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Technology. What used to be once a concept that was unimaginable is now accessible at your fingertips. Much of today's world revolves around technology. In classrooms students' entire days are spent on their computers, in the street you cannot go 100 feet without someone bumping into you since their head is buried into their phones, or infant children cannot eat dinner at a restaurant without their parents iPhone propped up against the salt and pepper shakers. The world that we live in today is infected with technology and there does not seem to be any slowing down. Sherry Turkle, a researcher from the world-renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology, uses her book *The Empathy Diaries* to bring to light these issues and argue for change. In her book Turkle specifically mentions that although digital technology has done severe damage to Americans, she believes that the phones can be put down and change can be made. While I agree that America is too fixated on technology and has become too reliant on it, I believe that it is impossible for them to ever learn to live without and in turn the continuation of the dampening of emotions of Americans.

While yes, much of 21st century America is built on this new form of technology, the reliance Americans have on it has caused them to transition from empathetic human beings to mindless drones. This effect is most notably seen in children. In Turkle's piece, she states, "And we like to hear them because if these are the only stories that matter, then we don't have to attend to other feelings that persist – that we are somehow more lonely than before, that our children are

less empathic than they should be for their age and that it seems nearly impossible to have an uninterrupted conversation at a family dinner” (349). In other words, only positive stories of technology are shared because it is those stories that reinforce the idea that technology is a positive in our life when it has created a disconnect between humans and wiped clear the emotions of children. The Oxford dictionary defines empathy as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another”. These children live two lives, one in the real world and one behind their screens. They are slowly being swallowed by their devices, leaving them emotionless. No longer are kids concerned about one another’s feelings, rather an “every man for himself” mentality has been adopted as the children do not know the difference. The longer that this issue dwells, the bigger it will get, and soon it will be too late. Change needs to take place but there is no sign of that change occurring any time soon. People still rush to buy the newest iPhones; and families still eat dinner with their big screen television playing in the foreground. For decades now humans have been indoctrinated by the big tech companies so much so that they live in the palm of their hands. Unless action is taken at their end, which financially speaking is not anticipated anytime soon, the cycle will continue, and emotions will be further flushed down the drain.

When you think of the concept of a conversation, most likely you envision two people indulging face to face discussing a specific topic. This commonplace is shifting, however. Most conversations are now held digitally, whether it be through a phone call, a text, or a video call. This practice inevitably will have lasting negative effects on the emotions of Americans. Sherry Turkle weighs in on this idea in her piece when she writes, “It all adds up to a flight from conversation – at least from conversation that is open-ended and spontaneous, conversation in which we play with ideas, in which we allow ourselves to be fully present and vulnerable” (344). To summarize this quote, Turkle is claiming that digital technology provides humans with an

exit strategy to in person conversations as those are the conversations that are truly meaningful and oftentimes unpredictable. Americans today shy away from human interactions when it requires them to speak face to face. This is because it is easier to have genuine and difficult conversations over through the screen. Conversing through text allows for time to process the conversation and generate a reply whereas an in-person conversation does not allow for thinking to occur, oftentimes producing genuine responses. I believe that this newfound custom of American society contributes to the oversimplifying of emotions. Superficial conversations via text do not allow for feelings to be conveyed and provide people an avenue to express whatever they want without the fear of repercussions. In messages, there is no dictation. Unless an emoji is embedded into the text, the author's feelings cannot be transmitted. What they say is simply words on a screen. Because of that, a response is generated without taking their emotions into account as they cannot determine what they are feeling. This varies from the in-person conversation as in those, facial expression is visible, and fluctuations in their voice is audible, all which tell the listener what feelings are associated with what they are saying.

Technology and the effect that it has on human emotions is diminishing the relationships between people. Why spend time searching for your "perfect someone" or hang out with a friend when your digital technology can provide you with the same dopamine hits you would have received from your relationships, all without stepping outside. Turkle claims that "most relationships are a blend of online and off-line interaction. Courtships take place via text" (349). Turkle is saying that in today's world, relationships are three-dimensional, taking place both in-person and digitally. She further comments that romantic relationships happen via texts. This occurrence is synonymous with the idea that technology oversimplifies emotions. The age of love letters, flowers, and dinner has been replaced by texts, Venmo cash exchanges, and Door Dash. The little romantic acts that shaped relationships dating back hundreds of years have been

turned into shallow gestures that only scrape the surface of love. In today's world technology has established itself as the backbone of relationships, causing the success of said kinship to be dependent on the use of it.

Works Cited

Turkle, Sherry. *The Empathy Diaries: A Memoir*. New York, Penguin Press, 2021.