

# Connected and alone essay

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Connected and alone We have all experienced being alone and feeling as though there is no one there for us, even though we may be surrounded by many people. It can be an uncomfortable feeling. We are social beings. From the moment we are born we seek connection with other people. We listen for a voice, feel for a touch and try to make eye contact in order to experience this connection.

From infancy through childhood to adolescence we depend on our connection with our caregivers to help us understand and make sense of ourselves and our world. To feel their love through their touch, to have them sit and listen to us, and to see and hear their response is what prepares us to live in a related way in the larger world. Our connection with others is why we thrive as a species. We are designed for relationship, for emotional connection; it's what sets us apart from other species.

In our present world we have placed great importance on visibility and connection. We need to be seen, to be heard, to be in control of our lives and never feel alone. Technology has given us mediums for doing this, from computers and the internet to cell phones. Our lives are dictated by the little devices we hold in our hands. They are our companions, devices that are always with us and which we depend on to keep us connected. MIT professor and psychologist Sherry Turkle states that these devices have come to be what she calls a “phantom limb” wherein we always feel they are going off, even when they are not on us.

As Turkle explains, “It is as though we use them as spare parts to support our increasingly fragile selves,” and we have subjected ourselves to them.

We purposely avoid real human-to-human contact because it is much more convenient to just text or email; social media allows for a greater avoidance of human contact. Facebook, MySpace and Twitter give us the feeling of being connected without needing to be physically present. Turtle echoes her concern by stating that “technology provides the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship” (Turtle).

Human-to-human contact can be messy and can reveal things about us that we may not be happy with, but this is the very way we learn from one another about ourselves. Turtle says, “We use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves.” Although we have conversations through email, text and social media in order to connect with other people, they cannot substitute for face-to-face conversation. Email, text and social media allow us to edit, cut out, and retouch the things we wish not to reveal; they give us the idea of being in control. Turtle explains that this is what we have come to value most, “control over where we focus our attention” (Turtle). As human beings we have an innate desire to be in control of our lives, from our thoughts and actions to our physical bodies; we try to be in control of the outcome. We want to customize our lives in ways we see fit. Turtle explains that technology is providing the forum to make us believe that this is possible.

She calls this the Goldbricks effect, “not too close, not too far, just right” (Turtle). Technology and social media makes tangible the idea of having everything just right; it allows us to feel that we can control how far or close we keep people, and even keeps us from having to know who we truly are.

We can connect and disconnect when we wish; “ We have gotten used to the idea of being in a tribe of one loyal to our own party’ (Turtle). In our attempt to be in control, however, we forget that we are vulnerable creatures; it is our nature to be so.

To have fears, to not always have things in control, to allow ourselves to be intimate and to be alone is all part of what makes us human. Technology has come to comfort our fears, and it presents us with the illusions that we can be in control. We try to keep people at bay because having them get too close makes us vulnerable to being hurt or ending up alone, “ So we live exclusively in relation to others, and what disappears from our lives is solitude” (Directories).

It is in moments of solitude that we find our true self. The fear of being alone has been what technology has removed from our consciousness. Our new devices have turned aloneness into a problem that can be solved” (Turtle). This changes the way we think about ourselves and the world around us. We have to be constantly occupied, to know the latest tweet, the latest post and to never feel alone.

Yet being alone with our thoughts, alone with ourselves is what has enriched our lives and given richness to our thoughts. It used to be that knowledge was limited to the classroom and to books in our libraries, but now information is accessible in the palm of our hands. With technology we are given the illusion of being in control of what we learn, hear, see and experience, but we are drowning in a pool of information and connectivity, seeking to be saved but finding no life vest. Technology presents a world of

easy access to information about anything. It is reshaping the way we think because we focus only on what is of value and of immediate relevance to our lives, again, desiring to be in control.

Writer Nicholas Carr writes about this in his book “ The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to our Brains”. He states that we are living in a world where information is flowing to us in such a huge stream that it is difficult for us to process it all. Human history has always processed information in a linear way that enables a person to process information calmly and to stay focused, with minimal distraction. He goes on to explain how this has allowed people to dive into deep thought and to cultivate ideas about what they read because they can narrow in their focus on one thing.

He believes that “ the net has taken away our old linear thought process” (Carr) and has rewired the way we think. Media aren’t just channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought” (Carr). The internet is said to be a grand pool of information that search engine websites such as Google have made conveniently accessible. This allows for great development, as we are now able to share ideas, learn different perspectives, and grow from one another through a screen. In his book he explains how our brains are adaptable, not only in our childhood but throughout our adult lives. Those parts of our brain that we use more get strengthened while those parts that we don’t use get weaker.

The internet is training us to be distracted readers, multi-takers and absorbers of as much information as possible. These skills are becoming

strengthened while concentrated thought, critical thinking, and creative thinking are weakened. Carr's concern is that "when the load (cognitive) exceeds our mind's ability to process and store it, we're unable to retain the information or draw connections with other memories" (Carr). The net is also training us to become superficial thinkers and skim readers. We are able to be in multiple sites, all presenting information that we don't feel a need to spend as much time on because we believe we can get enough information to know about the topic by just skimming multiple sites. We go from website to website skimming through them and this, as Carr explains, is extraneous to the process of reading "because it disrupts concentration [and] such activity weakens comprehension" (Carr). As a result, we spend too little time with our thoughts and thinking critically about one thing; we only read what is on the surface.

This steals from the richness of thought. Carr explains that when we are able to have a connection between information and experience it gives richness to our thought. Spending time with our thoughts also facilitates the transferring of information from short term to long term memory, and the more we remember, the richer our thoughts. The net is short circuiting all these lines of thought. Mental break varying degrees is the very common result of uprooting and inundation with new information and endless new patterns of information" (Bass).

The net is making live in a society that is in a "perpetual state of distraction" (Carr). We accept this interruption, however, "because each interruption—email, tweet, instant message or news headline—brings us a valuable piece of

information. ” To turn off these links risk feeling out of touch or even “ socially isolated”. The internet and social media thus created an ideal world in which we will never have to be alone, and we will never have to feel disconnected. So we willingly give in to these interruptions and distractions. Technology, as a tool, has enabled us to advance in ways we could not have imagined.

It has given us the ability to connect long distance with loved ones, to instant communication and easy access to information. In all of its greatness, however, technology has become something on which we depend. Where we once shut it off and forget about it, technology has become something that is all on and always with us. We have subjected our entire lives to it and see it as the panacea for all our problems. The very thing that we sought from the moment we were born, human-to-human contact, is the thing we are now in jeopardy of losing. We instead feel the desperate need to maintain a constant connectedness but at distance, seeking to be seen and heard but in amounts we can control. The net is also training us to become superficial thinkers and skim readers. We are able to be in multiple sites, all presenting information that we don't feel a need to spend as much time on because we believe we can get enough information to know skimming through them and this, as Carr explains, is extraneous to the process of comprehension” (Carr).

As a result, we spend too little time with our thoughts and thinking critically about one thing; we only read what is on the surface. This steals injection between information and experience it gives richness to our thoughts. Spending time with our thoughts also facilitates the transferring of

information from thoughts. The net is short circuiting all these lines of thought. “ Mental breakdown of varying degrees is the very common result of uprooting and inundation with new information and endless new patterns of information” (Bass).

The net is making us interruption, however, “ because each interruption-? email, tweet, instant message, IRS headline- brings us a valuable piece of information. ” To turn off these links is to risk feeling out of touch or even “ socially isolated”. The internet and social media has never have to feel disconnected.