

Feeling Powerless in a “Power-full” World

by Kaely Miller and Carol Duerksen

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Copies of the story “Why do I feel so alone?” for each participant
- 2 Highlighter pens for each student
- 3 Contact a girl ahead of time and give her the story to read to the class. Ask her to be familiar with it so she can read it well.
- 4 Paper and pens

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS

Ask the student you contacted prior to class to begin the session by reading the story.

CONNECT WITH THE CONTENT

Hand out the story and highlighters. Say: *Now that you’ve heard the story, I’d like for you to read and reflect on it. Use the highlighters to indicate anything that you really agree or disagree with as you read it.*

REFLECT

Discuss the areas that youth highlighted, and discuss the following questions:

- 1 How does technology provide a way for us to avoid personal communication?
- 2 Has it become part of our nature to use technology in this way? Or is something unnatural about it?
- 3 Give examples of when we should decrease our use of technology.
- 4 What are some realistic ways that we can use less technology and more personal communication?
- 5 How can we use technology to enhance personal communication?
- 6 Give examples of times in your life you’ve felt unheard because of technology.
- 7 Do you feel that your friends and family really hear you? Do you really listen to them?

RESPOND

Hand out paper and pens. Ask students to write their own reflection piece on how they feel about the technology in their lives. Do they agree or disagree with the story they read? What is their own take on technology in their lives?

“WHY DO I FEEL SO ALONE?”

Sometimes I feel so ... alone.

Which is so ironic, you know? I mean, my parents tell me we live in this age where anything is possible. They keep reminding me that I can find almost any kind of communication within my reach. I can call my friends no matter where I am. I can text them whenever I want. I can e-mail them photos and videos that will be there within minutes. I can IM them within seconds. I, apparently, can do so much in this age. I, apparently, have this unseen power surging within my hands and my fingers.

So why do I feel so alone?

I watched my friend Katie call her boyfriend the other day. They talked for hours. I mean hours. While she was talking to him she was IMing her other friend Sarah. When she wasn't IMing Sarah, she was finishing her homework.

And I started wondering - how much is she actually listening to her boyfriend? Are they having a deep conversation? Does she even know what he's saying half of the time? Are those "yes's" sincere? Are those "mhmm's" real? Or is she just filling space.

I watched another friend Allison e-mail her Aunt that same day. It was a long e-mail. She talked about how school was keeping her busy, and about the people she met when she worked as a waitress, and about how her parents were going to be out of town this weekend so she was going to have a few girls over. But she didn't tell her Aunt about how she dreads school because she feels like the "dumb kid" in her Algebra class, and she feels like the "untalented kid" in her Ceramics class. She didn't tell her Aunt about how she hates going to work because this guy she works with always brushes up against her even when she's asked him to stop. She didn't tell her Aunt about how she's actually worried about this weekend because some of her girl friends have threatened to bring beer with them and she's not really into that.

And I started wondering - what was the point of that e-mail? Was it really to let her Aunt know how she was doing? Was it really an accurate image of her life? Or was she just going through the motions?

My parents tell me that I have this ability to do anything I want to because of the technology today.

But secretly I wonder. I wonder what it was like when there weren't cell phones for everyone to talk on every minute of every day. And I wonder what it was like when there weren't e-mails we could write and pretend to be okay. What would it be like to always see the other person's face when you were talking to them? Do you hear so much more through their expression, through the raising of

their eyebrows, through their smile, through their grimace? What would it be like to always hear the other person – to really hear them – their tone, their laughter, their anger. Would it be like a completely new dimension to communication?

I know it's probably not a big deal. I know I probably do have the ability to do almost anything I want with technology.

But when I watch my friends text while I try talking to them, I know I'll have to re-say half of what I've already told them.

And when I hear them tell me just to Facebook them, I know they won't really get my expression.

And I guess – well I guess I just wonder if I'm heard. Really heard.