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### Low Battery, Lower Human Connection

We rely on AI for answers, Google for directions, and find ourselves lost in social media for connection, but at what cost for our relationships and thoughts? In “The Empathy Diaries”, Sherry Turkle, a world renowned researcher for The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, shares her own experience from trying to make sense of the emotional and social cost of how much we rely on technology for our daily life and communication. Her research challenges us readers to think about the ways technology has affected us. She shows us how it is making us unable to have real human connection and think for ourselves. This topic is also discussed with first year students at the University of New England, Faith Santiago's and Tyler's Pelletier cases. They both describe the impact modern technology has had on their behavior, attitudes, and how they connect with other human beings. Faith brings up technology's ‘two-way street’ in which technology makes information accessible to us, but in doing so it harms our intellectual engagement at the same time. Whereas Tyler explains how constantly using technology has made it harder to deal with real life relationships and experiences. Through Turkle, Faith and Tyler we see a constant worry about losing ourselves through technology and the features that keep advancing. They all show that while technology provides more connectivity, it quietly damages the very human connection that it is supposed to be growing as we mature. Not only is our reliance on technology changing what we do, it's changing who we are, and not necessarily for

the better. Turkle, Tyler and Faith show us that our dependence on technology is harming our human identity.

Turkle and Faith discuss the fact that possibly one of the greatest impacts of technology is how it has continued to harm our capacity to think by ourselves in detail. Turkle writes in “The Empathy Diaries” about how the research she did uncovered changing patterns in human development. For example: Students who were once able to concentrate for hours, are now constantly distracted and emotionally unavailable. Specifically she highlights the loss of empathy. Turkle finds that loss of empathy happens as a result of our excessive use of screens. She states, "But these days we find ways around conversation. We hide from each other even as we're constantly connected to each other" (Turkle 344). Turkle is not just discussing our tendency to text more than speak, but is talking about our loss in human connection and the way we interact with others. Faith also reflects this problem when she states, "These apps have conditioned me into preferring the way that they release information, because the more I rely on them for entertainment or as a time filler, the more they profit." Both Turkle and Faith speak of the cycle we are experiencing. The easier content can be accessed with less effort, the less we think critically or reflectively. Turkle calls it an empathy crisis, and Faith calls it an intellectual independence breakdown. Devices meant for ourselves are now conditioning us to need speed and ease instead of reflection and depth. This isn't just something I've read about but something I have experienced myself. Whenever I sit down to do an assignment for school, even this paper, I find myself clicking another tab or reaching for my phone without any thought behind it. I will lose any thought that I had for the notification I constantly have to check. I have lost my patience because of the fast and easy information technology brings. It is harming our ability to learn, connect, and belong in the world.

A common theme through the three pieces is how technology makes things more accessible, taking away authenticity in our work and interactions. Tyler's essay is stating this point of how he describes how AI writing programs and autocorrect has damaged his level of confidence in his own skills: "This tool has been a virus of the human brain, eliminating the need to think for themselves." His point regarding his mother utilizing AI to produce report cards for students is showing how even the most people-oriented professions can lose touch with reality by leaving the work of feeling and thinking to machines. Turkle would likely agree. She warns that "... that computers offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship, and then, as the programs got really good, the illusion of friendship without the demands of intimacy" (Turkle 346). Each time, one feels that something valuable is being lost. She says, "These silences - often in the presence of our children - have led to a crisis of empathy that has diminished us at home, at work, and in public life. I've said that the remedy, most simply, is a talking cure" (Turkle 347). We are losing our significance which is much greater than losing our ability. Sometimes I notice this with my writing techniques. I used to have so much confidence writing my own papers and feeling successful. However, now I check Grammarly to make sure I don't make silly mistakes or even Google things to see if I am making sense. This small loss of effort I used to have during proofreading has taken away from my growth slowly. The moment technology comes in to do something with our thinking or feeling, the more efficient, but less human, we will be.

Though Turkle discusses in detail the emotional loneliness brought about by technology, Tyler offers a different approach through his narrative of how behavior on the Internet has affected his social anxiety. He states, "In real, non-technological interaction, it's very difficult to be vulnerable because there's so much uncertainty." His discomfort with situations, like

delivering a speech or attending a party alone, is typical of a trend among our generation that Turkle also observes among her students. They have a preference for the edited and controlled world of online life. I have certainly gone through this too, especially in public speaking. When it comes to giving even just a five minute presentation my whole body gets shaky and even sometimes my brain blanks. However I can text in a group chat or post on social media without a thought in my mind. Conversations and public speaking almost feel risky. Like Tyler says the ease of the online makes the human connection intimidating and gives me a fear of making real relationships. Turkle informs us, "We may even begin to feel more at home in the world of our screens" (Turkle 343). Both are fighting against the emotional security that technology provides and the price it takes away in return. Faith's essay talks about tension when she writes about how she tends to question herself immediately upon looking at difficult viewpoints on the internet, "I start to doubt my original position and get persuaded to side with the crowd." We see a lack of self-confidence as well as social confidence in each of their points of views. Regardless of whether it is Tyler's paranoia in the public arena, Faith's lack of ability to form independent opinions, or Turkle's students' difficulty with empathy, the message is concerning. Life on the internet may feel safer, but it is just as isolating. It keeps us from gaining that emotional strength formed by actual, human connection.

Together, the research of Turkle, Faith, and Tyler is an insightful critique of our intellectual and emotional investment of technology. Turkle's own extended studies on empathy and connection are matched in real students' lives like those of Faith and Tyler. They reveal how technology has discretely changed their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Though each of these voices offers slightly different perspectives, they all have the same unsettling conclusion of technology and how it does not simply change the way we behave, it changes the type of people

we are. It makes us more connected and less present, more knowledgeable and less reflective, more efficient but less authentic. We can reclaim our empathy and our focus by learning to be comfortable with the uncomfortable, and better with real connection.

*Works Cited*

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