

# Book Reviews



Bain, K. (2012). *What the Best College Students Do*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 282p. ISBN 9780674066649

I'm not sure how many students will read this work, but those who do will benefit greatly. The premise of Ken Bain's masterpiece is that young people often plan what they think they'd want to do with their lives – at age 20! And then take the courses that they think will help them get there. By doggedly staying within that narrow path, they miss the serendipitous opportunities that highly successful people say have made their lives more interesting and rewarding. Throughout the text, Mr. Burns, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of the District of Columbia, makes effective use of storytelling to illustrate the points he wishes to make, particularly in Chapter 1, “The Roots of Success,” and Chapter 2, “What Makes an Expert,” with reference to scientific studies that prove the most salient points. By the end of the book, the reader will be well on the way to being more creative and innovative.

In Chapter 3, “Managing Yourself,” Burns urges the reader to take the time to understand how your mind works and to make an effort to improve how you think and work. “A mindful brain pays attention... looking for new ways of understanding both the object of my attention and the way I'm interacting with it. I'm constantly creating new categories surrounding the event or object, and I'm aware that someone else might create other categories that could challenge mine” (p. 73).

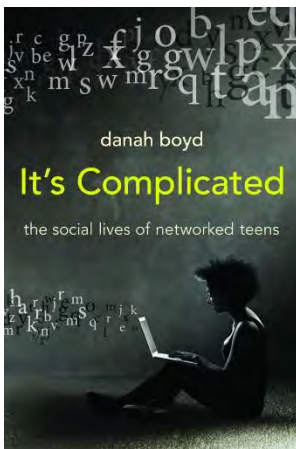
“Learning How to Embrace Failure” (Chapter 4) reminds us that we can learn a lot from our mistakes. This helps us gain the “growth mindset” required to believe that one person can change the world, if he/she tries. Chapter 5 (“Messy Problems”) is designed to help students learn to reason and to make better decisions. In this chapter, you will learn which rung of the King and Kirchner's ladder you are on. What is encouraging is that the creative people interviewed think at the highest level – “reasonable inquiry” – but they recognize that they did not begin that way: they had to work at it. So, there is hope for everyone! Bain urges the reader to, “Consider what it means to learn deeply” (p. 155). Learning is all about “grappling with ill-structured problems... How you raise new questions, collect data that will give you a better understanding of the world and how it works... You don't learn from experience; you learn from reflecting on experience” (p. 160-162).

In “Encouragement” (Chapter 6), Bain looks closely at self-esteem and the mistake some make when they “build self-worth around good grades.” These individuals “may not learn much and may not even get the high marks they so desperately covet.” Students who see difficult tests “as a challenge, a game, or as an opportunity to learn” generally perform better than those who rely on test as a measure of their self-worth (pp. 166-167). The chapter also addresses the notion of self-compassion as being something that “allows you to step back from the problem and exercise a more objective approach” than feeling sorry for yourself: Mindfulness “as a balanced state of awareness” (pp. 173-174).

“Curiosity and Endless Education” (Chapter 7) deals with the value of a liberal education

beyond preparation for a job. Chapter 8, "Making the Hard Choices," highlights the benefit of delayed gratification. It is here where the reading slows up – not because of the quality of the writing, but because you will want to reflect on each piece of advice given to students trying to determine whether a particular course of study is right for them. It teaches student how to read with intention: what you should do before beginning to read, imagining the experience. There are prescriptions for learning how to study, and also how to write. Read these with care and joy and climb atop King and Kirchner's ladder. My takeaway: Don't be the kind of student taking classes to get a good grade, but rather become a student with deep-learning intentions. Don't know what I mean? Read this book!

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boyd, d. (2014). *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Available in print and [online](#). ISBN: 0300166311

With this text, geared toward teachers, parents, and others who interact with teenagers on a regular basis, danah boyd (she does not capitalize her name) seeks to inform adults about the digital lives of modern teens. She dedicates each chapter to "different issues that underpin youth engagement with social media" (p. 25). The crux of boyd's argument is that today's teens seek to do online what yesterday's teens did in person. That is, connect with each other in spaces outside of adult jurisdiction. In the past, this has happened at parks, malls, or even on street corners. However, as teens and parents of teens now find these places off-limits or unsafe, youth are driven to form and interact with each other in online communities. Boyd seeks to both define and assuage fears from the adult community about teen use (and alleged abuse) of social media.

The first issue on which boyd offers commentary is why teens seem "strange" or inconsistent online. For example, why would a high school senior tell a college admissions board that he wanted to attend their university and escape gang culture when his Myspace profile showed how apparently committed he was to those same gangs. Those familiar with boyd's work will recognize her theory of "context collapse." As teens seek to implement social media tools to navigate both the public at large and their close friend groups, borders are blurred.

The second chapter is devoted to the issue of teens and privacy online. The author shares conversations that she had with teens around the nation about what it means to interact in a public space, yet maintain a level of privacy. Teens, like adults, boyd says, are merely trying to maintain a distance between themselves and the authorities. For teens, this means maintaining privacy between themselves and the adults in their lives, not necessarily the government.

Next, is the issue of teens' apparent "obsession" with social media. boyd first gives a brief history of the concept of addiction and explores its application to the world of social media. boyd pushes back against the idea that we need to fear teens' engagement with digital networks, saying that teens now turn to social media simply to do what teens have always done: socialize with each other. However, teens are now "coming of age without agency"

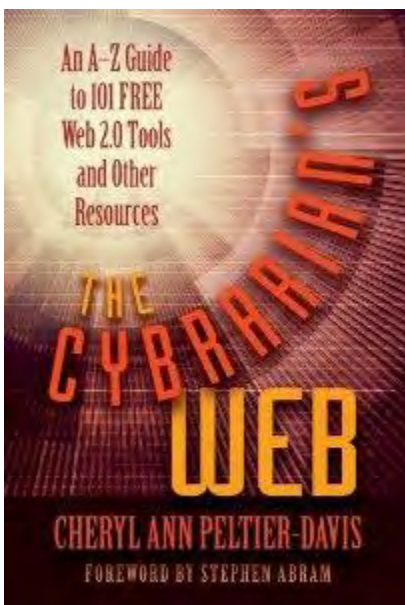
and have no freedom to socialize in the public spaces mentioned in the introduction.

boyd tackles two difficult subjects in chapters 4 and 5: sexual predators and bullying. The "myths" here being that teens are more susceptible to be taken advantage of or abused when they lead connected lives. boyd reminds us that with new technology comes amplified fears from adults and that teens' risk levels are no higher now than they have been in years past – though she certainly is not flippant about the need to protect kids and teens online. She says, “while we certainly cannot protect youth from all forms of meanness and cruelty...we can certainly make a concerted effort to empower youth” (p. 152).

Chapters 6 and 7 apply to the digital world at large—not just connected teens. Chapter 6, *Can social media resolve social dimensions?*, explores the cultural and economic biases that exist in technology adoption. boyd challenges our assumptions that technology is the great equalizer, reminding us that “new technology...typically reinforces existing social divisions” (p. 156). Chapter 7, *Are today's youth digital natives?*, explores the history of the term “digital native” and the various kinds of “literacies” required to successfully navigate a digital world.

In the conclusion, boyd summarizes what I see as her main point: "what teens do online cannot be separated from their broader desires and interests, attitudes, and values... Teens' engagement with social media and other technologies is a way of engaging with their broader social world” (p. 202). I recommend this book to parents, educators, and social science researchers alike. Although the majority of the text is anecdotal, boyd includes an extensive set of footnotes and a solid bibliography to supplement the text. A wide range of readers will find the text engaging, thought-provoking, and challenging as they help teens connect to the world through the more "complicated" realm of online.

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Peltier-Davis, C.A. (2012). *The Cybrarian's Web: an A-Z Guide to 101 Free Web 2.0 Tools and Other Resources*. Second printing. Medford, NY: Information Today. 486pp. ISBN 978-1-57387-427-4

Writing a print guide to online resources is like herding cats, with resources appearing, adding new features and eliminating others over time. However, readers of *The cybrarian's web: an A-Z guide to 101 free Web 2.0 tools and other resources* could do worse than following Cheryl Ann Peltier-Davis' advice as to tools to try out for their work.

In this text, Ms. Peltier-Davis has identified 101 of her favorite free (or low-cost) online tools that could be helpful to librarians who are less adventurous and prefer to rely on the recommendations of those they respect and admire. Indeed, this Archives and Digital Librarian (at the Alvin Sherman Library, Research and Information Technology Center at Nova Southeastern University, Florida) has

assembled an array of useful resources for any information professional. Each resource is similarly described, with an overview describing the site's origin and development (i.e., who created the resource and why), important features of the site/tool that librarians should explore (functionality and usability), and how cybrarians can use the resource. All chapters include illustrative screenshots and most of the 101 tools have a resource listed (endnote) for further reading or viewing (e.g., YouTube video). The book includes a forward by Stephen Abram; an appendix of tips and teaching tools for cybrarians with recommended resources for keeping up; an annotated glossary; an appendix listing all of the websites mentioned in the book; and an index.

Rather than an A-Z listing, I wish that the editor had suggested grouping resources by type. That would have been easy as each tool is identified in the table of contents as being in one of 30 categories:

- Productivity tool
- Search engine
- Social networking/microblogging service
- Audio/video production/sharing service
- Ebook reader
- Blog/wiki publishing/hosting service
- News and feed aggregator
- Social bookmarking service
- Social news service
- Content management system
- Photo/audio/video hosting service
- Digital library
- Live video broadcasting service
- Social cataloging service
- Online publishing service
- Online cataloging webinar
- Instant messaging service
- Web conferencing service
- Course management system
- Podcast service
- Visualization tool
- Next-generation online union catalog
- Question-and-answer service
- File hosting service
- 3D virtual world
- Travel planning service
- Broadcasting service
- Open source ILS
- Programming code service

In that way, there could be several tools profiled in each category, with honorable mentions listed. Too many of the services highlighted by Cheryl Ann are no longer around; some ceased operation and others were acquired by the competition, but all have alternatives. Consider this book your starting point and use the website (<http://cybrariansweb.com>) to keep up-to-date with new resources.

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