

My Sister, Malala

by Elsa Helin

3

Players



45

Minutes



Intensity

Keywords:

Internet, inequality, Pakistan, teenagers.

Background

This scenario is about girls in Pakistan and their ability to exchange thoughts and ideas freely. The internet can be used by girls and women in conservative societies as a means of empowerment, but their presence on the internet makes them vulnerable to threats and harassment. It is not unusual for online threats to turn into real world violence.

Pakistan is one of the world's least connected countries, but internet access is rapidly increasing. About 14 percent of Pakistanis use the internet today, but there are huge differences between men and women, boys and girls, and the rich and poor. For many people in conservative societies, the internet is connected to crime and pornography; if a girl uses the internet, her honor may be questioned. While some women use the internet to obtain information about their rights and to organize themselves, others are frightened into erasing their accounts and leaving the internet when someone finds out and threatens to tell their family and neighbors.

Setup

Aisha, Nighat, and Jehat are the three roles in this scenario. You are all 18 years old and are in your final year of school. You live in Karachi, a modern city with one foot in the conservative past. Your family lives in a nice apartment. Your father is an engineer and your mother works part time as a teacher. Your father has a computer at work. You want to go to university, and that dream may come true if you get a scholarship.

Play Suggestions: If you, like most players, have little knowledge of life in Pakistan, play these characters in a respectful manner. Avoid adopting fake accents or acting out obviously stereotypical behavior. Play them as young girls from your own culture, but in a slightly different setting.

Aisha, Nighat and Jehat do not know each other in real life, but are friends on Facebook. You all use the internet in school, where there are computers, and your teachers do not supervise you. Your families do not know that you have online accounts. Take five minutes to make up your online identities. Do you use your real name or a fake one? What does your profile picture look like?

Play

The game consists of 3 Facebook conversations and 3 scenes, one online conversation and one real-world scene focused on each character. Aisha goes first, then Nighat and last Jehat.

Each Facebook conversation starts with the main character updating her status, and then the other characters may comment on their status. (This is played out just by saying what you write. You may “like” and include emojis.)

After each Facebook conversation, the main character introduces her scene. Decide together how the scene will end before beginning to play the scene.

Aisha

Facebook Status: You want to go to a party at your best friend's older cousin's home tonight. You have not asked your parents, because you know they will say no. How do people manage to sneak out and stay undetected?

Scene: You are one of the best students in your English class. Your teacher has asked you to be a guest blogger on the school website. This may be a great opportunity for you to get a scholarship and continue your education at a university. You want to say yes, but you need your parents' approval. Your parents love you and support you, but blogging will put you at risk. Malala Yousafzai got shot in the head for blogging about her school. The two other players will portray your mum and dad, and the scene is set at the dinner table. Decide together how this scene will end before you start.

Nighat

Facebook Status: You have realized that your dream is to become a lawyer. Is that possible for a girl? How can you get your dream to come true?

Scene: You have applied for one of your school's scholarships for going to law school, but you did not get it. One of the boys in your class got a scholarship, and you know that you have better grades than him. It is unfair, and you are going to complain at the headmaster's office. You know that this is discrimination and that it is illegal. One of the other players will play the headmaster, and the other will play your teacher, who is on your side. Decide together how the scene will end before you start.

Jehat

Facebook Status: You have realized that your parents have sold you into a young marriage. The bride price will be 1,000 dollars, a lot of money for your family. You need to escape this situation.

Scene: Your brother has found out about your Facebook identity. You published a selfie, and he has Photoshopped it onto a naked body. He sent you the image in a private message (PM) and says he will spread it if you try to escape the marriage. You must see him and persuade him to destroy the image. One of the other players will play your brother, the other your sister, who knows all. You are in your living room, and your parents are not at home. Decide together how the scene will end before you start. If your brother fulfills his threat, is it likely that you will be killed.

Debrief

I wrote this game after working at the 2015 Stockholm Internet Forum, where I met a lawyer who educates Pakistani girls in cyber security. Everything in the scenario is based on true stories, even though the characters are made up. I realized that even if the situation of women and girls is harsher in Pakistan, the same structures of harassment and sexual threats are present in my own context. We are all Malala's sisters, I believe.

What parallels can you draw to your own society? What did you recognize?

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be questioned.

About the Designer

Elsa Helin's (Sweden) heart beats faster when talking to someone from another part of the world. What matters most to her is respect for human rights. For many years, she worked as a reporter, but now works with aid and development. She has been larping since 1994.