

Alive Enough? Reflecting on Our Technology with Sherry Turkle by On Being

Krista Tippett, host: Sherry Turkle founded and directs the intriguingly titled MIT Initiative on Technology and Self. She made waves with her book *Alone Together*; it was widely reviewed as a call to "unplug" our digital gadgets. But as I've read her and listened to her speak, I hear Sherry Turkle saying something more thought-provoking: that we can lead examined lives with our technology. That each of us, in our everyday interactions, can choose between letting technology shape us and shaping it towards human purposes, even towards honoring what we hold dear. Engaging Sherry Turkle on this is full of usable ideas — from how to declare email bankruptcy to teaching our children the rewards of solitude — a core human experience more elusive for their generation. And in technology as in life, it seems, discontent can be the beginning of wisdom.

Ms. Sherry Turkle: I'm optimistic because the people who I interviewed sense that there's something amiss. There are a lot of people out there who — they love their phones, they love their music, they love listening to their books on their MP3 players, as do I. But there's something about this that has just tipped out of balance and they want to get it right.

Ms. Tippett: I'm utterly intrigued just by the way you describe your passion, your interest and concern, that you study the subjective side of our encounters with technologies, that I'm concerned with the human meaning of the objects of our lives. And just as we start, I wanted to ask you a kind of question I ask everyone, which is, you know, was there a spiritual background to your childhood? And what I wonder as I read those kinds of statements that you make about what interests you, you know, was there a spiritual background to your childhood that seeded this kind of concern about human meaning?

Ms. Turkle: Well, I think in my case the question didn't come from a spiritual quest; it came from a deeply personal psychological quest. My father — my biological father disappeared from my life when I was around two. My mother, my grandparents, my mother's sister, my aunt, didn't want me to know anything about him. And so, of course, I only wanted to know things about him and would search through, you know, every family — we lived in very close quarters in an apartment in Brooklyn, you know, where five adults were squeezed into a one-bedroom apartment.

But there were these places: there was a closet that had old books and trinkets and there was a junk drawer. There were just these places where the memories were kept. I would scour them for traces of him and finally I found one. I found a photograph of him in which someone in anger had rubbed out his face, but I found all kinds of information from that photograph, you know, that he wore tweed pants, where he was standing, what his shoes — you know, his lace-up shoes looked like. And I just think that some place in that quest of a child, the notion of looking for objects to fill in human meaning became very close to

my heart in a very personal way.

You know, obviously, as I became a sociologist, you know, there's a fancy word for studying this; it's called bricolage. It's the science of studying meanings and the interplay of objects, and I realized that that's kind of what I'd been doing all the time. A little bit like Molière's, you know, Monsieur Jourdain who'd been speaking prose all his life without knowing it, I'd been a bricoleur all my life without knowing it.

Ms. Tippett: So is this kind of a lifelong question of yours about where memories are kept and how we make sense of the objects and how objects, I think you've said this, lead us to ourselves and lead our way through a world? Is part of what you're doing trying to figure out, you know, our technological devices, new objects? I mean, what do they take away? How do they lend themselves to this kind of bricolage?

Ms. Turkle: Oh, absolutely. They are objects. It remains to be seen the degree to which we will let them take away because they also give. I mean, technological objects have become almost phantom limbs. They are so much part of us.

Ms. Tippett: Right. Right.

Ms. Turkle: I mean, seriously, there's a phenomenon where people feel their phones ringing and they're not. It's called the phantom ring. Teenagers report that even when they put their cell phones in their lockers, you know, as schools require them to do, they know when their phones are ringing.

Ms. Tippett: Oh, my gosh.

Ms. Turkle: So I came up with the notion of the phantom limb [laugh]. We're very close to our phones.

Ms. Tippett: So, you know, it's absolutely fascinating to read that when you started at MIT, you say you met the idea that part of your job would be to think of ways to keep technology busy.

Ms. Turkle: Yes.

Ms. Tippett: That alone tells us how little we understood in the beginning and how radically, not just our lives, but our imaginations about this stuff have changed.

Ms. Turkle: Yeah, I mean, there was a meeting that was held for the computer science faculty and I was already studying people and computers, so I was invited.

Ms. Tippett: Was this the early '80s when we're talking?

Ms. Turkle: This was the late '70s, '78. I think the meeting might have been '78 or perhaps the beginning of '79. The greatest computer scientists in the world were invited to — the great names: Licklider, Fano, Pappert, Dertouzos — legendary figures to try to come up with things regular people — they called them regular people — might want to do, and they called them home computers. The term personal computers really hadn't yet entered the lexicon.

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Ms. Turkle: What I remember when I looked at my notes for that meeting was somebody said a calendar; people put their calendars on computers and people said that's crazy because really a little flip book is fabulous for that. You see it all; you flip back and forth; you erase. Why do you want that on a computer? Somebody said, well, names and addresses. I remember there was a similar reaction — and these were very sophisticated people that really, unless you had a database, really paper was good.

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Ms. Turkle: It raises the question of was he right. But you know, I love this story because — and then everybody agreed that people would want to play games.

Ms. Tippett: OK.

Ms. Turkle: So there would be games. But I love this story because I like to say that it turned out that, when we were connected to each other on the network, you know, it wasn't that we would need to worry about how we would keep the computers busy. They keep us busy because we're their killer app, we're their killer app. We want to be tweeting and texting and Facebooking and being connected to each other all the time. We can't get enough of using them to be with each other. But it also shows how recently we really didn't know what this technology was for and it's humbling because, um, you know, really my favorite line in *Alone Together*, if an author is allowed to have a favorite line is ...

Ms. Tippett: You are here.

Ms. Turkle: I'm allowed. Really, my favorite line is, "Just because we grew up with the Internet, we think that the Internet is all grown up." That is that we think, that we have a mature Internet in front of us and we don't. We don't have a mature Internet in front of us. We're in the baby stages, and that's good because that means we can make it right.

Ms. Tippett: We are at the beginning of a kind of revolution, something that is changing us in ways that are unfolding in real time. I mean, we often feel like it's just hard to keep up, and it is hard to keep up. I wonder if we in the 21st century are better equipped to be at a moment like this where we can actually — where we also somehow have the capacity and the intelligence — we have this capacity, whether we use it or not — to stop and say, "All right, let's make this work for human beings." I mean, that's what you're proposing.

Ms. Turkle: That's what I'm proposing, and I get very discouraged whenever I see any signs — and I've got to say I see many signs — that we don't seem to have a taste for stopping and asking, well, how can we make this work for us? So I'll give you an example of, you know, kind of my most recent moment of when I get nervous. Mark Zuckerberg makes a statement that "privacy is no longer relevant as an element in social discourse." He says that. It gets widely reported, not commented on, as though this is like a serious pronouncement. I mean, it's very serious when Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, says that.

Ms. Tippett: An announcement that one doesn't have to question, I guess.

Ms. Turkle: Right. Doesn't question. You know, I tweet very little [laugh], but this

caused me to tweet. I said very simply, you know, maybe privacy isn't convenient for the social network, but maybe we should be asking — and I did get in under 140 characters — you know, what is intimacy without privacy, what is democracy without privacy?

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Ms. Turkle: Democracy and privacy are very linked together in the modern world. So I get concerned when we don't seem to be stepping up to it.

Ms. Tippett: Mm-hmm. And another one of these examples that's even more existential is your sense of how technology is changing our sense of aliveness. I mean, you've often told this story, and I wonder if you'd tell it again, of taking your daughter to the Darwin exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History. I remember that exhibit. It seems to be a pivotal story for you.

Ms. Turkle: Well, it is a pivotal story. It's a pivotal story because this is an example of the prepared mind finds it a pivotal story. I've been studying children and how they see the computer as alive since the late 1970s so ...

Ms. Tippett: And you also have worked with robotic pets and ...

Ms. Turkle: Yes. I mean, I have — I have exposed children — so I'm very interested in the question of — you know, when Piaget — the great — the great psychologist Piaget was interested in the question of how do children decide what's alive and not alive. And he — in the world of traditional objects where you had bicycles and stones and dolls, he interviewed children about what was alive and not alive. Ultimately, they decided that things that could move, physically move without an outside push or pull, were alive.

So that meant that, for example, they would incorrectly classify clouds as alive until they could figure out that the wind pushed the clouds. When the computer came, I studied a radical shift in how children went about solving that problem because they no longer cared — and this was dramatic — they no longer cared about whether or not something was pushed in terms of its movement. They cared about how this thing thought, what its psychology was, whether its psychology came from the inside, and that was stunning. That was stunning to watch.

By the time of the Darwin exhibit in 2006, I think, my daughter saw a Galápagos turtle, which had been brought up from the islands. This was the life that Darwin saw. She looks at this turtle — and she's been exposed to robots, you know, ever since she's been a baby, the Tamagotchis, the Furbies, the AIBOs. She looks at me and she says, because this turtle is sleeping, she says, "For what this turtle is doing, they could have just had a robot."

It struck me that, from her point of view, the fact that it was alive mattered not at all. And I begin to interview — and actually went back to the museum several times and begin to interview kids and parents about the question of the turtles because the kids began to use a locution phrase to talk about the turtles, and the phrase they used was "a robot would have been alive enough," which was a phrase that by that time I'd been at this study over 20 years and I'd never heard that.

That's when I started talking about a new pragmatism among this generation of young people. This is no longer philosophical. Life becomes a pragmatic quality. Is this

alive enough for this purpose? And this is important because we're now talking about robots that will serve as companions to the elderly, robots that will serve as companions to children as kind of nanny-bots. This is the question being asked of them. Are they alive enough for this purpose? And I, of course, think this is the wrong question in many cases and that moment at the museum helped me frame, you know, helped me frame my thinking.

Ms. Tippett: So, you know, I was struck when I was reading one of your accounts of this, of what a parent said, so the kids would say, "Did it have to be alive for this?" and a father I remember you saying, "It's real. That's the whole point." And that point was lost on the child. What question do you wish the children were asking or how do you wish they were framing that observation?

Ms. Turkle: Well, I don't think it's a question of a wish. I think it's really not for us to be wishing, but to be noting. My way of approaching this is to begin to say, "What are the things these children start to miss if they don't think it's important that things be alive?"

Ms. Tippett: And so what do you think of? What do they start to miss?

Ms. Turkle: Well, for example — for example when people just plug their earphones in. I live on the Cape during the summer, and there are these magnificent dunes that I walk on the Cape. When you walk these dunes — and I've been walking them for years, I mean, decades of going to the Cape. And recently, people have their earphones in and are listening to their music. And more recently, people have their earphones in and are walking them with their handheld devices and are texting as they walk them.

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Ms. Turkle: So you're still getting your exercise. And I'm not saying that they're not looking up to, you know, notice anything. I mean, it's not for me to judge that nobody's noticing anything. But there's something about being attentive with the life you meet along those walks and with solitude.

Ms. Tippett: Right. So you're losing the experience of the dunes as a medium for self-realization, for example. I mean, I think that image of the dunes — I think that this idea of solitude is so central and so powerful in your writing, and we don't think about this very often. You know, this basic quality of human health and wholeness that comes with being able to feel at peace in your own company, right, as somebody said?

Ms. Turkle: Yeah. There's a wonderful phrase. In psychology, it says, "If you don't teach your children to be alone, they'll only always know how to be lonely." It's not just your children. I mean, if you don't know ...

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Ms. Turkle: ... how to be alone, you'll only always know how to be lonely. If you're always reaching for the device, the cell, the Facebook, the sharing, um, you lose that. I'm very concerned about this.

Ms. Tippett: Mm-hmm. The other thing that I'm aware of with my children — so I'll say I have a 12-year-old son and a 17-year-old daughter, so I'm in the middle of this. You know, if you think about kind of basic spiritual principles, I mean,

technology is the ultimate anti "being in the present moment" [laugh] temptation. I mean, I have this experience with my kids, and they're not overly — they're not wildly involved with their technology, I think, compared to some other kids. But I'll say to my daughter when we're driving in the car — we used to be just be driving in the car and talking, right, even just a couple of years ago before everybody had phones — I'll just say, "I want you to be with me." And she thinks she is, but she doesn't even realize that she's not. And it's true of a lot of experiences, that they're not — as you say, they're not — it's the same thing, walking in the dunes.

Ms. Turkle: Oh, I have a 19-year-old daughter. A very wise, wonderful friend, Jill Ker Conway, who is a friend and mentor of mine ...

Ms. Tippett: And the former president of Smith.

Ms. Turkle: Former president of Smith, a great writer, a great memoirist, said to me once, apropos of raising a daughter, [laugh] she said, "A child has to live in her generation."

Ms. Tippett: Yeah.

Ms. Turkle: And I've tried to use these wise words from Jill Ker Conway to get me through, you know, moments of doubt. So I kind of know that really it's not my place, you know, to be reminding Rebecca about my needs because, you know, it's natural for her to text her friends that she's on her way home, right?

Ms. Tippett: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Turkle: I mean — but there is a loss, there is a loss, because I remember the conversations that we used to have.

Ms. Tippett: In the car?

Ms. Turkle: In the car.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, so I'm with you on that and yet I also think it's like solitude. I mean, I shouldn't — it would be crazy for me to impose some "no cell phones in the car" rule, right?

Ms. Turkle: Absolutely.

Ms. Tippett: I mean, I think I'm trying to ban them from the dinner table.

Ms. Turkle: That's the Jill Ker Conway dilemma, although I do think the dinner table is different.

Ms. Tippett: I do too, I do too.

Ms. Turkle: I do believe in this notion of sacred spaces.

Ms. Tippett: But it's a struggle.

Ms. Turkle: It is a struggle, but I believe that there are some places that, in the car, you know, it's reasonable to say, "Hey, I'm going back to my friends. I want to tell

them I'm coming." You know, every place you are with your children, you can't say is a sacred space [laugh]. That doesn't fly. But I think that, for families as they grow up, I do feel strongly about this because really this dinner table thing has been such a theme in my research, such a theme as teenagers look back on their lives and what they miss. It's teenagers who say, "My parents text at the dinner table."

Ms. Tippett: Right [laugh]. Right.

Ms. Turkle: There's a story in my book: This young man has a mother who is a gourmet cook. So her pleasure is in making these long, long, many-course meals and that's how she shows her love for her family. And she's married to a kind of master of the universe, kind of Wall Street-type guy, and he's on his BlackBerry all through dinner. And their son starts to try to negotiate with the mother: Could she prepare shorter meals so that then maybe the father would put away the BlackBerry? But he's not going to do it if it's a four-course meal. But maybe he would do it if it was basically just soup and salad, or maybe he would do it if it was just salad and a grilled steak. You know, you see a teenager trying to negotiate some way to get this BlackBerry out of the dinner table, and it's touching.

Ms. Tippett: Are you finding ways to live more deliberately with technology — to shape it to honor what really matters? Share that with us and other listeners at onbeing.org. There you can also, as always, listen again or find links to download this program as well as my unedited interview with Sherry Turkle. For example, she told me much more about her work with sociable robots — which she says are on the cusp of reframing our sense of responsibility to other human beings. Again, that's all at onbeing.org.

Coming up, more on how creating boundaries with technology can teach and nourish our children; also, strategies for growing up in our relationship with email.

Ms. Turkle: I've known a lot of people who declare email bankruptcy. You basically say: There are 10,000 messages in my inbox; yours is one of them. If you have continuing business with me, please send me another email.

Ms. Tippett: You do use this phrase "sacred spaces." One moment of insight that I had about technology was when I was talking to Jon Kabat-Zinn. Do you know him?

Ms. Turkle: No.

Ms. Tippett: He's a scientist, but he's worked on bringing meditation into medicine. He made this really simple observation that technology goes 24/7, but we don't. I mean, biologically, physiologically, we can't. It's this boundarylessness. I mean, this gets back to your point that it's not just a matter of choices. At some point, it's a matter of survival; we have to set boundaries. When you talk about sacred spaces, what are you talking about there?

Ms. Turkle: To make our life livable, we have to have spaces where we are fully present to each other or to ourselves, where we're not competing with the roar of the Internet and, quite frankly, where the people around us are not competing with the latest news off the Facebook status update. They may not have anything new. They may just be there being in a way that needs attention. I mean, people like to put things on Facebook and certainly Twitter that are happy. I've interviewed people who say things to me as simple as, you know, I don't even like to put that my dog died.

Ms. Tippett: Really?

Ms. Turkle: Yeah, because it doesn't seem the place. It doesn't seem the place for a lot of people to share negative things. Anyway, I guess I'm saying that sacred space is for me the places in your daily life where you want to keep them for yourself and the people who you need to give full attention to. I have very simple rules. I mean, so far as I have rules for how to know you're close to one or in one or should be having one: it's dinner, it's sharing meals with your family, it's that moment at school pickup when your kid looks up and is trying to meet your eye. You know, you're looking down at your smartphone and your child is trying to meet your eye.

I have enough data from children who're going through this experience to know that it's a terrible moment for them. It's on the playground. Very bad when your child's on the jungle gym and is desperately trying to have you look at them, for them to be taking hands off the jungle gym to try to get your attention — accident time. I mean, be in the park. Be in the park with them. Spend less time there, but make it a space. Make it a moment. These are important moments.

Ms. Tippett: It's so interesting that you're talking as much as or more about adults not setting boundaries with this, right? I mean ...

Ms. Turkle: Oh, absolutely. Well, this is data-driven. I mean, this is data-driven in the sense that this is one of the surprises to me in doing the research. Is that I thought when I started this research that I was going to be telling a story of children driving their parents crazy.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah.

Ms. Turkle: And I'm not. It ended up that it was a story of parents — as much a story of parents leaving their children feeling lonely and alone and modeling the very behavior that then they came to find irritating in their children.

Ms. Tippett: Yes, right. I mean, how can we — we talked a minute ago about somehow carving out in your child's life an experience of solitude so that they know how to be alone, and this idea of being present, but if we ourselves are not modeling those possibilities.

Ms. Turkle: Absolutely. I mean, I think the greatest gift you can give your child is to walk out of the house without your phone. I mean, to pick up the newspaper, to pick up the bagel, to go out for coffee. Don't take your phone. Show your child what that looks like, that you're willing to step out of the house not open for communication. In the place on the Cape I live in Provincetown, there're these beautiful mudflats that, again, are one of nature's wonders. And people now walk them with their kids and their phones, and that's a very powerful message to a child that we're walking them with our phones.

You know, I'm not like a romantic or I don't have like a crazy nostalgia for, you know, an unplugged life, you know, in cabins in the woods, not at all. I'm just saying that we have to ask ourselves really what is served by having an always-on, always-on you, open-to-anyone-who-wants-to-reach-us way of life? Because in my research, I've found that it actually cuts off conversations as much as it opens out conversations. So, for example, you can be too busy communicating to think, well, to think.

Ms. Tippett: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Turkle: You know, there's this wonderful line from Barbara Tuchman. Somebody said to this great — you know great writer and very prolific writer. Somebody said, "Well, how do you write a book?" She said, "Well, first you have to have an idea." You know it was like — like sort of step one, have an idea. I mean, you have to be able to think.

Ms. Tippett: Right, and that, again, comes back to solitude and attentiveness.

Ms. Turkle: Absolutely. You know, there's something — when I wake up in the morning — I mean, the way I've handled it is I do set aside three times a day when I'm doing my email. It's a lot of email; it's a lot of time. But I prefer it because, in the other times of my day, I'm thinking.

Ms. Tippett: You're not checking all the time.

Ms. Turkle: I'm not reactive because there are two ways of being. I mean, when you're emailing, you're reactive. It's not you. It's not your independent thoughts. It's your reactive to other peoples'; possibilities, other peoples'; plans, other peoples'; input, other peoples'; ideas. And there's just something about being completely in your own head with your own thoughts that's very valuable.

Ms. Tippett: One of the things that was actually helpful for me as I started hearing you out there talking about your book was you talked about research and the stress that comes with technology. This is something else I don't think we're self-aware about. I also think it probably varies very much from person to person, right? I have a level of anxiety with — I mean, I am actually obsessive about keeping on top of my email. I cannot bear it for my inbox to get too big and I haven't solved it. But at the same time, I am physically aware of how my stress level rises with technology. I can't do Facebook. It makes me nervous. Are there other people like me out there?

Ms. Turkle: Oh, absolutely. And, actually, your email is making you nervous and you're going to probably extreme lengths to deal with that anxiety by spending a great deal of time attending to it so that it won't make you too anxious to function, to managing it. I mean, I say I do my email three times a day. That's a lot of hours because I think we're probably quite similar. You know, I can get 600 or 700 a day. Those people — you know, I will confess to your listeners — those 700 messages, those people really don't need to write me. You know, they want to. These are just people who have access to me because I have a public email and who have something to say to me and this is how the system works now.

Ms. Tippett: They don't all need to write to you and you don't need to feel beholden.

Ms. Turkle: Guilty.

Ms. Tippett: Right, but that's a hard thing. So this is making me think. I recently had a conversation with Anthony Appiah, who I think you've quoted, a philosopher. He talked about one of the things that technology has done is it's taken away the role of the editor. I mean, he was talking about how we send our opinions out into the world now and that there used to be this editorial function which meant a pause and it meant

thinking and it meant that there wasn't so much raw emotion that things got edited.

Now, I'm thinking about what you said at the beginning that we're in the baby, we're in the infancy stages of this technology. I'm wondering if part of this move that you are advocating, of us becoming self-aware about using — shaping technology to serve human purposes, is that we hopefully gradually will become our own editors in terms of we won't necessarily write that nonessential email or answer that nonessential email. Is that part of the process we're in?

Ms. Turkle: Absolutely, absolutely. We're in between worlds now. I still treat email to me as though it were considered correspondence. And I feel as though I have a responsibility to answer my correspondence. But I think that as we become more sophisticated, we'll adopt a more humane set of rules, where we will adapt better to — well, first of all, one thing we'll do is that people won't expect instant answers. I don't know how it is for you, but if I don't respond to an email really within a few hours, people get angry at me. They'll say things like, "Don't you read your email?"

Ms. Tippett: I wonder if, as this happens, as we take a more proactive stance in shaping technology, being deliberate about it and, as you say, shaping technology to honor what we hold dear, you must see people taking different approaches to this. I'm curious about whether adults and young people will do it in different ways and if there may be some tensions we have to hold even in our different solutions to this.

Ms. Turkle: Well, I think that younger people have more options because they're not yet in the work world.

Ms. Tippett: OK.

Ms. Turkle: So young people will talk about, "I'm taking a holiday from Facebook" and go off for the summer and get out of the whole Facebook scene, where they feel a lot of pressure to maintain the profile. Because there is some very I think hilarious, I mean, I think my book is so funny, but I really know the author [laugh]. I mean, I read sections of this book that crack me up. These teenagers describing how, you know, they try to keep up their profiles, they make themselves thinner.

But then the stress of keeping up the profile just right, you know, you don't want to do this, you don't want to do that, you know, you don't want to show you care too much, but you don't want it to be too nonchalant because you don't want to be like some kind of slacker. Oh, it's just a lot of work. I'm interviewing one guy and, at some point, he's talking about all the work this is. He looks up at me and says, "I wonder how long I have to keep doing this?" It's so clear to him that ...

Ms. Tippett: There's a world-weariness.

Ms. Turkle: Yes. It's like he can't possibly imagine that is like how long, how long? So, I mean, they just get exhausted. You know, they have to do this and their homework? I mean, it's just like one more thing. And get into college? So they'll drop out of Facebook because that's just a whole other project. Adults really can't, if they have jobs, just say, "I'm unplugging," since so many of us have jobs where the plugging in is really the main way we're with each other.

Ms. Tippett: Well, you know, I did declare an email sabbatical for two months last summer.

Ms. Turkle: Really? How'd that go?

Ms. Tippet: Well, my out-of-office bounce said, "I'm taking an email sabbatical. If it's urgent, you can call this number." It went fine, you know. It went fine. I came back and it all started all over again, but the world went on.

Ms. Turkle: Well, I've known a lot of people who declare email bankruptcy where you basically say, "There are 5,000" — make up a number — "There are 10,000 ...

Ms. Tippet: In your inbox?

Ms. Turkle: Yes. "There are 10,000 messages in my inbox; yours is one of them" — a little program goes through — "and I am not going to be going through these messages. If you have continuing business with me, please send me another email. If not, I'm not going to be returning to your earlier request. I will just be considering that transaction, you know, archived."

Ms. Tippet: So I do want to talk to you about, though, again in this same infancy stage, I see interesting paradoxes emerging. We did a public forum on civil discourse after the Tucson shootings.

Ms. Turkle: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Tippet: We had this interesting experience that in the room, which we could have laid out differently, but it was about 100 people and they're all looking straight ahead and they're looking at me and it doesn't end up being a conversation.

It ended up being a presentation and a back-and-forth between me and other people, and they didn't interact with each other. Online — in this online space, there was incredible interaction going on, people sprouting ideas right and left about action steps and what they would do next. You know, truly reacting to each other and learning.

Ms. Turkle: I love that. All kinds of cross channels and back channels.

Ms. Tippet: Right.

Ms. Turkle: That's great, you know, but knowing how to do that and getting good at doing that, this is the art and science of 21st-century communication arts and sciences. It needs to be nurtured and developed, and I think that's the problem that we've had in education where, you know, you set up the ability for people to have WiFi in classrooms, you put them in big lecture halls, and they shop [laugh]. You know, I mean, was it just because we put them on WiFi that we thought they were going to be setting up exciting fora in which they would be bringing things to a higher level?

One university after another is rethinking this and, as I go around the country, you know, we talk about it, we laugh about it because everyone who's a professor today pretty much, you know, a senior faculty were there when this was set up and we remember what was on our minds and now we stand in the back of those classrooms and watch our students, you know, ordering from REI Sports and Amazon and on Facebook and on J. Crew. You know, we didn't give it enough thought, so that's what I mean.

Ms. Tippet: So that's part of the growing up.

Ms. Turkle: Just this is part of growing up. Just because we grew up with the Internet, we think the Internet is all grown up and it's not.

Ms. Tippet: You know, one of the things that your work and reading you made me think about is, in this growing-up process and this process of change, is a natural space for grieving also or what we're losing or maybe that's part of also wondering what's amiss and addressing it.

You know, when you talked about growing up and your whole world opening up because of books that you found on a bookshelf and they took you someplace that your family wouldn't have taken you or those objects you stumbled upon, then I wonder will children in the future stumble on life-changing books on somebody else's Kindle? Is part of this process also saying what are we losing and some of it not being able to get back or even wanting to get back, but just noticing the loss? I don't know.

Ms. Turkle: Well, I think that one of the things that fascinates me now is the question of legacies.

Ms. Tippet: Well, what did you say? Where are memories kept? That's a big question with all this technology.

Ms. Turkle: Well, that's a big question in my book is where are memories kept. This is of great concern to me because now today's memory closet is locked in somebody's hard drive and it's also not tactile. It's also not ...

Ms. Tippet: It can't be put in a box put in the basement.

Ms. Turkle: It can't be put in a box. Actually, this is very serious. I have my daughter's now going to be 20 and I would say I have 14 years of her life in boxes and in printed photographs, scrapbooks beautifully made, lovingly assembled. Then she started taking the pictures. They were digital. And then she got the iPhone. There was never a print again, and it just — we went into a different phase where we've got it on the computers.

Ms. Tippet: I recently started — so my kids went to Scotland with their dad; their grandmother lives there. It was a big trip and they wrote me these really hilarious and insightful emails and, for the first time, I printed out those emails and put them in boxes. I mean, it doesn't come naturally.

Ms. Turkle: Good for you.

Ms. Tippet: I thought, look, I want them to read these emails about their trip to Scotland. But you're right. If it had been a letter, it just would automatically have been filed away someplace tactile.

Ms. Turkle: Good for you. I end *Alone Together* with a story of my daughter's — she spent her gap year in Ireland. No sooner had I dropped her off than I'm already missing her [laugh]. We have a conversation on Skype and, before our conversation, I looked at my mom's letters to me when I was a freshman in college. She was dying and she didn't want me to know. The letters were so moving because she's struggling to tell me who she is and she senses that she doesn't have much time. Then I would write my mother letters — and, of course, I have those letters too — in which

I try to tell her who I am as I'm taking this next step in my life.

So here I have my daughter on Skype and we're sharing every intimate detail of her life. She's holding up her dress. We're deciding on her shoes. I mean, I could not be more involved, and I'm like telling her, "Well, wouldn't you want to maybe, you know, write me a letter?" So she says, "Well, why don't you write me a letter?" Then I sort of say, well, you know, in some ways, this book is my letter to her because in this book I talk about my concerns about what kind of legacy this generation will leave to the next, and what are the things we want to leave?

You know, what are the things that, if we don't pass them on, even with this new technology, we're going to feel we didn't do our job? And I know the ones for me. I mean, I have the ones that are important to me. I feel very strongly about privacy, a very important conversation. You know, I can't necessarily make that conversation come out the way I want it, but I want to make sure that my voice is heard in the mix. That's very important to me. And then solitude, the importance of solitude.

Ms. Tippett: And this question of where leadership lies in starting these important questions about how we shape technology to be humane and sustainable, and the possibilities of that answer are more interesting because of the nature of this technology, right? There's a possibility for everyone to be a leader on their Facebook page or as they reshape their family lives. I don't know.

Ms. Turkle: Yes.

Ms. Tippett: You have special powers from sitting at MIT to really shape this big public discussion, but it's not limited to people like you.

Ms. Turkle: No. I think that's what really makes this technology so — so powerful.

Ms. Tippett: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Turkle: Is that, I mean, look at the way it empowers citizens politically.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah.

Ms. Turkle: You know, look at what's going on in the Middle East. You know, we need to take our inspiration from that, that people can make political revolution. You know, we can make revolutions in how we want to, you know, think about questions like privacy in our own country, civil liberties in our own country, the way we want to run our family lives.

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Ms. Turkle: So I'm optimistic because the people who I interviewed were not happy about the place that we'd come to. People sense that there's something amiss. There are a lot of people out there who — they love their phones, they love their music, they love listening to their books on their MP3 players, as do I. But there's something about this that is just tipped out of balance and they want to get it right.

Ms. Tippett: Sherry Turkle is Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT. She's founder and director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self. Her books include *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from*

Technology and Less from Each Other.

Near the end of that book, Sherry Turkle quotes Thoreau writing about his two years of retreat: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately ... I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear ..." "Thoreau's quest," Sherry Turkle writes, "inspires us to ask of our life with technology: Do we live deliberately?"