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Critical Reflection #2: Are we "Alone Together?"

Within chapters eight and nine of “Alone Together” by Sherry Turkle, Turkle expresses her opinions and concerns of an American society that is becoming increasingly dependent on technology. In chapter eight, she talks about how people are connected virtually, but not in reality. Turkle feels as though people are finding it harder to move off of their digital lives and be present in real life. This is seen through how people are no longer being immersed in what's physically around them, but now retreat to new places online, and alone. For example, she notes how often people are disconnected from what's in front of them like how she notices, “Parents check e-mail as they push strollers. Children and parents text during family dinners. As I watched the annual marathon in Florence, Italy, in November 2009, a runner passed me, texting.” She also makes connections to how we have multiple new identities and how multitasking has changed due to our technological advancements due to social media. In chapter nine she explores the effects of being “tethered” to the internet and smart devices on the next generation, as they are growing up this way without any recollection of life before the internet.

Overall I would have to say that Turkle has a negative perception of our society moving towards life online. In general, her points are valid and make sense. I agree that we should reflect

on our internet use, and try to be more in the moment. However, I feel as though she is only looking at the bad side that comes with society being increasingly dependent on technology, and forgetting the benefits that may arise from our newfound level of internet use. She forgets how people have the incredible privilege to interact with each other in ways that never existed before. She highlights how people are less productive, building anxiety and the pressures of crafting an online identity. I feel as though her conclusions, from my understanding, are biased and lack another perspective. What I get from her writing is that as we become more connected online, we are disconnected in real life, which is destructive to our society. Unfortunately, she rarely brings up the positives to the world being connected online. From the viewpoint of a young person, I feel as though our dependence on technology isn't truly detrimental to our society, but simply a sign of the times. Every generation has something that defines them or sets them apart from the others and for my generation it seems as though the internet is that for people in my generation. Older people are quick to criticise us but fail to try to see things from our perspective. Turkle even demonstrates this when she reflects on her daughter's social media use while on their trip to Paris. She expressed her concerns to her psychoanalyst friend about how her daughter couldn't disconnect from her friends at home across the globe. Her friend responds with how when she was sixteen and traveled with her family to Paris, "she insisted on staying in her hotel room, writing long letters to her boyfriend. Adolescents have always balanced connection and disconnection... The Internet is more than old wine in new bottles; now we can always be elsewhere." Turkle lacked the capacity to realize that her daughters actions weren't abnormal, but actually rather common even if it's not in the format she approves or can relate to. I think

that mindset dominates these chapters and makes it hard for me to agree with her. It's not the fault of young people for the society that older generations built for us.