

PARENTS TALK BACK

The secret lives of teens

Teenagers have kept parts of their lives secret from the prying eyes of adults for generations. A degree of privacy is necessary to develop one’s own identity, and to learn to solve problems independently on the path to becoming an adult.

But the hidden aspects of today’s teen culture are vastly different from those in the pre-social media era. The secret spaces of this generation are contained behind a screen to which teens are nearly continuously connected.

Most parents know that technology has dramatically changed how teens communicate; they have become much more aware of the legal and social dangers of sexting, and the emotional harm of cyberbullying. But they may not realize the impact of the most significant change this era has enabled: the easy accessibility and near-constant presence of pornography. And they remain largely unaware of how it has changed the way teens interact, the way they view themselves and their sexuality, says author Nancy Jo Sales.

In “American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers,” Sales details a new frontier of sexism and harassment that has become the reality for girls today. Even though girls aren’t the primary consumers of online porn, their social interactions are guided by a hypersexualized porn-saturated culture, she argues. Sales interviewed more than 200 girls in six cities for this book. She presents teen girls’ struggles and anxieties in their own words — words that parents need to hear.

The confluence between the tech, porn and social media industries delivers graphic, violent and degrading images regularly to children’s screens, even before they begin to seek it out. Clicking on a benign topic or a “trending” hashtag on Instagram or Twitter will commonly bring up pornographic images — and the content is vastly different and more violent than what might have been seen in a magazine passed around a playground decades earlier.

Girls who raise their voices against it are dismissed as prudes who “have no chill.” Sales describes scenes in which boys hold up their phones, playing porn, during a girl’s class presentation if the teacher is sitting in the back of the room.

Is anyone going to responsibly argue that this is OK? she asks.

There is a stark difference between being “sex positive” and wanting your child exposed to violent and degrading sexual images. Sales cites research that suggests that when boys have their first sexual experience by watching pornographic videos on a screen, it becomes much easier for them to think of women as objects to pleasure them. Sex is reduced to a woman’s performance. She cites additional research that shows exposure to porn is related to male sexual aggression toward women.

And many kids’ first sexual experiences happen over social media now.

“There is a generation of kids who are self-generating porn, and yet it’s become so normalized so quickly that people are trying to dismiss it,” says Sales. Young teens she interviewed describe how boys try to blackmail them into sending nude pictures of themselves.

In fact, some of the world’s most popular social media sites began as a way to evaluate whether girls and women were “hot or not.” That idea was the basis for Facemash, the precursor to Facebook, and the founders of YouTube have said they originally set out to create a hotness-evaluating video site.

A lot of men in Silicon Valley have become filthy rich and powerful off of teenage girls, Sales argues, yet they have taken no responsibility for the ways in which this hypersexualized culture has negatively impacted girls’ lives.

She recalled a conversation she had with a friend, a father of a 17-year-old boy, in which she shared her surprise at how much porn teenage boys were consuming (according to studies she’d been reading). The father said he doubted his son watched very much.

The father approached her weeks later, after looking through his son’s browser history. He’d discovered that not only was his son watching hard-core porn, he was looking at it right when he woke up in the morning, as soon as he got home from school and again before he went to bed.

The father was alarmed and troubled by both the content and the frequency, she said.

“Kids don’t say at the dinner table, ‘I saw a great porn video today,’” she said.

The takeaway for parents is twofold: First, parents need to talk with their children about porn, and not just about how to avoid it. There has to be a discussion about the ways it is influencing culture, teen interactions and self-image.

Secondly, we need to demand better protections for kids by the tech industry that profits from children’s use of their products. Sales points out that in 2013, Britain’s four largest Internet service providers agreed to institute “family-friendly filters” that automatically block pornographic websites unless households chose to unblock them.

Her book raises a fundamentally critical question: Why should porn profiteers and Silicon Valley flourish at the expense of a generation of American girls?

It’s time to answer that question.

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Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Crowdfunding honeymoons

Websites allow newly weds to ask for cash

By JOSEPH PISANI
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — Before they say “I do,” soon-to-be newlyweds are increasingly going online to ask, “Will you pay for our honeymoon?”

Crowdfunding websites such as Honeyfund, GoFundMe and Honeymoon Wishes make it easy to raise cash from family and friends for a post-wedding getaway. The sites charge fees for their services — as much as 10 percent of the total collected — but people are warming up to the idea, despite the cost.

As couples increasingly live together first and marry later, they already have toasters and towels, so traditional gift registries don’t make as much sense. Honeymoon registries also provide a polite way of hinting to guests to give money instead, without breaking wedding etiquette.

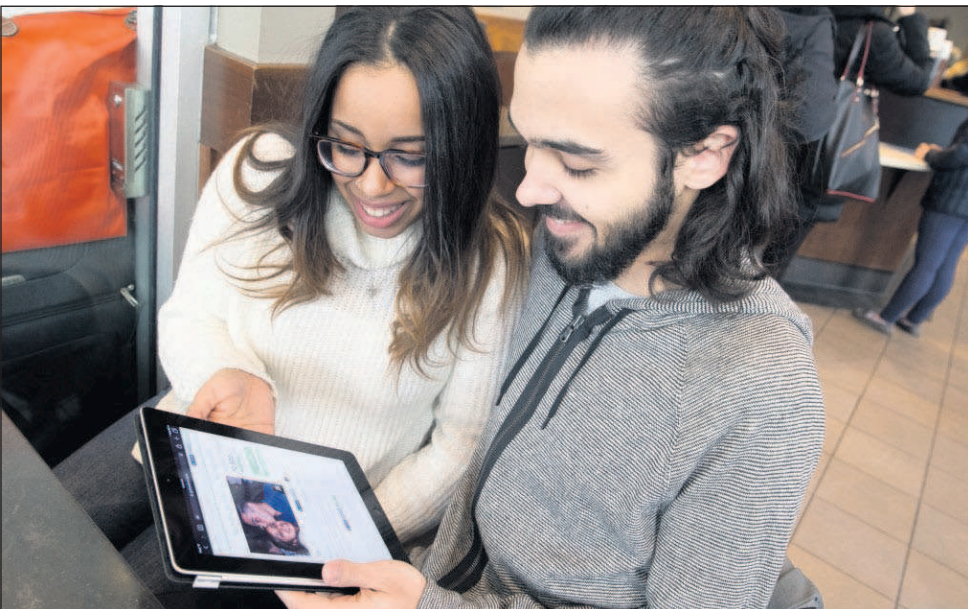
“I didn’t feel right saying, ‘Hey, give me cash,’” says Nicole DePinto, who raised \$2,900 on GoFundMe for an Icelandic honeymoon with her husband Anthony in December.

Sites that help couples raise cash for honeymoons have seen their popularity soar recently. Honeyfund users, for example, raised \$90 million last year, a 50 percent jump from the year before, says co-founder and CEO Sara Margulis.

Last year, 22 percent of people using the Knot, a wedding planning site, said they also used honeymoon registries, according to a survey of 6,500 customers. That’s the same as the year before, but up from 17 percent in 2013 and 13 percent in 2012.

The DePintos even crowdsourced the destination of their honeymoon, asking the 100 guests at their travel-themed October wedding reception to vote on Greece, Iceland or Japan. The save-the-dates came on post-cards and the party favors were luggage tags.

“We did everything outside of the box,” she said. They loved the natural beauty of the icy island in winter, and besides: “They’re all places we wanted to go eventually.”



AP Photo/Mary Altaffer

In this Tuesday, March 1, 2016, photo, Nicole DePinto, left, and her husband, Anthony, pose for a photo with their crowdfunding page displayed on an iPad, in New York. Websites such as Honeyfund, GoFundMe and Honeymoon Wishes make it easy to raise cash for a post-wedding getaway.

Most guests gave the couple cash-stuffed envelopes at the wedding, but the 14 donations they got online covered their hotel and airline tickets, even after GoFundMe kept more than \$230 in fees. The Union City, New Jersey, couple also had a registry at Target, but asked for just a few things there since they had lived together for three years.

“In that time we’ve acquired tons of pots, plates, towels, throw pillows and bedding,” they explained on their GoFundMe page.

Asking for cash in the invitation is a wedding faux pas, says Kristen Maxwell Cooper, deputy editor at The Knot. But passing around a link to a honeymoon registry works, because couples can explain to guests exactly where the money will be spent, she says.

Couples have a few options to turn to. Crowdfunding site GoFundMe has collected \$2 billion to date for all sorts of personal campaigns, raising money for medical emergencies, crime victims and other local causes. But the site does have a weddings and honeymoons section where users have raised \$4 million since

GoFundMe was launched six years ago, says media director Kelsea Little.

Anyone can see a GoFundMe campaign, but don’t expect strangers to hand over cash — only friends and family will likely donate, says Little.

“It’s a common misconception,” she says. Honeyfund, meanwhile, is more focused on honeymoons. Couples can list exactly what the cash will pay for, from hotel rooms to sightseeing tours to massages.

Major resorts and cruise lines are jumping in, using Honeymoon Wishes to power honeymoon registries built into their sites.

At Carnival Cruise Line, for example, couples can ask wedding guests to pay for scuba diving excursions or horseback rides. The money goes straight to Carnival and couples can redeem the gifts on board, says Nancy Williams, the business development director at Honeymoon Wishes. Couples can also go to Honeymoon Wishes and build their own honeymoon, without being attached to a certain resort.

“It’s now socially acceptable,” says Williams.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Backpack a reminder of Japanese interment camp

A Milton-Freewater resident had painful memories rekindled in March 1988 when a photo surfaced that hearkened back to his time in a World War II Japanese interment camp in the Philippines.

John Wightman and his family celebrated a day of thanksgiving every Feb. 23, the day U.S. troops from the 11th Airborne and elements of the Filipino guerrilla forces liberated 2,247 prisoners from the Los Banos interment camp in the Philippines in 1945. But John said he remembered very little about the time spent in the camp except from stories his parents told. “When we got back to the United States, I was



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

having trouble emotionally adjusting to a ‘free’ life. Part of the way I finally adjusted to that was to forget most everything,” said Wightman, who was six years old when the family was freed after a little more than three years in the camp. His younger brother Bill was born there.

John’s memory was given a jog when a photo on display in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., was discovered in 1987 by Dick Hoyt, the editor of

Voice of Angels, a publication for the 11th Airborne Alumni Association. Hoyt was able to identify the children in the photo by the names written on their backpacks. Wightman’s father, in an article for the publication, wrote that the packs were made because the Japanese army had a custom of suddenly moving prisoners from a camp to an unknown destination. John still had his backpack, and a knife given to him by one of the liberating soldiers.

The Wightman family moved to the Philippines to help in missionary work with John’s grandparents and two uncles. When the Japanese invaded the islands in December 1941, the

entire family was taken prisoner. The family endured frightful conditions, but all but one uncle survived to return to the U.S. — he was killed when a Japanese ship was torpedoed and sunk by a U.S. submarine crew that didn’t know there were prisoners aboard.

Wightman came to Oregon in 1970 and moved to Milton-Freewater in 1974, where he lived until his death in 2012 at the age of 74.

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Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Safety over sexy: Airport stops woman with gun-shaped heels

LINTHICUM, Md. (AP) — At the airport, safety is more important than sexy.

That’s what a woman found out at the Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport. Officials say she was stopped Sunday at a security checkpoint with a pair of gun-shaped stiletto heels.

TSA spokeswoman Lisa Farbstein says the stilettos had heels in the shape of handguns and faux bullets around the sole. They were in the woman’s carry-on luggage, along with bracelets lined in faux bullets.

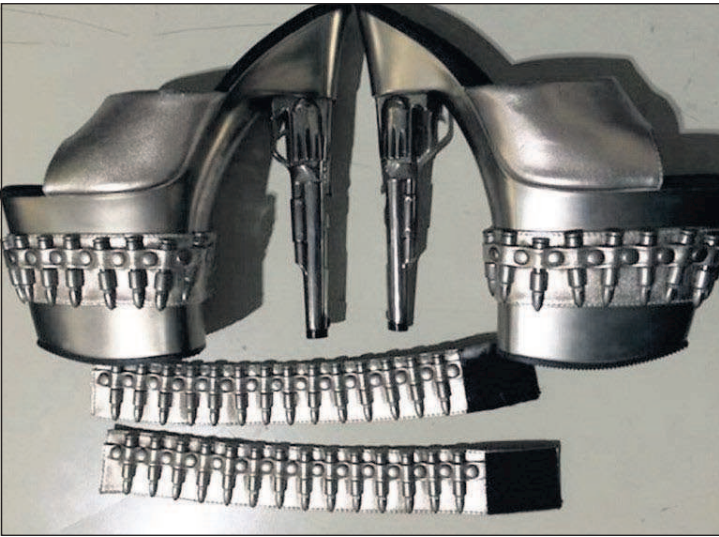
The agency prohibits passengers from carrying “replica guns or ammunition” through airport security checkpoints.

Farbstein says the woman was told that she could put the items in her checked luggage. The woman tried to check the items, but ended up leaving them with the TSA in order to catch her flight.

Cops to whoever left drugs: We feel ‘horrible for your loss’

MACEDONIA, Ohio (AP) — Northeast Ohio police hoping to figure out who left a bag of methamphetamine in a hotel room trash can say their department feels horrible for the owner’s loss and wants to help.

The tongue-in-cheek message posted Tuesday to the Macedonia police Facebook page asks the owner of the drugs to call or stop by to claim them so officers can, in their words, “make your day.”



Transportation Security Administration via AP

This Feb. 28 photo shows a pair of gun-shaped stiletto heels at Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, in Maryland.

A photograph shows a baggie containing what a detective says is a gram of high-grade crystal methamphetamine worth as much as \$160.

The detective at the department about 20 miles southeast of Cleveland says there were numerous empty bags in the hotel trash can. Police haven’t identified who rented the room using a gift card.

Albuquerque Girls Scouts sell cookies near pot dispensary

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Two Albuquerque Girls Scouts have picked an unusual spot to sell Girl Scout cookies — a marijuana dispensary.

KRQE-TV in Albuquerque reports a Junior Girl Scout and a Brownie set up shop Saturday outside medical marijuana dispensary Ultra Health and sold more than 60 boxes.

Ultra Health manager James

Gambling says he invited the scouts and offered to donate \$1 for every box the girls sold. He says “the munchies” is a stereotype that comes with marijuana, so it was fitting to have the Girl Scouts outside.

Phil Temer, a dad of one of the girls, says he saw nothing wrong with the girls selling near the dispensary.

Girl Scouts of New Mexico Trails spokeswoman Carol Ann Short says selling outside medical marijuana dispensaries is against scout rules.

Last dry county in Alabama legalizes alcohol sales

ASHLAND, Ala. (AP) — Alabama’s last totally dry county is going wet.

Residents in the Clay County cities of Ashland and Lineville voted Tuesday to legalize alcohol sales.

Alcohol sales will still be

illegal outside the cities. But the vote means alcohol can now be sold legally in at least part of each of Alabama’s 67 counties.

Opponents argued against legalizing alcohol sales on moral and public-safety grounds. But supporters say allowing the sale of alcoholic beverages will help stimulate business in the rural, east Alabama county.

Bootleggers have operated in Clay County for years, and possession of small amounts of alcohol in the county has been legal.

The issue last came up for a countywide vote in 1986, when church opposition killed a proposal to go wet.

Man breaks in to store for cigarettes but leaves cash

LAS CRUCES, N.M. (AP) — A New Mexico man is accused of breaking in to a convenience store for a pack of cigarettes — but also making sure to pay for them.

Police in Las Cruces say the 24-year-old man went to buy cigarettes early Sunday, but the business was closed.

Surveillance cameras show him pounding on the front door several times and then kicking and breaking the door’s lower panel.

Police say he went inside, grabbed a pack of cigarettes and then made sure the cameras captured him leaving \$6.

A witness called 911, and police say they found and arrested the man. He faces a felony charge of breaking and entering.

Damage to the store’s front door is estimated at \$800.