

## **Humanity, technology and how it affects the future of communication**

**By: Alyssa Lagasca, PharmD, BA**

The technological age of iPhones, Facebook and Siri has led human society to be more efficient. But this reliance on technology has led individuals to become lonely in the world. Now, the existence of artificial intelligence (AI) and robots have made it possible for individuals to develop relationships with machines. While it can be used for interactive and therapeutic purposes, these advances in technology further encourage the lack of human interaction. The factors that contribute to individual attachment to technology include the escape from reality's struggles, emotional convenience and lack of authenticity. As society faces this struggle between their human and technological interactions, mental decision making can be done to avoid this deep reliance in these devices. By understanding the effect of technology in an individual's mental state, in-person interactions can still be preserved in the future.

In general, people try to run away from their real life conflicts in order to avoid harming their mental state. Without these obstacles, however, humans are unable to grow from their mistakes and improve as an individual. The constant use of technology makes it even easier to run away from personal problems presented both online and in-person. This is supported by the introduction of *Alone Together*, "Technology is seductive when what it offers meets out human vulnerabilities...We are lonely but fearful of intimacy," (Turkle 1). The need to escape from reality stems from a collective fear in society of experiencing intimacy then losing it. Despite experiencing loneliness which tends to contribute to personal suffering and introverted behaviors, individuals distance

from one another to avoid any potential miscommunication which can lead to problems. A clear example is in the movie, *Her*, featuring Theodore's relationship with his Operating System (OS) named Samantha. Theodore's consistent flashbacks of his ex-wife, Catherine, even after spending his days constantly making use of his technology in order to distract him. From his point of view, he believes he is moving on by doing activities such as playing video games but is really delaying the reality of signing the divorce papers. This traces back to Turkle's statement that technology is making individuals feel alone but they are too anxious to face intimacy regardless of its outcome. As a result, devices eventually become an extension of the human self. Just like how Theodore develops a romantic relationship with Samantha and considers her a part of him. So when these machines are torn away from humans, it concludes that "whether or not our devices are in use, without them we feel disconnected, adrift," (Turkle 14). People tend to feel anxious and bored whenever their phones run out of battery or they cannot connect to the internet. However, Theodore went through a panic when Samantha went offline due to a OS update. He displayed the same anxious and worrisome reactions of a woman leaving him since he attached a personality as well as developed feelings for his OS. Although this is a very extreme example, it is not so far off that many people feel emotions of emptiness when their devices are not present and so they are easily distracted by their own anxiety. In turn, this shows the human reliance on technology and that escaping from real life conflict from these devices are not an option regardless. In terms of emotions, individual control over their AIs and machines are assumed to help regulate their own mental state.

Usually when someone seeks comfort from a loved one or a friend, they do not always hear the answers they would like from them. However, speaking to an AI in which it's personality is shaped by the user is proven to be advantageous. Not only will the AI can help provide a wide range of solutions for the individual but is guaranteed to always be there for them. As Turkle suggests from her analysis, "People seem comforted by the belief that if we alienate or fail each other, robots will be there, programmed to provide simulations of love," (Turkle 10). This traces back to the emphasis on human control over technology and how their expectations on their AI influence how they regulate their own emotions. This is the reason why people mainly rely on their devices for company over people that may potentially leave them some day. That way they can avoid any negative emotions such as guilt, sorrow and trauma. This is shown between Theodore and Samantha in their first encounter in which she explains to him that she grows through the experiences that they will both possess in the span that they know one another. Although she is an OS, which is basically an advanced Siri, she develops a personality throughout the movie. It even gets as far as having sexual encounters with Theodore and getting jealous of his ex-wife. Although it sounds heartwarming, this behavior with technology can be detrimental to a human's mental state as well as threatening to their own communication with other individuals. Theodore's flaw of falling in love with Samantha is the fact that there is nothing from this relationship that he can truly gain. For a while, he completely misses that "A love relationship involves coming to savor the surprises and rough patches of looking at the world from another's point of view, shaped by history, biology, trauma and joy," (Turkle 6). The difference between AI and a human is that while AI will never leave them, the

fact that it is still artificial stands in which its personality is shaped by the user. An individual can never improve themselves if they do not experience betrayal, heartbreak or self-destruction of one's own character. If the AI's personality is based on an individual's perfect point of interest, then they never really place themselves in anyone else's shoes.

Authenticity is the last factor that ties everything together about why interactions with machines are threatening human communication. As stated by Rayner, "...self is not given: it is made and remade in a variety of ways in a variety of contexts," (Rayner, 2012). People have different sides of them all the time based on beliefs, experiences and values which can be traced back by Rayner's statement. But limiting themselves to a default, expected behavior of a robot or AI for communication can seriously reduce their own social experiences and desensitize them when helping others cope through future events. When authenticity is mentioned, it could be correlated with imperfection and flaws. However, By interacting with an authentic individual means to laugh, suffer, argue and cry with them. People get to see the best and worst of one another. This makes sense when Catherine gets angry once she finds out Theodore, her former husband, has fallen for Samantha who is not even a real person. She emphasizes to him that "...It makes me real sad you can't handle real emotions...you always wanted to have a wife without the challenges of actually dealing with anything real," (*Her*). Despite the comfort that Theodore has with his newfound companion, his former wife that may still harbor some feelings for him must be understandably betrayed. However, it is more so due to seeing his morality as a human being diminishing and that he has not made the effort to try to understand other people. Instead, he confides into the comfort of an

OS who is shaped by a personality that answers favorably to him. Turkle also talks about a similar situation about a woman she met, Anne, who believes that “A responsive robot, even one just exhibiting scripted behavior, seemed better to her than a demanding boyfriend,” (Turkle 8). Not only does this create an ignorant mindset towards intimate relationships as a whole for society, but it also encourages people to turn away from complex human interactions.

Although there seems to be a negative connotation towards technology in relation to human interaction, changes can be done now to avoid situations like Theodore’s from happening. The main issue with humanity today is their anxiety of being alone and their fear of intimacy. Technology can still coexist with society, but people must start making the effort to normalize in-person conversations again. People cannot be reliant on texting to talk about complex issues as it becomes harder to become emotionally invested in the problem. AIs and robots, like Samantha, can also still be involved in society through therapeutic means such as counseling. However, their involvement with individuals must remain in collaboration with real human interaction in this field and not completely take over.

## **Citations**

*Her*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. Joaquin Phoenix, Scarlett Johansson, Amy Adams, Rooney Mara, and Olivia Wilde. Warner Bros, 2013. Film.

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