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American Girls: Social Media And The Secret Lives Of Teenagers

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Social Media and
the Secret Lives
of Teenagers

Nancy Jo Sales



Synopsis

Instagram. Whisper. Yik Yak. Vine. YouTube. Kik. Ask.fm. Tinder. The dominant force in the lives of girls coming of age in America today is social media. What it is doing to an entire generation of young women is the subject of award-winning *Vanity Fair* writer Nancy Jo Sales' riveting and explosive *American Girls*. With extraordinary intimacy and precision, Sales captures what it feels like to be a girl in America today. From Montclair to Manhattan and Los Angeles, from Florida and Arizona to Texas and Kentucky, Sales crisscrossed the country, speaking to more than 200 girls, ages 13 to 19, and documenting a massive change in the way girls are growing up, a phenomenon that transcends race, geography, and household income. *American Girls* provides a disturbing portrait of the end of childhood as we know it and of the inexorable and ubiquitous experience of a new kind of adolescence - one dominated by new social and sexual norms, where a girl's first crushes and experiences of longing and romance occur in an accelerated electronic environment; where issues of identity and self-esteem are magnified and transformed by social platforms that provide instantaneous judgment. What does it mean to be a girl in America in 2016? It means coming of age online in a hypersexualized culture that has normalized extreme behavior, from pornography to the casual exchange of nude photographs; a culture rife with a virulent new strain of sexism and a sometimes self-undermining notion of feminist empowerment; a culture in which teenagers are spending so much time on technology and social media that they are not developing basic communication skills. From beauty gurus to slut shaming to a disconcerting trend of exhibitionism, Nancy Jo Sales provides a shocking window into the troubling world of today's teenage girls. Provocative and urgent, *American Girls* is destined to ignite a much-needed conversation about how we can help our daughters and sons negotiate unprecedented new challenges.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a Christian woman, mother and grandmother of girls, and a teacher at a typical American middle school, I believe every thinking adult should read this book. I witness firsthand, with sickening frequency, how social media is stealing girls' self-worth and leaving them personally and emotionally vulnerable. This book is an explicit, unflinching, carefully documented investigation of how social media 24/7 is shaping the lives of girls. Nancy Jo Sales has written a book everyone should read--and talk to one another about. Face-to-face. In person. Phones off. Because we "realize how dear girls are." It's time adults start paying attention, get a plan, and act.

Do not be a dinosaur and think because you don't use or value social media means it has no power on your child. Do not think this doesn't affect you if you don't have a tween or teen. These are the kids that will be in the workforce in twenty years or less. If you expect to be alive then, this affects you. Peer pressure has ALWAYS been an issue. I'm an Xer. I remember peer pressure. Social media takes peer pressure and makes it the thing that gives kids their value. Saying NO doesn't feel empowering to a lot of kids anymore. Feminism has become all twisted into girls feeling forced to be sexy when they should still be children. Remember as a tween how you might notice a boy or read a bookmarked passage in someone's mom's romance novel but then you might be playing with a Strawberry Shortcake doll or battling with a pretend lightsaber the next minute? Sexuality came about gradually and naturally. Not for these kids. They have access to porn at age eleven or twelve. Much of porn online is violent or fetishist which isn't what you want your child to think is typical sex. I'm not saying porn is bad. I'm saying it has no place in the life of a kid. Especially when they see this stuff daily and unfiltered. They become desensitized. They focus on how they LOOK and how many likes they get. It's a real mess. Girls in middle school photoshop their pics to look thinner & prettier. Intelligence does not get likes. The kids idolize the Kardashians and the number one life goal is "Be famous." Remember how it used to be that was a goal for the few kids who wanted to be an actor/actress and fame just was going to mean they were good at the job they loved? These kids are unhappy. They talk about how hard it all is. I began reading this book because of worrisome things I've noticed going on in Instagram accounts etc of teenagers I care about. This book explained

what I was seeing, why, and that it's not an isolated group of kids. They are mostly all affected. Worse, the age that this is happening is younger each year. Everyone needs to read this book. Whether you have kids or not. Boy or girl. Male or female. It's not just the girls who are affected. The boys are just as affected. If you think this doesn't concern you, it will when these kids grow up and run the country. We need to have a dialogue in this country about what we value and what our hopes are for this youngest generation. I love technology. I got an iphone one the day it went on sale back in 2007. Loving technology does not mean we don't need to use our brains and think. Kids are not adults. Period. It doesn't matter that they are growing up. They are not GROWN. They need to be protected. People need to be parents and not best friends. Please. Please. Read this book. Easily the most important book you'll read this year. As a nation, we need to talk about this. Kudos to Nancy Jo Sales for such excellent research & exhaustive interviews. We need this book to educate us & start us talking.

In reviewing the book *Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* by I found myself physically sick while listening to it. Initially this book stunned me with its bold crass language that was so unfiltered and raw. The reality that these words came from young teens was just heartbreaking. I decided to do the audio version of this book and found it very powerful to hear the words of these girls who were a part of the study in this book. The voices in the audio version screamed for our attention as readers to hear the heart of girls who are desperately seeking our help to save them from what they know they need rescuing from. I had decided to look at it from a position defending the opposite side to which this book's position takes as a way to see the whole picture. I tend to want to root for the underdog in any competition and this book takes such a bold stance that I found myself wanting to fight for the other side at times when it was rooting against social media. In the end though there is no doubt that this book makes a bold statement about girls and women in society. Girls need advocacy and respect of their feminine role so they can have their childhood be protected and grow into healthy women of purpose with a sense of confidence of who they are. Their childhood is being ripped away and there needs to be a way to find protection for these girls. I think this book doesn't really spell out the answer but is an excellent voice to say *Hey, we have a problem here! Do something!* I do think however that this book could have made the statements it does without the raw language as a personal preference. I would rather know and listen to the heart of the girls' messages rather than the language. I also think the scope of this research could have been more balanced in taking a look at teens of all backgrounds and look at the positive aspects of social media for some girls.

Have got to say this is a very detailed and insightful book as to what American teen girls go through. I recommend parents read it, as well as educators and anyone in the mental health field. Only reason I didn't give it a five star rating is because I can read seemingly 20 pages where I'm into it, but then the author feels she has to go on some tangent to explain to me things from decade ago (the history of pornography, the history of the camera dating back to the early 1900's). I'd go to a history book for that Disrupts the flow of the book. Outside of those historical pieces though, the book is very informative.

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