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Revision: Summary of Sherry Turkle’s *Connected But Alone*

Turkle, Sherry. *Connected, but Alone?*. 2012. Video. TED: Ideas worth spreading. Web.

21 Sep 2012.<http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/sherry_turkle_alone_together.html>

Although social media has undoubtedly brought many positive aspects to the world, in her TED talk, “Connected But Alone”, Sherry Turkle she outlines how, she fears, people who use social media are damaging interpersonal and self- relationships.

Turkle begins by observing how, in today’s world, people use their smartphones to stay connected in situations where, previously, using phones would be unacceptable. She insists this demonstrates that we “customize our lives” (4:39), using our technology to control where we place our attention at any given time.

Turkle then tells us another consequence of our obsession with technology: how in our society we stray from (face-to-face) conversations in exchange for using social media and texting to communicate. She denotes this replacement as not conversation, but as mere connection; the “sips” (8:12) exchanged in connecting through social media/texting are only useful for the exchange of discrete information, but are not true conversation. Turkle contends that the loss of conversation will “compromise our capacity for self-reflection” (8:50) because “we use conversations with each other to learn how to have conversations with ourselves” (8.43).

Through the constant connection we can get from our smartphones and the use of technology such social robots as pseudo-empathizers, Turkle insists that we are moving from “connection to isolation” through the loss of a “capacity for solitude” which she defines as “the ability to be separate” and to “to gather yourself” (14:33). Essentially, Turkle argues that we find ourselves in solitude through self-reflection (a skill we learn through face-to-face conversation), and only after we have found ourselves can we reach out to others and form meaningful relationships.

In order to battle this, Turkle implores us to embrace solitude in our own lives and in the lives of our household; to “teach our children to be alone” (15:02). Turkle is optimistic about the integrated future of our species and technology but she advocates that changes in how we use technologies and boundaries between it and us are necessary.