

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Exposed: Student Dies After Roommate Reveals Secret

By Paul Asay

Posted: Oct. 15, 2010

What Happened:

Tyler Clementi, an 18-year-old freshman at Rutgers University, killed himself Sept. 22, 2010, after his roommate streamed video of Clementi having a sexual encounter with another male student.

The roommate, Dharun Ravi, and his friend Molly Wei, flipped on a webcam in Clementi's dorm room after Clementi requested some privacy Sept. 19, and later invited his Twitter followers to watch the live video stream themselves. Three days later, Clementi posted a suicide note of sorts on his Facebook page: "Jumping off the gw bridge sorry."

The incident sparked new conversation on two fronts: The notion of privacy in this hyper-wired age of ours and the phenomenon of cyberbullying—particularly when the victim is or is accused of being gay.

According to several surveys, youth who identify themselves as homosexual are more likely to be bullied and far more likely to have considered suicide. A few days after Clementi's suicide, 13-year-old Seth Walsh died after hanging himself from a tree after classmates taunted him for being gay. Around the same time, Asher Brown, another 13-year-old, shot himself in the head after classmates called him gay. Billy Lucas, 15, hanged himself in his grandmother's barn after several peers questioned his sexuality.

As a college student, Clementi perhaps was less likely to be hurt by taunts from friends or enemies; but some speculate that Clementi's sexuality was exposed in such a public way that proved to be impossible for the freshman to endure.

"There always have been cruel kids who like to pick on the vulnerable, but only recently have the tools of cyberspace given them such power," wrote Michael Daly of the *New York Daily News*. "This power is made all the more dangerous by the emotional disconnect that accompanies disembodied communication. People say things in email they never would in person or on the telephone."

Talk About It

Have you ever had a secret? Have you ever kept a secret for someone else? Have you ever blurted out a secret when you shouldn't have? Have you ever kept a secret you should've told?

Have you ever had someone invade your privacy? Spy on you when you didn't think anyone was looking? Read personal things of yours? Snooped through your closets? How did it make you feel? Have you ever spied on someone else?

Biblical authors in the Old and New Testaments took a dim view of homosexuality, and many Christians believe homosexuality is a sin. The issue here isn't whether homosexuality is right or not, but how we as Christians are called to treat those whose values may clash with our own. Do you know anyone who's gay? How do you treat them? How do others?

Has anyone close to you—a friend or family member—ever come out to you? If so, how did you respond? What did you say? How did those close to you react? How would you hope to act if something like that did happen?

What the Bible Says:

“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar” (Ps. 139:1-2).

“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (Prov. 11:13).

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:10-13).