



Alone Together

Why We Expect **MORE** from Technology and **LESS** from Each Other

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A groundbreaking book by one of the most important thinkers of our time shows how technology is warping our social lives and our inner ones

Technology has become the architect of our intimacies. Online, we fall prey to the illusion of companionship, gathering thousands of Twitter and Facebook friends, and confusing tweets and wall posts with authentic communication. But this relentless connection leads to a deep solitude. MIT professor Sherry Turkle argues that as technology ramps up, our emotional lives ramp down. Based on hundreds of interviews and with a new introduction taking us to the present day, *Alone Together* describes changing, unsettling relationships between friends, lovers, and families.

My Synopsis:

A thought-provoking read about the power of designed technology and the role we allow it to play in our lives. Helped me to see a few areas in my life I need to adjust, especially with my kids, so that I remain in control of the technology in my life, not the other way around. Reading this has also helped me to see a few ideas on how to better serve those around me.

Alone Together

Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other

- p. xxi Always distracted, we lose the capacity for solitude.
- p. xxi We pay a price for our distraction.
- p. xxii ...I came to this formulation: technology makes us forget what we know about life.
- p. xxii We must ask whether a technology expands our capacities and possibilities or exploits our vulnerabilities.
- p. xxv This is our current challenge: combatting the sense that it is normal to lose privacy for a feeling of sociability.
- p. xxv As I continue to research the emotional effects of social media, I regularly meet parents who think that their children need people less than they did.
- p. 1 **Alone Together**
- p. 1 Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities.
- p. 1 Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to one another.
- p. 3 People are lonely. The network is seductive.
- p. 10 The idea of sociable robots suggests that we might navigate intimacy by skirting it.
- p. 11 Some people even talk about robots as providing respite from feeling overwhelmed by technology...
- p. 11 If the problem is that too much technology has made us busy and anxious, the solution will be another technology that will organize, amuse, and relax us.
- p. 11 ...this book is not about robots. Rather, it is about how we are changed as technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face.
- p. 11 Technology ties us up as it promises to free us up.
- p. 13 ...now we look to the network to defend us against loneliness even as we use it to control the intensity of our connections.
- p. 16 ...when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections.
- p. 16 Life in a media bubble has come to seem natural.
- p. 17 Overwhelmed by the volume and velocity of our lives, we turn to technology to help us fine time. But technology makes us busier than ever and ever more in search of retreat.
- p. 17 Technology reshapes the landscape of our emotional lives, but is it offering us the lives we want to lead?
- p. 17 It is too late to leave the future to the futurists.
- p. 18 In the company of the robotic, people are alone, yet feel connected: *in solitude, new intimacies*.
- p. 19 We are increasingly connected to each other but oddly more alone: *in intimacy, new solitudes*.
- p. 19 What are we willing to give up when we turn to robots rather than humans?
- p. 21 **Part One: The Robotic Moment – In Solitude, New Intimacies**
- p. 23 **Nearest Neighbors**
- p. 24 ...our willingness to engage with the inanimate does not depend on being deceived but on wanting to fill in the blanks.
- p. 26 After all, our online lives are all about performance.
- p. 30 ...understanding how people think of them (robots) provides a view into how we think about ourselves.
- p. 31 When a digital “creature” asks children for nurturing or teaching, it seems alive enough to care for, just as caring for it makes it seem more alive.
- p. 33 Things that never could go together – a program and pity for a weary body – now do go together.

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- p. 34 These online places of meaning do more than give children a way to express their feelings. They sanction the idea that it is appropriate to mourn the digital – indeed that there is something “there” to mourn.
- p. 35 **Alive Enough**
- p. 38 ...as children interact with sociable robots like Furbies, they move beyond a psychology of projection to a new psychology of engagement.
- p. 39 For decades computers have asked us to think with them; these days, computers and robots, deemed sociable, affective, and relational, ask us to feel for and with them.
- p. 46 We are at the point of seeing digital objects as both creations and machines.
- p. 49 The romantic reaction of the 1980s and 1990s put a premium on what only people can contribute to each other: the understanding that grows out of shared human experience.
- p. 51 ...from (1983 to 2000), human fallibility has gone from being an endearment to a liability.
- p. 53 **True Companions**
- p. 54 Even now, as we contemplate “creations” with artificial feelings and intelligence, we come to reflect differently on our own.
- p. 55 ...talking with the AIBO to “get thoughts out” suggests using technology to know oneself better. But it also suggests a fantasy in which we cheapen the notion of companionship to a baseline of “interacting with something.” We reduce relationship and come to see this reduction as the norm.
- p. 55 The first thing missing if you take a robot as a companion is *alterity*, the ability to see the world through the eyes of another. Without alterity, there can be no empathy.
- p. 56 ...whether child or adult, we are vulnerable to simplicities that may diminish us.
- p. 60 With robot pets, children can give enough to feel attached, but then they can tur away. They are learning a way of feeling connected in which they have permission to think only of themselves.
- p. 61 Whether we have permission to hurt or kill an object influences how we think about its life.
- p. 63 Artificial intelligence is often described as the art and science of “getting machines to do things that would be considered intelligent if done by people.”
- p. 67 **Enchantment**
- p. 68 ...it gets children talking about family things, care and attention, how much they have and how much more they want.
- p. 70 The fifth graders think that a robot could be a babysitter if it could manage babysitter *behavior*...”Robots would always be sure that you would have fun. People have their own problems.”
- p. 70 Conversations about families are as much about their elusiveness as about their resources.
- p. 72 ...human trust can take a long time to develop, while robot trust is as simple as choosing and trusting a program.
- p. 79 Disappointed by people, she feels safest in the sanctuary of an as-if world.
- p. 79 ...Callie reminds us of our vulnerability to them (robots). More than harmless amusements, they are powerful because they invite our attachment. And such attachments change our way of being in the world.
- p. 79 Defense mechanisms are the responses we use to deal with realities too threatening to face.
- p. 83 **Complicities**
- p. 84 There I stood in the presence of a robot and I wanted it to favor me. My response was involuntary, and I am tempted to say visceral.
- p. 85 A robotic face is an enabler; it encourages us to imagine that robots can put themselves in our place and that we can put ourselves in theirs.

- p. 87 What we ask of robots shows us what we need.
- p. 90 They (other researchers) don't see lifelike behaviors as deceptions but as enablers of relationship.
- p. 90 Everything that deceives may be said to enchant. – Plato
- p. 99 Vulnerable children are not helped even when the robots are doing just fine.
- p. 101 I believe that sociable technology will always disappoint because it promises what it cannot deliver. It promises friendship but can only deliver performances. Do we really want to be in the business of manufacturing friends that will never be friends?
- p. 101 A machine taken as a friend demeans what we mean by friendship.
- p. 101 It is easy to become so immersed in technology that we ignore what we know about life.
- p. 103 **Love's Labor Lost**
- p. 104 Why do we believe that the next technology we dream up will be the first to prove not only redemptive but indestructible?
- p. 105 ...having a robot around makes seniors feel they have something "important" to talk about.
- p. 105 ...what kept seniors coming to sessions with robots was the chance to spend time with my intelligent, kind, and physically appealing research assistants.
- p. 107 We ask technology to perform what used to be "love's labor": taking care of each other.
- p. 107 ...people are capable of the higher standard of care that comes with empathy. The robot is innocent of such capacity.
- p. 107 The Paro eases Tim's guilt about leaving his mother in this depressing place. Now she is no longer completely alone. But by what standard is she less alone? Will robot companions cure conscience?
- p. 107 ...if our experience with relational artifacts is based on a fundamentally deceitful exchange, can they be good for us?
- p. 108 They (the answers) depend on what we will be like, the kind of people we are becoming...
- p. 108 When children ask, "Don't we have people for these jobs?" they remind us that our allocation of resources is a social choice.
- p. 113 Their robots become useful just at the point when they became substitute humans.
- p. 113 Self-expression and self-reflection are precious.
- p. 115 A sociable robot is sent in to do a job...and once it's there, people attach.
- p. 116 The robot's special affordance is that they simulate listening, which meets a human vulnerability: people want to be heard.
- p. 121 ...performance is the currency of all social relationships and that rather than a bad thing, this is simply how things are.
- p. 122 We do not become children as we age. But because dependency can look childlike, we too often treat the elderly as though this were the case.
- p. 123 An AI expert claims that humans "as a species" have to learn to deal with "synthetic emotions", a way to describe the performances of emotion that come from objects we have made.
- p. 127 **Communion**
- p. 129 As our relationships with robots intensify, we move from wonder at what we have made to the idea that we have made something that will care for us and, beyond that, be fond of us.
- p. 132 To be sold on partnership with robots, people need to feel more than comfortable with them.
- p. 135 ...the boundaries between people and things are shifting. What of these boundaries is worth maintaining?

- p. 137 ...the presence of a face initiates the human ethical compact. The face communicates, “Thou shalt not kill me.”
- p. 142 We will animate our robots with what we have poured into our phones: the story of our lives.
- p. 145 The teller is not from the neighborhood. He doesn’t know you or care. There’s no point in talking to him because he has become a robot. – discussion about bank teller as an exercise in nostalgia.
- p. 146 ...when we make a job rote, we are more open to having machines do it. But even when people do it, they *and the people they serve* feel like machines.
- p. 149 **Networked: In Intimacy, New Solitudes**
- p. 151 **Always On**
- p. 152 The multiplicity of worlds before them (the embryo) set them apart: they could be with you, but they were always somewhere else as well.
- p. 152 Beyond all of this, connectivity offers new possibilities for experimenting with identity and, particularly in adolescence, the sense of a free space, what Erik Erikson called the *moratorium*.
- p. 153 When part of your life is lived in virtual places, a vexed relationship develops between what is true and what is “true here,” true in simulation.
- p. 153 Virtual places offer connection with uncertain claims to commitment.
- p. 154 Always on and (now) always with us, we tend the Net, and the Net teaches us to need it.
- p. 154 ...moments of more may leave us with lives of less.
- p. 154 Networked, we are together, but so lessened are our expectations of each other that we can feel utterly alone.
- p. 154 There is the risk that we come to see others as objects to be accessed – and only for the parts we find useful, comforting, or amusing.
- p. 155 These days, being connected depends not on our distance from each other but from available communications technology. Most of the time, we carry that technology with us.
- p. 155 What is a place if those who are physically present have their attention on the absent?
- p. 157 Today, our machine dream is to be never alone but always in control.
- p. 160 We have moved from multitasking to multi-living.
- p. 161 Mobile technology has made each of us “pausable”.
- p. 162 We are too quick to celebrate the continual presence of a technology that knows no respect for traditional and helpful lines in the sand.
- p. 163 When media are always there, waiting to be wanted, people lose a sense of choosing to communicate.
- p. 163 When the Blackberry movie of one’s life becomes one’s life, there is a problem: the Blackberry version is the unedited version of one’s life.
- p. 164 Our networked devices encourage a new notion of time because they promise that one can layer more activities onto it.
- p. 165 On vacation, one vacates a place, not a set of responsibilities.
- p. 166 (Diane) worries that she does not have the time to take her time on the things that matter. And it is hard to maintain a sense of what matters in the din of constant communication.
- P 169 In online intimacies, we hope for compassion but often get the cruelty of strangers.
- p. 169 It is the young who begin to speak about problems that, to their eyes, their elders have given up on.
- p. 171 **Growing Up Tethered**
- p. 171 These young people live in a state of waiting for connection.

- p. 172 Today's adolescents have no less need than those of previous generations to learn empathetic skills, to think about their values and identity, and to manage and express feelings. They need time to discover themselves, time to think. But technology, put in the service of always-on communication and telegraphic speed and brevity, has changed the rules of engagement with all of this.
- p. 172 Traditionally, the development of intimacy required privacy. Intimacy without privacy reinvents what intimacy means.
- p. 173 If they were frightened, they had to experience those feelings. The cellphone buffers this moment.
- p. 174 Adolescent autonomy is not just about separation from parents. Adolescents also need to separate from each other.
- p. 176 What is not being cultivated here is the ability to be alone and reflect on one's emotions in private.
- p. 178 For young people in all of these circumstances, computers and mobile devices offer communities when families are absent.
- p. 183 ...what I learned in high school was profiles, profiles, profiles, how to make a me.
- p. 185 Social media ask us to represent ourselves in simplified ways.
- p. 187 **No Need to Call**
- p. 187 The advantage of screen communication is that it is a place to reflect, retype, and edit.
- p. 188 ...(adults) avoid voice communication outside of a small circle because it demands their full attention when they don't want to give it.
- p. 189 They subscribe to a new etiquette, claiming the need for efficiency in a realm where efficiency is costly.
- p. 192 Change your avatar, change your world.
- p. 193 Real life provides little space for consequence-free identity play...
- p. 194 We feel "ourselves" if we can move easily among our many aspects of self.
- p. 196 ...she had said it on the internet, its own peculiar echo chamber.
- p. 198 If you send feelings or appreciation digitally, you protect yourself from a cool reception. One of the emotional affordances of digital communication is that one can always hide behind deliberated nonchalance.
- p. 198 ...one of the pleasures of digital communication is that it does not need a message. It can be there to trigger a feeling rather than transmit a thought.
- p. 201 Both parties are willing to reduce their interchange to a transaction that scheduling software could perform.
- p. 201 If you feel that you're always on call, you start to hide from the rigors of things that unfold in real time.
- p. 202 Now, we have all taken up the burden, reframed as an asset – or as just the way it is.
- p. 203 In solitude we don't reject the world but have the space to think our own thoughts. But if your phone is always with you, seeking solitude can look suspiciously like hiding.
- p. 204 The barrier to making a call is so high that even when people have something important to share, they hold back.
- p. 206 These young women prefer to deal with strong feelings from the safe haven of the Net. It gives them an alternative to processing emotions in real time.
- p. 206 We did not set out to avoid the voice but end up denying ourselves its pleasures. For the voice can only be experienced in real time, and both of us are so busy that we don't feel we have it to spare.
- p. 207 With mobile connectivity (think text/Twitter), we can communicate our lives pretty much at the rate we live them.
- p. 207 We work so hard to give expressive voice to our robots but are content not to use our own.
- p. 209 In simulation culture we become cyborg, and it can be hard to return to anything less.

p. 211 **Reduction and Betrayal**

p. 212 When we perform a life through our avatars, we express our hopes, strengths, and vulnerabilities.

p. 214 In the virtual, he cultivates skills he wants to use in the real.

p. 215 Clever people who don't feel a commitment to the community are in a position to do real damage.

p. 219 Adam gets little sleep, but he does not consider cutting back on his games. They are essential to his self-esteem, for it is inside these worlds that he feels most relaxed and happy.

p. 222 Adam has not forgotten that the bots are programs, but in the game he sees them as programs and as people.

p. 222 ...how we look and act in the virtual affects our behavior in the real.

p. 224 This is the sweet spot of simulation: the exhilaration of creativity without its pressures, the excitement of explanation without its risks.

p. 225 Online, it becomes more difficult to tell which messages come from programs because we have taught ourselves to sound like them.

p. 226 ...Americans face too many choices, but they are not real choices. They provide the illusion of choice – just enough to give a sense of overload, but not enough to enable a purposeful life.

p. 228 Once we feel humane because we are good friends to bots, perhaps it is not so surprising that we confide in online strangers, even about the most personal matters.

p. 229 **True Confessions**

p. 230 Relationships we complain about nevertheless keep us connected to life.

p. 231 ...on all of the (online confession sites), a confession that once might have been made within the bounds of friendship, family, or church now takes place with no bounds or bonds at all.

p. 231 Confessing to a website and talking to a robot deemed “therapeutic” both emphasize getting something “out”.

p. 231 Venting feelings comes to feel like sharing them.

p. 233 She goes online to feel better, not to make things right...She is ready to confess, not apologize.

p. 234 Technology makes it easy to blur the line between confession and apology, easy to lose sight of what an apology is...

p. 234 When we live a large part of our personal lives online, these complex empathetic transactions become more elusive. We get used to getting less.

p. 235 ...a human vulnerability: if you share something intimate with a stranger, you invest in that person's opinion. Anonymity does not protect us from emotional investment.

p. 237 Online confessionals...reassure users with the promise that they do not need to talk to someone in person – expression alone is helpful.

p. 237 We have not used our emotional resources to build sustaining relationships that might help. We cannot blame technology for this state of affairs. It is people who are disappointing each other. Technology merely enables us to create a mythology in which this does not matter.

p. 240 Often the first step toward doing something different is developing the capacity to not act, to stay still and reflect.

p. 241 **Anxiety**

p. 242 Anxiety is part of the new connectivity.

p. 242 Now we know that multitasking degrades performance on everything we try to accomplish. We will surely continue to multitask, deciding to trade optimum performance for the economics of doing many things at once.

p. 243 Technology helps us manage life stresses but generates anxieties of its own.

p. 247 The trauma of 9/11 is part of the story of connectivity culture.

- p. 247 This is a new non-negotiable: to feel safe you have to be connected.
- p. 249 Feeling secure as an object of choice (because the other is able to imagine you as the perfect embodiment of his or her desire) is one of the deep pleasures of Internet life.
- p. 250 ...she has become part of the tribe by behaving like its members.
- p. 252 ...(online) stalking is a transgression that does not transgress...stalking may not be breaking any rules, but it has given young people a way to invade each other's privacy that can make them feel like spies and pornographers.
- p. 255 Some teenagers say that their privacy concerns are not as bad as they might seem because, in the future, everyone...will have an accessible Internet past with significant indiscretions.
- p. 258 People try to force themselves to mesh their behavior with what they know rather than how they feel. But when people want to forget that they do not have privacy on the internet, the medium colludes.
- p. 260 The experience of being at one's computer or cell phone feels so private that we easily forget our true circumstance: with every connection we leave an electronic trace.
- p. 260 Over time (and I say this with much anxiety), living with an electronic shadow begins to feel so natural that the shadow seems to disappear – that is, until a moment of crisis.
- p. 262 ...the task of the modern state is to reduce its need for actual surveillance by crafting a citizenry that will watch itself.
- p. 263 Some are even gratified by a certain public exposure; it feels like validating, not violation. Being seen means that they are not insignificant or alone.
- p. 263 ...my civics lessons at the mailbox linked privacy and civil liberties. I think of how different things are today for children who learn to live with the idea that their email and messages are shareable and unprotected.
- p. 265 **The Nostalgia of the Young**
- p. 265 We have seen them (young people) feeling more alive when connected, then disoriented and alone when they leave their screens.
- p. 266 Listening to what young people miss may teach us what they need. They need attention.
- p. 266 Longed for here is the pleasure of full attention, coveted and rare.
- p. 267 From the youngest ages, these teenagers have associated technology with shared attention.
- p. 267 Today, children contend with parents who are physically alone, tantalizing so, but mentally elsewhere.
- p. 270 These days I hear teenagers measuring degrees of caring by type of communication.
- p. 273 ...online life presents a new kind of "craziness."
- p. 274 We cannot respect each other if we "stumble over one another."
- p. 275 Anxiety about Internet friendships makes people cherish the other kind.
- p. 276 For a child, one cost of constant connectivity is that adults lose the ability to act as a buffer against the world.
- p. 276 Thoreau complained that people are too quick to share an opinion.
- p. 277 A sacred space is not a place to hide out. It is a place where we recognize ourselves and our commitments.
- p. 277 Immersed in simulation, where do we live, and what do we live for?
- p. 279 **Necessary Conversations**
- p. 280 Online, we easily find "company" but are exhausted by the pressures of performance.
- p. 280 Overwhelmed by the pace that technology makes possible, we think about how new, more efficient technologies might help dig us out.
- p. 280 The ties we form through the internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are the ties that preoccupy.
- p. 281 We go online because we are busy but end up spending more time with technology and less with each other.

- p. 282 ...ELIZA's popularity revealed more than people's willingness to talk to machines; it revealed their reluctance to talk to other people.
- p. 283 When technology is a symptom, it disconnects us from our real struggles.
- p. 283 A parallel with technology is clear; we transgress not because we try to build the new but because we don't allow ourselves to consider what it disrupts or diminishes. We are not in trouble because of invention but because we think it will solve everything.
- p. 285 ...if we pay attention to the real consequences of what we think we want, we may discover what we really want.
- p. 287 Simulation is often justified as practice for real-life skills – to become a better pilot, sailor, or race-car driver. But when it comes to human relations, simulation gets us into trouble.
- p. 290 The “robots-or-no-one” quandary takes social and political choice out of the picture when it belongs at the center of the picture.
- p. 292 When we lose the “burden” of care, we begin to give up on our compact that human beings will care for other human beings.
- p. 293 The authors of this study associate students' lack of empathy with the availability of online games and social networking. An online connection can be deeply felt, but you only need to deal with the part of the person you see in your game world or social network.
- p. 294 Because we grew up with the Net, we assume that the Net is grown-up.
- p. 294 We don't need to reject or disparage technology. We need to put it in its place.
- p. 295 If convenience and control continue to be our priorities, we shall be tempted by sociable robots, where, like gamblers at their slot machines, we are promised excitement programmed in, just enough to keep us in the game.
- p. 296 I believe we have reached a point of inflection, where we can see the costs and start to take action.
- p. 296 We deserve better. When we remind ourselves that it is we who decide how to keep technology busy, we shall have better.
- p. 297 **The Letter**
- p. 300 If technology remembers for us, will we remember less?