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Digital Demands: The Challenges of Constant Connectivity

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHERRY TURKLE

Sherry Turkle, Director of MIT's Initiative on Technology and Self, is a scholar, researcher, and longtime observer of technology's impact on people. Her 2011 book, Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other, posits a potential downside to human reliance on digital technologies and poses the question: Is our perpetual connectedness actually making us feel more alone? The following interview is excerpted from a PBS Frontline TV/Web report "Digital Nation."

SHERRY TURKLE: What I'm seeing is a generation that says consistently, "I would rather text than make a telephone call." Why? It's less risky. I can just get the information out there. I don't have to get all involved; it's more efficient. I would rather text than see somebody face to face.

There's this sense that you can have the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. The real demands of friendship, of intimacy, are complicated. They're hard. They involve a lot of negotiation. They're all the things that are difficult about adolescence. And adolescence is the time

when people are using technology to skip and to cut corners and to not have to do some of these very hard things. One of the things I've found with continual connectivity is there's an anxiety of disconnection; that these teens have a kind of panic. They say things like, "I lost my iPhone; it felt like somebody died, as though I'd lost my mind." The technology is already part of them.

And with the constant possibility of connectivity, one of the things that I see is a very subtle movement from "I have a feeling. I want to make a call" to "I want to have a feeling. I need to make a