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From Front Page

Has Intimacy Suffered in the Information Age?

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"We have all of these social phenomena," said Rigsby. "Social media is changing the way we relate to people. Due to the instant gratification of online communication we feel we have much more intimate relationships with people than we really do." The instant responses received through texting, tweeting and chatting may cause us to feel close, but often social media is actually more distancing. "The way we express intimacy is changing," said Rigsby.

In her 13 years of teaching, Rigsby has seen a notable shift in her interactions with students. "In my first five years [my students] came to office hours," she remarked. "Now almost no one comes. They text me and e-mail me. For incidental communication they always try electronically first."

"I usually text as a first point of contact before Skype or a phone call or meeting in person," said Chloe Anderson, a master's student at the Academy of the Arts who is in her mid-20s. "I love phone calls, but they do take more time."

Rigsby explained that people who grew up around cell phones prefer to

text as a first and primary form of communication. "Calling someone on the phone to ask for information seems like a huge social extension," said Rigsby, who grew up with a rotary phone and doesn't think twice about dialing a new number.

Some people, like Saint Mary's alumnus and hospice nurse Ilona Robinson, are less prone to following new trends in communication. "I use the phone first and email second," said Robinson. "I'm one of those people who still sends letters and cards. I think they're more personal." Robinson noted that new forms of social media can isolate older people, like the patients she cares for.

The immediate and unlimited access provided by smartphones and computers presents its own challenges. "If I'm not careful, I spend the first one and a half hours of the day on email," Rigsby admitted. "I lose the most productive part of the day." But the same tools also offer her great benefits. "I've never been good at keeping track of attendance," she said, recalling how she used to record students names on random scraps of paper. Now she does it all on her

phone, adding, "I'm very careful with my phone in ways I'm not with pieces of paper."

Technology has been changing for as long as people have been inventing, but it hasn't always happened this quickly or been so immediate and far reaching. Due to the proliferation of social media, our concept of intimacy is changing.

"I currently have five social media accounts to manage," said Anderson, who uses social media both professionally and personally. "I'm very aware of how I am presented."

"It has its value," said Robinson, "but it can take away from personal relationships. I don't like seeing people out for dinner on their phones or looking at their iPods. It makes it hard to have intimate conversation."

According to Rigsby, "Social media is gratifying, but it doesn't cover what friendship un-mediated by social media can do." Human interaction is a basic need. However, "if we remember what face-to-face friends are for," said Rigsby, "we can navigate technology in a healthy way."

Civic News orinda

The Heart in Orinda's Art

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According to Richard Starks, creator of "Open-Ended," one of the newest pieces to arrive on Orinda's public arts scene, the Cor-ten steel used is known for its characteristic oxide patina, which will mature "in about 8-10 years and is said to form a protective 'rust' layer over the base metal, thereby halting the formation of further rusting."

Photo Ohlen Alexander

Four years ago, she was appointed to serve as the liaison from OAC to the City of Orinda's Art in Public Places Committee. Her dual roles now are intertwined. "My part is in the area of making sure kids get art as part of their education."

Orinda's students benefit because the APPC, OAC, and Educational Foundation of Orinda collaborate to ensure that instruction is delivered by teachers who have formal arts training – unlike in other schools where the arts are a "frill." One only need attend OAC's spring Visual Arts Competition to appreciate just what a difference this level of professional instruction makes.

Mautner notes that exhibits at the Orinda Library Art Gallery also play a crucial role. "OAC helps artists utilize that space month in and month out." In addition, she and her fellow APPC members visit with Bay Area artists to encourage them to loan pieces of their work for display, and hope to launch additional events to help a greater number of

artists connect with prospective donors and art collectors.

For those reading this and thinking they don't have the time to serve on the APPC or another city commission, Mautner stresses that the commitment need not be onerous. The APPC meets "during the day, once a month. Meetings don't go more than an hour-and-a-half. It's just a very delightful group of people to work with. And beyond the hours of this meeting, I have my reporting to the Arts Council."

The reward, she says, is priceless – a sense of inspiration and accomplishment. It touches her deeply each time she sees people of all ages "walking through the library gallery, enjoying the art work."

To learn more about how you can apply to become a member of a city commission or committee, visit the City of Orinda's website: www.cityoforinda.org/. To become a member of the Orinda Arts Council, visit: www.orindaartscouncil.org/.

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