

Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World

By Rosalind Wiseman

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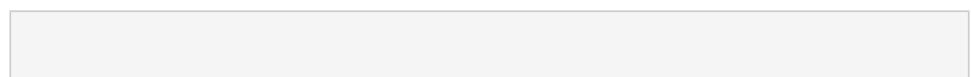
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Now, Wiseman has revised and updated her groundbreaking book for a new generation of girls and explores:

- How girls' experiences before adolescence impact their teen years, future relationships, and overall success
- The different roles girls play in and outside of cliques as Queen Bees, Targets, and Bystanders, and how this defines how they and others are treated
- Girls' power plays—from fake apologies to fights over IM and text messages
- Where boys fit into the equation of girl conflicts and how you can help your daughter better hold her own with the opposite sex
- Checking your baggage—recognizing how your experiences impact the way you parent, and how to be sanely involved in your daughter's difficult, yet common social conflicts

Packed with insights about technology's impact on Girl World and enlivened with the experiences of girls, boys, and parents, the book that inspired the hit movie *Mean Girls* offers concrete strategies to help you empower your daughter to be socially competent and treat herself with dignity.



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Editorial Review

Review

“Wise, humorous, life-affirming advice for parents that is utterly respectful of girls. I recommend parents mark it up, turn the corners of pages, and heed Wiseman’s creative and practical strategies for guiding girls along the sometimes treacherous pathways of growing up today. **Queen Bees and Wannabes** is Mapquest for parents of girls, from fifth grade all the way to young adulthood.”—Patricia Hersch, author of **A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence**

“Who’s in? Who’s out? Who’s cool? Who’s not? Why is one girl elevated to royal status and another shunned? **Queen Bees and Wannabes** answers these unfathomable questions and so many more. Wiseman gives parents the insight, compassion, and skill needed to guide girls through the rocky terrain of the adolescent social world. This is such an honest and helpful book; we recommend it highly.” —Nina Shandler, author of **Ophelia’s Mom** and Sara Shandler, author of the bestselling **Ophelia Speaks**

“Laced with humor, insight, and practical suggestions, **Queen Bees and Wannabes** is the one volume that’s been missing from the growing shelf of girl-centered publications. Wiseman explains the inner workings of teen culture and teaches parents, educators, and peers how to respond.”—Whitney Ransome and Meg Miln Moulton, executive directors, National Coalition of Girls’ Schools

“Wiseman cuts through wishful parental thinking with a wonderful mixture of humor, facts, girls’ voices, and a healthy dollop of reality. No, the harm cliques cause is not a natural fact of life. Wiseman gives us both hope and strategies to help our girls (and boys) build a more healthy, nurturing world for themselves.”—Joe Kelly, author, **Dads and Daughters: How to Inspire, Understand and Support Your Daughter When She’s Growing Up So Fast**, executive director, Dads and Daughters

“Rosalind Wiseman invites us into the “Girl World” with insight, honesty, and humor. Based on the most thorough, helpful research I know of, this book should be required reading for parents, teachers, and health professionals.” —Edes P. Gilbert, acting president, Independent Educational Services

About the Author

ROSALIND WISEMAN is an internationally recognized expert on children, teens, parenting, bullying, social justice, and ethical leadership.

Wiseman is the author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (Crown, 2002). Twice a *New York Times* Bestseller, *Queen Bees & Wannabes* was the basis for the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*. In fall 2009, an updated edition of *Queen Bees & Wannabes* will be republished with a chapter on younger girls, insights on how technology has impacted kids’ social landscapes, and new commentary from girls and boys. Her follow-up book *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads* was released in 2006, and she is a monthly columnist for *Family Circle* magazine.

Additional publications include the *Owning Up Curriculum*, a comprehensive social justice program for grades 6–12, and a forthcoming young adult novel, *Boys, Girls, and Other Hazardous Materials*, in stores in January 2010.

Since founding the Empower Program, a national violence-prevention program, in 1992, Wiseman has gone

on to work with tens of thousands of students, educators, parents, counselors, coaches, and administrators to create communities based on the belief that each person has a responsibility to treat themselves and others with dignity. Audiences have included the American School Counselors Association, Capital One, National Education Association, Girl Scouts, Neutrogena, Young Presidents Association, Independent School Associations and the International Chiefs of Police, as well as countless schools throughout the U.S. and abroad.

National media regularly depends on Wiseman as the expert on ethical leadership, media literacy, bullying prevention, and school violence. She is a frequent guest on the Today Show and been profiled in *The New York Times*, *People*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, Oprah, Nightline, CNN, Good Morning America, and National Public Radio affiliates throughout the country.

Wiseman holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Occidental College. She lives in Washington D.C. with her husband and two sons.

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Introduction

I just overheard my 8-year-old daughter's friend tell her that she'll only hang out with my daughter at our house because everyone else in the class thinks she's weird. And my daughter agreed! I'm having a very hard time not hating this girl and everyone else in the class. Meanwhile, what is wrong with my daughter that she's OK with this? I didn't raise her to be a doormat. –Patty

My 12-year-old daughter has a great relationship with my brother, and she just told him that she had two boys in the house when we weren't there. Of course he told me but now I don't know what to do. It's totally against our rules but if I punish her she'll know her uncle told me and she'll stop talking to him. If I don't do anything, she'll do it again! What do I do? –Leah

What do you do when your daughter is the Queen Bee? My daughter talks so badly about other people that she's starting to lose all her friends. I'm having a hard time liking her myself. –Marianne

I just went through my 14-year-old daughter's text messages and want to throw up. I couldn't believe the language she was using about herself and other kids in her class. –Todd

Eight years ago I sat down to write a guide for parents about their daughters' friendships. Well, I don't know about you, but my life certainly hasn't been the same since. People talk about *Queen Bees* at work, on television, and in their preschool playgroups. You can buy *Queen Bee* T-shirts, backpacks, and pencil cases—as if being one is something your daughter should aspire to. Every day people ask me questions or share their experiences about Girl World and Queen Bees. For better and for worse, our awareness of Queen Bees and Mean Girls is now commonplace.

Meanwhile, girls are still in the thick of Girl World—where people won't tell you why they're mad at you, friends tease you and then dismiss your feelings with “Just kidding!,” and everyone texts and instant messages every rumor and embarrassing photograph about you. So the first time your daughter tells you that all her friends have stopped talking to her and she has no idea why, you want to know what to say and what to do—beyond wanting to yell at all those horrible children you now hate. But then things get more complicated when you pick her up the next day at school and there she is arm in arm with one of those Mean Girls like nothing ever happened. You stare at your daughter as she opens the door and begs you to let this kid come over, refusing to acknowledge that she has been co-opted by the Mean Girl World and ignoring

your “are you kidding me?” expression.

Welcome to the wonderful world of your daughter’s adolescence. Ten seconds ago she was a sweet, confident little girl. Now you can’t breathe in her direction without getting that really annoying eye roll, followed by the equally irritating sigh. Or maybe, one day she’s insecure and wants to sit on your lap, but the next day she’s threatening to run away and you’re ready to pack her bag. She’s facing the toughest pressures of adolescent life—test-driving her new body (while you’re giving her a big sweatshirt to cover up that figure she seemed to have developed overnight), navigating changing friendships, surviving crushes, trying to keep up with school—and intuitively you know even though she’s sometimes totally obnoxious, she needs you more than ever. Yet it’s the very time when she’s pulling away from you.

Why do girls so often reject their parents and turn to their friends instead, even when those friends often treat them so cruelly? One day your daughter comes to school and her friends suddenly decide they hate her. Or she’s teased relentlessly for wearing the wrong clothes or having the wrong friend. Maybe she’s branded with a reputation she can’t shake. Or trapped, feeling she has to conform to what her friends expect from her so she won’t be kicked out of the group. But no matter what they do to her, she still feels that her friends know her best and genuinely want what is best for her. Or worse, she knows they aren’t good for her, but she would rather put up with being treated like dirt than be alone. In comparison, she believes that you, previously a reliable source of information, don’t have a clue. For parents, being rejected by your daughter is an excruciating experience. But it can really make you mad and doubt your child’s sanity when you’re replaced by a group of girls with all the tact, sense of fairness, and social graces of a pack of hyenas.

Most people believe a girl’s task is to get through it, grow up, and put those experiences behind her. But your daughter’s relationships with other girls have deep and far-reaching implications beyond her teen years. Your daughter’s friendships with other girls are a double-edged sword. First, let’s talk about the positives. These friendships can be the key to surviving adolescence. Many girls will make it through their teen years precisely because they have the support and care of a few good friends. These are the friendships where a girl truly feels unconditionally accepted, understood, and sometimes even challenged when she’s doing something that’s not good for her—like dating a guy who doesn’t treat her with respect.

But I wouldn’t be writing this book and you wouldn’t be reading it if that’s all there was to girls’ friendships. Girls’ friendships are often intense, confusing, frustrating, and humiliating; the joy and security of “best friendships” can be shattered by devastating breakups and betrayals. And beyond the pain in the moment, girls can develop patterns of behavior and expectations for future relationships that stop them from becoming competent, authentic people who are capable of having healthy relationships with others as adults.

But your daughter is too close to it all to realize the good and bad influence of her friends. She needs guidance from you despite the fact that she’s pulling away. My job is to give you my best suggestions for what kind of guidance to give her and how that information should be presented so she listens and your relationship with her is strengthened through the process.

As this is the updated version of *Queen Bees*, there’s no way I could write it without addressing two things: (1) how technology and the media influence your daughter’s social life for better and worse; and (2) how these issues are impacting younger girls and what you can do about it.

There’s no way I can emphasize enough the effect that constant connectivity to the Internet, e-mail, cell phones, and texting has on your child’s landscape—not to mention online social networking like MySpace, Webkinz, Club Penguin, Stardoll, Facebook, Twitter, or the ten other new websites the girls will be regularly using by the time this book is published. These things are in your daughter’s life—even if you don’t let your

daughter have a cell phone or you don't think she has an e-mail account.

Before you assume I think all of those things are bad, let me assure you I don't. What I think is that most parents haven't realized that as soon as their child interacts with technology in any way, they have to explicitly tie her use of this incredibly powerful tool to their values. If parents don't, they have missed the most important opportunity to teach her how to be a decent ethical person.

The worst thing you can do is be in denial. About a year ago I realized that teens weren't watching music videos that often. I knew this because I often show music videos of popular songs in my classes where it was common for my students to see them for the first time—even if the same song was one of their ring tones. But in researching for this book, I figured out who *is* watching them—fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. How are they doing this when you'd never let them watch MTV? On YouTube (or Vimeo, Hulu, or Yahoo Video)—where they can see all of those videos in their entirety for free. But it's not just the music videos. Any social networking site can be used to bring people of like interests together. These sites can build a sense of community in a positive way. But they can also do the opposite.

If you don't believe all of this, listen to this fourth grader:

Last year, a girl I used to be friends with got mad at me and went into my Webkinz account and destroyed everything. She did it because she knew my password. Everything, everything I had was gone. —Kara, 11

My friend loves Stardoll.com and her grandmother gave her these star dollars so she can buy all the best things. My parents don't have the money to buy me things like that and she makes me feel bad because then she looks at the things I do [on the site] and tells me how ugly it is and how the girl doesn't have any money. It's like she's telling me I'm ugly and poor. —Natalie, 10

Fast-forward three years later to an instant message between two eighth graders:

Everyone knows what you did . . .
your life is now over
What are you talking about!!!!
I'm not going to say . . .
Seriously, you have to tell me
No, I don't, but you'll find out soon

I will give you all the strategies I use to stop that kind of exchange occurring again—and you won't have to become a technology expert. Technology is instantly and continuously transforming our world, and we have got to teach our children how to use it and still keep their dignity and sense of human decency intact.

What girls fight about with technology is what this book has always been about. So, of course, we'll still examine cliques, "frenemies," reputations, gossiping, rebellion, bullying, crushes, and boyfriends. I'll show you how your daughter is conditioned to remain silent when intimidated by more powerful girls—and the lessons she learns from these experiences. I'll teach you how to recognize which friends will support her and which could lead her into situations that threaten her emotional health and even her physical safety. I'll show you how your daughter's place in her social pecking order can affect how she will or won't participate in humiliating others, staying silent, or being the Target. Finally, I'll make a connection between what your daughter learns in her early life and how those lessons impact her future.

I will do this by walking you through key rites of passage your daughter is likely to experience: the first time

people get mad at her and won't tell her why; her first breakup with a friend; the first time she gets into a fight with you because she wants to go to school or a party in the latest style that you think is totally inappropriate; the first time you realize she's no longer talking to you about her problems; the first or seventy-fifth time she receives a nasty text message. Just as these moments can be excruciating for her, they can be equally challenging for you. I'm not talking only in terms of the extent to which they make you angry or try your patience; mishandling them can prevent you from getting her the help she needs and weaken your relationship with her. I'll help you navigate them together.

Understanding your daughter's friendships and social life can be grueling and frustrating. Parents often tell me they feel totally shut out of this part of their daughter's life, incapable of exerting any influence. This book will let you in. It'll show how to help your daughter deal with the nasty things girls do to one another, minimize the negative effects of what's often an invisible war behind girls' friendships, and recognize the truly strong relationships she may already have.

Before I go any further, let me reassure you that I can help you even if you often feel helpless or at war with your daughter.

It's perfectly natural at this stage that she:

- Stops looking to you for answers.
- Doesn't respect your opinion as much as she did before.
- Believes that there's no possible way that you could understand what she's going through.
- Is absolutely certain that telling you her problems will only make her life worse.
- Lies and sneaks around behind your back.
- Denies she lied and snuck behind your back—even in the face of undeniable evidence.

On the other hand, it's natural that you:

- Feel rejected and angry when she rolls her eyes at everything you say.
- Have moments when you really don't like her.
- Wonder whose child this is anyway, as this person in front of you can't possibly be your sweet, wonderful daughter.
- Feel confused when conversations end in fights.
- Feel misunderstood when she feels you're intruding and prying when you ask what's going on in her life.
- Are really worried about the influence of her friends and feel powerless and angry to stop her hanging out with them. (Because, of course, she'll keep the friends you don't like if you expressly forbid her from seeing them.)
- Feel sad because you don't know how to deal with problems she won't even discuss with you.

The Mother/Daughter Maelstrom

Moms and daughters seem to have the hardest time with each other. Your daughter craves privacy, and your very presence feels like an intrusion. You feel you have so much to offer her. After all, you've been through the changes she's experiencing, and you think your advice will help. Although this privacy war is natural, it creates a big problem. Girls are often so focused on resisting the influence of their parents that they rarely see when their peers are influencing them in the wrong way. Girls often see things in very concrete, either/or ways. You, as the parent, are intrusive and prying, which equals bad; her peers are involved and understanding, which equals good.

But there's another issue that complicates everything, especially for moms. In the words of one mom who wrote me:

When I was a senior in high school, my best friend since third grade dumped me and had our entire clique turn their back on me. I was devastated. I found more friends, but the experience left me very insecure in my relationships—something that haunts me to this day (I'm 36). The anger and betrayal I felt at the time has never fully left me, despite my fervent desire to leave it behind. In short, she is the person that I would run out of the grocery store to avoid. The most difficult aspect of all this is that I am trying very hard to "check" this baggage as I witness MY daughter's blossoming best friendship . . . and my deeply wired desire to protect her. —Ellen

So if you're a mom reading this, it's important to remember that your experiences as a girl are both your greatest gift and liability as your daughter navigates her own friendships. They're a gift because they enable you to empathize. They're a liability if your past makes you so anxious or reactionary that you can't separate your experiences from hers.

Don't Dismiss the Dads

This book isn't only for mothers. I know, I know, most fathers would rather do anything else than read any kind of parenting book. Believe me, I've talked to and laughed with plenty of dads at my presentations who have been dragged there by their wives. But whether you're this kind of dad, or the one who e-mails me knowing all the seventh-grade girl drama in your daughter's class, almost all dads want to be emotionally engaged with their children and struggle coming to terms with the young woman who just moments ago was "Daddy's little girl."

So if you only read one paragraph in this book, make it this: Never forget or dismiss that your perspective can help your daughter. Just because you were never a girl, don't know what a menstrual cramp feels like, and have never liked talking for hours about other people's lives doesn't mean you're clueless or useless. I know lots of dads feel rejected and pushed aside when their little girl suddenly dismisses them with "You just wouldn't understand." But in reality, this is an opportunity for you to become a genuinely cool dad. I don't mean you let her get away with stuff, side with her against her mom, or drive her wherever she wants. I'm talking about the dad who patiently waits around until she wants to talk, then listens without being judgmental, isn't afraid to look foolish or show his emotions, shares the "boy perspective," holds her accountable when necessary, and is able to communicate his concerns without coming across as controlling and dogmatic.

You're probably dying to warn your daughter off every hormone-crazed boy who walks through your door because you may remember what you or guys you knew were like. But if you launch in with "what boys really want" and come across as the crazycontrol-freak-doesn't-have-a-clue father, you've lost a golden opportunity. Your job is to present your wisdom in a credible manner so she won't blow you off. Through your relationship with her, you can teach her that she has the right to expect that relationships with men must be mutually respectful and caring. This book will help you.

Believe It or Not, Your Daughter Still Wants You in Her Life

When I ask girls privately what they need most from their parents, they tell me they want their parents to be proud of them. You may look at her in the middle of an argument when she's screaming that she hates you and think there's no way you can get through to her, but you can and will if you learn to see the world through her eyes.

Parents don't realize that their children look up to them. When I know that deep in my mother and father's

heart they really don't agree with what I'm doing, that really hurts. –Eve, 12

I know I should listen to my parents, even if they're wrong. –Abby, 16

Developing Your Girl Brain

One of the hardest truths for parents is that as their daughter gets older they have less control over which people she hangs out with. It's terribly stressful knowing that they can't always be there when their daughter faces the difficult decisions that could impact her health and safety. When your daughter was little and got hurt, she'd run to you and you'd kiss the pain away. Now, you're lucky if you have a clue what the problem is. Worse, if you sweep in to save the day instead of teaching your daughter how to handle it, she'll either be angry with you for intruding or she won't learn to take care of herself. How can you help her? Start by thinking the way she does.

The key to maintaining your relationship with your daughter is understanding how and why she's turning away from you and toward her friends, and being there for her anyway. In this book I will teach you to develop or restart your girl brain. It's like looking at the world through a new pair of glasses. And even though she may be acting as if you aren't an important influence in her life, you are—she just may not want to admit it because either it feels like she's becoming too mature to need your help or afraid of what you'll take away from her if she tells you what's really going on. If you can learn how to be her safe harbor when she's in the midst of Girl World conflicts, your voice will be in her head along with your values and ethics.

The first step is to understand what your daughter's world, Girl World, looks like. You need to know who intimidates her, where she feels safe, and where she doesn't. If she has a problem, does she think going to an adult will make the problem better or worse? Who does she go to for advice? What kind of music does she listen to and why? Why did she choose her ring tones on her cell phone and what does that say about her? What common things can ruin her day or make her feel on top of the world?

An even harder task is taking a closer look at her social interactions. What is she being teased about? Why are other children mean to her? Or the worst to ask yourself, why would she be cruel to others? What would make her lie or sneak behind your back? Get inside her head, and you'll understand where she's coming from.

Remembering the Lunch Tray Moments

It helps to remember what it was like to be your daughter's age. Remember your experiences, the role models (both good and bad), and the lessons learned from your family, your school, and your community. Suspend the worry, the common sense, and the wisdom you have accumulated over the last years. Think back to what you were like and what was important to you back then. Now if you're really struggling to remember, like seventh grade is just a black hole in your mind, you may have to do some reconnaissance. That's right, you know what I'm talking about. It's time to take out the yearbooks and read what people wrote you— or even scarier—open up those diaries and start reading and remembering.

Parents, teachers, and other adults are telling you what to do— and especially what you can't do. You have a close group of friends, but for some reason one of your best friends comes up to you between classes and tells you that one of your other friends is spreading rumors about you. Your face feels hot; you can feel everyone looking at you. Thoughts race through your head. What did you do? Why is she mad at you? Are your friends going to back you or side with her? What can you do to fix the problem? All of a sudden, a question drives an icy stake of fear through your heart as you stand there clutching your orange plastic lunch tray in the cafeteria line: Where are you going to sit at lunch?

Can you remember what it was like? Not too pleasant. As adults, we can laugh at how immense and insurmountable problems like those “lunch tray moments” can feel when you’re young. But in Girl World they’re vital issues, and to dismiss them as trivial is to disrespect your daughter’s reality. And within those moments are ethical choices and complex dynamics that are just as challenging as negotiating a peace treaty. Who says anything when someone is being excluded and treated cruelly? Who believes that seeking revenge or teaching someone “her place” justifies humiliating someone? What issues are more important than that? If you want your daughter to be a morally courageous person, it starts in these moments. And frankly, although the core issues remain the same, it’s probably harder for her than it was for you at her age. Did you have to deal with telling someone a secret and then having them forward it to everyone in the school? Did anyone ever set up a webpage dedicated to destroying you and making you feel that everyone hates you? You didn’t. I didn’t. But your daughter does.

The Girl World Police

Girls (like all of us) absorb the cultural messages of what a girl should wear and own, and how she should conduct herself, and then they take that information and develop strict social hierarchies based on it. At no time in your daughter’s life will it probably feel more important to her to fit these elusive girl standards than during adolescence. But it’s also confusing because often girls don’t know what these rules are because they’re invisible. You only really learn them when you break them or you see someone else break them and live with the fallout. And who is the prime enforcer of these rules? The movies? The magazines? This is definitely where it starts, but what is often overlooked is that it is the girls themselves who are often the enforcers. They police one another, conducting surveillance on who’s breaking the laws of appearance and clothing, boys, and personality—all of which have a profound influence on the women they become. Your daughter gets daily lessons about what’s “in” from her friends—and who has the “right” to wear those things. She isn’t watching television, movies, or websites by herself. She processes this information with and through her friends.

I’m not saying “the media” isn’t responsible for putting powerful images in our daughters’ heads, but it isn’t unfairly demonizing or blaming girls to ask them to admit that they play a part in their own degradation. Instead, it’s being honest about the complexity of this problem so that we can create effective solutions. We also have to point to ourselves (i.e., adults) for not challenging a culture that so often adamantly portrays girls and women as hypersexual, unintelligent, and materialistic. For example, musical groups go on morning talk shows in lingerie and talk with straight faces about how they’re good role models for girls—and the producers of those shows who are often parents let it slide. Many journalists are parents too, yet often they don’t ask substantive questions when interviewing people who create girl-degrading content or play those roles. And we all buy magazines that are obsessed with being mean. Who’s fat this week? Whose boyfriend dumped her for that younger blond actress? Who got pregnant and ruined her career? Who has the most or worst plastic surgery? Lots of mothers rationalize reading these magazines as a guilty pleasure. But, honestly, when you do this, you’re not being the strong woman your daughter needs you to be. Never mind the fact that it’s impossible to read one of those things and not suck in your stomach and think about those ten pounds you need to lose.

Last, we often don’t want to admit how little supervision we really exert over what our children are watching. To be fair, it’s really hard to do. You can pick out appropriate TV shows, but then the ads during the commercial breaks are horrible. You can get on a plane, let your child listen to the audio channel, and not know that the song they’re listening to is one on the radio station you have forbidden. We need to sit down with our daughters (and of course our sons as well) and walk them through how to think about the relentless messages they’re getting—we also have to educate ourselves without being afraid to be labeled as the uptight parent. We must, as must our daughters. Girls will only reach their full potential if they’re taught to be the agents of their own social change. As we guide girls through adolescence, we have to acknowledge it, name

it, and empower our girls so they can go into that store with the Queen Bee backpacks, and tell the manager to take them off the shelf.

So Why Listen to Me?

During a recent fifth-grade assembly, a student asked me, “Are you wise at what you do?” I said, “It’s really up to you to decide if I am. Listen to what I say and then tell me.” I’d say the same thing to you. Although I’m a mom now myself and have worked with tens of thousands of children and teens over many years, I don’t know your individual child. I’m going to give you my best analysis and suggestions for what’s going on in the lives of most girls. And I’m going to ask you to engage with me, your daughter, and the important girls in your life in the process. The only thing I know for certain is that each person’s dignity is not negotiable. Everyone is worthy. Everyone has the right to have her voice heard.

I’m frequently asked how I got into this line of work. Or said another way, “Were you a victim of a Queen Bee?” or, as kids love to ask me, “Were you popular?” Well, here’s the short version of why I do this work.

Until fifth grade I’d grown up in a close community inside Washington, D.C., and attended a small, public elementary school. I had many friends of different races, nationalities, and economic backgrounds. I was part of a clique, but I was friends with lots of students. The summer after I completed fifth grade, my family moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I attended a well-respected, private all-girls school. That’s where I had my first really miserable lunch tray moment when girls wouldn’t let me sit at their tables. But there were also girls who saw that happening to me and invited me to sit with them instead (thank you, Madeline McGrady and Melissa McSwiggen).

I returned to Washington the next year and enrolled in another private but coed school where I ran into more Mean Girls—but this time they became my friends and they were incredibly charismatic and fun. Looking back, I see that one of them in particular was any parent’s nightmare. She was stunningly beautiful, brazen, funny, and had a house with MIA parents, a fabulously exciting older sister, and a cute older brother who was always bringing his even cuter friends over. Honestly, from my eighth-grade perspective, there was nothing better than going over to her house and just waiting to see what exciting and dangerous thing would happen after school. And her family presented well, meaning my parents didn’t have a clue about what I was seeing and experiencing in that house and I certainly wasn’t going to tell them.

That’s when it got confusing. Think of it this way: when girls are mean to you all the time, it’s easier to hate them back and/or pretend they don’t exist; but it’s a world of difference when the Mean Girls are also really nice and exciting. In the scheme of things, it seemed like a good trade-off. So what if they would turn on me at any second or make fun of me about the things I was the most self-conscious about? I was willing to pay the price, because speaking my mind meant losing the friendships and all the exciting things that went with it.

Then the first day of ninth grade arrived, and I fell in love—hard. Unbelievable to me at the time, the boy liked me back. And just like that, my friends stopped teasing and humiliating me. It was like I had an insurance policy against how badly my friends could treat me. Why? Because he had the boyfriend “trifecta.” He was cute, charming, and wealthy. I had proven myself to my friends.

Unfortunately, my relationship with him became incredibly serious and then incredibly abusive. How did I, someone with no violence in my family and parents who loved each other, get into an abusive relationship at such a young age and stay in that relationship for five years? On paper, I was no one’s idea of a likely target for abuse. I would have known exactly what to say on any self-esteem test. I was a competitive athlete. I had a supportive and loving family. I didn’t abuse alcohol or drugs. So what was going on?

Like so many girls, I was amazingly good at fooling myself. I'd convinced myself that I was in a mature relationship and I was in control of the situation. But more important, my boyfriend made me feel like I was the only one who understood him. I was the special one. It was like having the BFF I'd always wanted with all the other benefits that go with having a boyfriend. I was in complete denial that I could get into situations that were over my head, even when I had clear evidence to the contrary.

But looking back, I realized I already knew how to be in an abusive relationship by the time I met him—thanks to my friends. I believed I didn't have the right to complain when people who were supposed to care about me treated me badly. I had already learned it was more important to have the relationship than how I was treated within it. And last, when the relationship was at its worst and even I had to admit things were bad, I felt horribly ashamed and powerless to change my situation and that I couldn't go back to my friends for help.

I stayed with him until I graduated from high school. When I was in college, I started studying karate and it gave me a new sense of purpose and personal strength. After my college graduation, I moved back to Washington, D.C., and began teaching self-defense to high school girls. That's where I started hearing stories remarkably similar to my own. I began to wonder: Where did these girls learn to be silent? Where did they learn to deny the danger staring them in the face? Why didn't girls trust other girls? Why were they so willing to throw away friendships if a better offer came along? And the most complicated question of all that's confused women forever: How in the world is a girl supposed to be sexy enough that she gets boys' attention but not so sexy that other girls turn against her?

Clearly, girls are safer and happier when they look out for one another. But, paradoxically, during their period of greatest vulnerability, girls' competition with and judgment of each other weakens their friendships and effectively isolates all of them. Honestly, I hate that. After all these years doing this work, I still get really worked up about it. And this is what the power of the clique is all about, and why it matters so much to your daughter's safety and self-esteem.

As I taught self-defense, schools asked me to develop other classes that would teach girls self-esteem, confidence, and social competence. And that is exactly what I do today—in addition to working with boys, educators, and parents around the world. And although some things have changed since *Queen Bees* was first published, many challenges are still as true today as they were then. Parents often feel overwhelmed by the challenges of parenting a teen, whether they're trying to deal with a cruel message left on their daughter's voice mail, helping her survive the morning bus ride safely, or rescuing a daughter in an abusive relationship. And whether I'm teaching in the most exclusive private school or the largest public school, the girls all bring similar concerns and fears. No matter their income, religion, or ethnicity, they're struggling with the same issues about the pleasures and perils of friendships and how they act as a portal to the larger world.

I love what I do. There's nothing like the adrenaline rush of trying to engage my students. But as I talk with girls and boys in school hallways and cafeterias, and I teach in their schools, athletic teams, and church groups, something is clear. Adults are struggling. Many of us feel overwhelmed by this new relentless culture. Some of us still dismiss girls' experiences as teen drama; others overreact and get overinvolved so that the girls don't learn how to handle these situations for themselves or stop going to any adults for help.

On the other side, some adults won't get involved at all because they think the "girls should learn to work it out themselves," providing no guidance or ethical standards about how the girls might do that. Some of us also feel helpless or are stuck in the same patterns as the girls themselves. And of course, parents often see their daughters' behaviors as a reflection of the success or failure of their parenting, so it's just that much harder to see their daughters for who they really are.

How the Book Works

Many parents have told me that one of the things they appreciated the most about the first version of *Queen Bees* is that they could read it in small bites—like when they’re stuck in traffic or pool line. I took that to heart, so I didn’t mess with how the book is organized. Most chapters will begin with a thorough analysis and description of a specific aspect of Girl World. In the “Checking Your Baggage” section, I’ll challenge you to answer a few questions about your experiences when you were your daughter’s age, because understanding your own biases and preconceptions can show you how they’ve affected your behavior toward your daughter. Then I’ll give you specific, step-by-step strategies to help her and you.

Just like the first time I wrote this book, I’ve reached out to girls, boys, parents, and educators to take an active role in its development. I’ve shown multiple drafts of every chapter to girls of different ages, races, cultures, communities, and socioeconomic levels. They’ve helped me fill in missing perspectives, pushed me to delve more deeply into certain issues, and offered their “political commentary,” which you’ll find throughout the book. They’ve anonymously shared personal stories, feelings, and opinions—all to help you know how to reach out to your daughter in the best possible way. And last, I have added specific questions from girls and their parents with my solutions.

The girls have also taught me about the “land mines” you’ll find throughout the book: things parents do and say that are guaranteed eye rollers and shut the door to effective communication. They usually seem insignificant (e.g., you can’t roll your eyes when your daughter says something that irritates you), but they can make the difference between your daughter listening to you or tuning out completely. As you read this, you may be thinking that pointing out land mines is a lost cause, since *anything* you do, including breathing or looking in her direction, makes her roll *her* eyes, but I promise that there are ways you can decrease the number of embarrassing things you do. (For some reason, the way dads sneeze and moms laugh are also land mines, but you can’t change everything about yourself!)

The one thing you aren’t allowed to do while you read this book is beat yourself up for being a bad parent. Parenting is really difficult, and the reward is way down the road when she emerges as a cool adult. Allow me to quote my own mother, who said, “When my children were teens, if I liked them for five minutes a day, that was a good day.” And now I can say with absolute authority that if I have gotten through a week without screaming at one of my own children, this is a very good and very rare week.

So let’s be honest. You don’t have to like your daughter all the time. One father I know refers to his increasingly distant daughter as “the exchange student.” You’re allowed to wonder why you had kids in the first place. Once you acknowledge these rotten—and believe me, universal—feelings, their power over you tends to decrease and you don’t feel so guilty.

Before You Get into the Heart of the Book

Your task is difficult. Instilling values, respecting your daughter’s growing individuality, influencing her to make good decisions, and protecting her while giving her the freedom to make mistakes is hard, hard work. A lot of the time you’ll feel as if you’re banging your head against a wall.

This book will give you strategies to make your daughter’s adolescence bearable for both of you. It will teach you to talk to your daughter in a way that doesn’t make her groan when you speak. She may even walk away from your conversation admitting to herself (but not to you, never to you) that you know what you’re talking about.

You can help your daughter develop a strong sense of self. You can teach her personal responsibility, confidence in her abilities, and empathy toward others. You want her to be an authentic person able to realize

her full individual potential while being connected to her loved ones and community. You can build a strong, healthy relationship with your daughter as long as you take a long-term view, focus on the overall goal, and challenge yourself to be as honest as you can. I also promise to answer the biggest questions of all: Should I read her e-mail/Facebook/MySpace/text messages/diary? When do I know she's lying to me?

Just Between You and Me

This book may be painful to read. If you decide you hate me, have no idea what I'm talking about, or I hit a nerve, I have only one request. Take a moment to reflect. Ask yourself why what you read bothered you so much. Did it call up memories of your own experience as a victim, bystander, or perpetrator? Did it give you a sinking feeling that your daughter is a target or evildoer? Is it hard to face the fact that your daughter is thinking and acting in ways you aren't happy about? Acknowledge the pain you feel, but don't let it stop you from learning all you can about your daughter's world. Everything in this book comes from what people have told me over the years, my teaching experiences, and from girls' comments as they have read drafts of this book. I'm not accusing girls of being bad people, judging parents as incapable, or predicting which daughters will be failures as adults. I'm reaching out to you, as parents, educators, and role models, to show you what I think girls are up against as they struggle to become healthy young women who will make our communities better. Now, let's start by looking at one of the main reasons I had to rewrite *Queen Bees* in the first place: how technology impacts girls' social lives.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shawn Hunter:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because if you are reading a book particularly book entitled Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World your thoughts will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a reserve then become one form conclusion and explanation that will maybe you never get previous to. The Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World giving you one more experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful data for your better life with this era. So now let us show you the relaxing pattern here is your body and mind are going to be pleased when you are finished examining it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

Barbara Barnes:

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Roxie Gregory:

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