a society must think about in the face of technological change is what has really changed, and what has not. As computer scientist Vint Cerf has said, "The internet is a reflection of our society and that mirror is going to be reflecting what we see. If we do not like what we see in that mirror the problem is not to fix the mirror, we have to fix society."[19] It is much harder to examine broad systemic changes with a critical lens and to place them in historical context than to focus on what is new and disruptive.

Through their experimentation and challenges, today's teens are showcasing some of the complex ways in which technology intersects with society. They don't have all of the answers, but their path through this networked world provides valuable insight into how technology is being integrated into and shaping everyday life.

Teens' struggles to make sense of the networked publics they inhabit—and the ways in which their practices reveal cultural fractures—highlight some of the challenges society faces as technology gets integrated into daily life. At the same time, teens are as they have always been, resilient and creative in repurposing technology to fulfill their desires and goals. When they embrace technology, they are imagining new possibilities, asserting control over their lives, and finding ways to be a part of public life. This can be terrifying for those who are intimidated by youth or nervous for them, but it also reveals that, far from being a distraction, social media is providing a vehicle for teens to take ownership over their lives.

As teens turn to and help create networked publics, they begin to imagine society and their place in it. Through social media, teens reveal their hopes and dreams, struggles and challenges. Not all youth are doing all right, just as not all adults are. Technology makes the struggles youth face visible, but it neither creates nor prevents harmful things from happening even if it can be a tool for both. It simply mirrors and magnifies many aspects of everyday life, good and bad.

Growing up in and being a part of networked publics is complicated. The realities that youth face do not fit into neat utopian or dystopian frames, nor will eliminating technology solve the problems

they encounter. Networked publics are here to stay. Rather than resisting technology or fearing what might happen if youth embrace social media, adults should help youth develop the skills and perspective to productively navigate the complications brought about by living in networked publics. Collaboratively, adults and youth can help create a networked world that we all want to live in.

notes

Preface

1. Most names used in this book are pseudonyms. Some pseudonyms are chosen by teens themselves; I chose other pseudonyms to be unique names that maintained cultural and temporal identifiers by using baby name websites that took into account birth year and ethnicity. When I'm quoting from public material, including blog posts and news media interviews, I use the name provided by the teen in that context. The names teens use online may not be their legal names, but I did not seek to verify either way.

2. The interviews and fieldwork conducted from 2010–2011 were done in collaboration with Alice Marwick. Most of these focused on privacy and bullying. I identify the interviews conducted by Alice both in the Appendix and within the text. To learn more about the teens that were interviewed for this book and the methodological approach that informs this book, see http://www.danah.org/itscomplicated/.

Introduction

1. Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, and Purcell, "Teens and Mobile Phones."

2. This book draws on data collected in the United States and refers to cultural references that are particular to American culture. Although many of my arguments have resonance outside the United States, I make no attempt to speak to the cultural practices, norms, or attitudes rooted in other countries. Many scholars have examined young people's mediated practices in other cultural contexts, including Livingstone, *Children and the Internet*; Mesch and Talmud, *Wired Youth*; and Davies and Eynon, *Teenagers and Technology*. In addition, as the directors of the EU Kids Online Project, Sonia Livingstone and Leslie Haddon have created a large network of researchers in Europe to examine children's online practices. They have produced numerous reports, journal articles, and scholarly manuscripts. To learn more, see http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/.

3. To read more about how social media is situated within Web2.0 in light of the rise of social network sites, see Ellison and boyd, "Sociality Through Social Network Sites." In this article, we argue that what makes "social media"

39. Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital*; Palfrey and Gasser, "Reclaiming an Awkward Term."

40. Gasser and Palfrey's nuanced description of digital natives comes from their answer to the question, "Are all youth digital natives?" on their project site: http://www.digitalnative.org/#about. They provide a similar explanation in the opening of their book *Born Digital*.

41. Prensky, "Digital Wisdom and Homo Sapiens Digital."

42. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* by Mimi Ito et al. provides a more detailed framework for understanding how young people's online activities can lead to tremendous learning opportunities. Many youth approach social media and other technologies as spaces to hang out with their friends, but some start messing around with different technical and media elements—such as those who started learning how to code by exploring ways of creating intricate MySpace pages. When teens become passionate about something, they may turn to social media to geek out, building online communities and drilling down in specialized interests. This book provides a framework for thinking about the various forms of informal learning that can emerge when youth are given the freedom to explore networked settings.

Chapter 8. Searching for a Public of Their Own

1. For an examination of how shopping malls serve as publics, see Matthews, Taylor, Percy-Smith, and Limb, "Unacceptable Flaneur."

2. Two books provide fantastic analyses of the consumer culture that American children inhabit and how it inflects every aspect of their engagement with school, media, and society more generally: Seiter, *Sold Separately*; and Schor, *Born to Buy*.

3. For a broader critique of the commercial side of social media and the privatization of public spaces online, see Scholz, "Market Ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0"; and Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*.

4. My collaborator, Alice Marwick, and I build off of this case study and detail the dynamics of Twitter and public culture in "Tweeting Teens Can Handle Public Life."

5. Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*; Finders,"Queens and Teen Zines"; Bayerl, "Mags, Zines, and gURLs."

6. In *The Anarchist in the Library*, Siva Vaidhyanathan shows how new technologies erase institutional boundaries, which in turn challenge the political organization of society. Not only are people using new technologies to engage in political acts, but the very architecture of networked publics—and the affordances that underpin them—create new socio-technical configurations that alter the political landscape. In *Communication Power*, Manuel Castells points out that those who control the networks—both technical and social—are often those with the most power.

7. According to Youth and Participatory Politics Survey Project, 41 percent of young people have engaged in at least one act of participatory politics, defined by the project as "interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern." Cohen et al., "New Media and Youth Political Action."

8. Jodi Dean argues that the environments that I'm describing as networked publics cannot serve as political public spheres because of the commercial underpinnings of these systems. Although I respect her argument, I do think that much political work does take place in and through these systems, even if they themselves are not the kinds of ideal publics that enable the public sphere to form. Dean, "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere."

9. In *Smart Mobs*, Howard Rheingold describes how activists in the Philippines used technology to spread information and come together politically. As protests were breaking out in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, people turned to social media for information and to coordinate political resistance. See Tufekci and Wilson, "Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protests."

10. In *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Philip Howard discusses how democracy is supported by having a high percentage of the population online, even if they are not directly engaged with political activities. In a paper for the Digital Media and Learning initiative, Joseph Kahne, Nam-Jin Lee, and Jessica Timpany Feezell demonstrated that engagement with nonpolitical online participatory cultures can act as a gateway for behavior that is considered to be more explicitly civic and/or political: volunteering, community problem-solving, protests, and political expression. Kahne, Lee, and Timpany Feezell, "Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood."

11. Khokha, "Text Messages, MySpace Roots of Student Protests."

12. Cho and Gorman, "Massive Student Walkout Spreads Across Southland."

13. Leavey, "Los Angeles Students Walk Out in Immigration Reform Protests."

14. For background information on Anonymous, see Coleman, "Our Weirdness Is Free"; Norton, "Anonymous 101"; and Greenberg, "WikiLeaks Supporters Aim Cyberattacks at PayPal."

15. Olson, *We Are Anonymous*.

16. For an in-depth examination of internet memes and the sociopolitical use of memes for humor and cultural commentary, see Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*.

17. For an explanation of the Hitler Downfall meme, including other examples, see http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/downfall-hitler-reacts.

18. In his book on the history of the telephone, *America Calling*, Claude Fisher shows how the fears and anxieties discussed throughout this book also played out at the time in which the telephone was first being deployed.

19. Vint Cerf quoted in Ward, "What the Net Did Next."