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While we've been quarantining, isolating, and digitally working

and socializing, The Aspen Institute has been busy. In April they

put on a webinar called "Intimacy in Isolation: How Technologies

are Impacting Human Connection During the Pandemic," and in

In between, they published comprehensive reports with telling

Gloria concluded our chat by saying, "Because people are so

nuanced, technology cannot be the solution. when you create a

technology, you're making one solution that's supposed to scale

and fit a generalized population, but we're learning that this is

Making the Most of What We Have

A 2018 University of Pennsylvania study confirmed that the

platforms Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram decreased well-

being and increased anxiety and depression. But 2018 feels like

another planet compared to 2020, and the social landscape has

changed, perhaps irreversibly. Of course opting for face-to-face

land far away known as January 2020, and though many people

promise to limit social media time or detox altogether, it's never

social-media detox is nearly as old as the platforms themselves.

new <u>Social Distance</u> captured the bizarreness of our lives almost

Time moves slow and fast during the pandemic, and Netflix's

in real time. Coupled with *Social Dilemma*, it's hard to know

what to do and how to stay healthy. How bad are online

been simple to do so—though the premise and pressure to

interaction over virtual friendships isn't as easy as it was in the

titles: "Lessons in Loneliness" and "Artificial Intimacy."

August they had a virtual event called "Virtually Alone: The

research we're doing now."

Future of Human Connection."

not a generalizable experience."

aspects of a person's personality, but where they are in life

developmentally. "Tech companies are trying," Gloria says,

customize, but that's one way technology falls short—it's just not

Gloria'a two young children are doing preschool on Zoom and

they're doing remarkably well with it. "Couldn't they just watch

Sesame Street?" I asked her, and although we shared a laugh

about it, the answer is no, there does have to be an interactive

technology is only going to be more a part of our lives. "It's not

like we're all going to become Luddites post-Covid," Gloria says,

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component for them developmentally. Gloria predicts that

"And the children will have a better skillset because of the

"Zoom is giving as many options as possible so users can

customizable to the levels we need it to be.

interactions, especially if that's all we have? Linda K. Kaye, a cyberpsychology academic in the department of psychology at Edge Hill University (UK), has reassuring insight. Kaye's research is primarily in the area of the psychology of digital gaming and online behavior, and in particular she's

interested in how online technologies support social inclusion

the psychosocial implications of WhatsApp.

and competence and decreases isolation.

nothing."

and well-being. Kaye did a study of university students showing

The study published, ironically, at the beginning of the pandemic,

though the research began years prior, and concludes that

'online bonding through WhatsApp was negatively related to

loneliness, and positively with psychological well-being, self-

encourages bonding between users and increases social capital

esteem and social competence." It turns out that WhatsApp

Kaye says that my preferred way of connecting during the

pandemic—through the voice memo feature on any of the

messaging apps—makes sense because it gives the best of both

conversation, yet without the parameters of space and time. "We

worlds. Using voice to connect on a personal level is akin to a

tend to say face-to-face communication is going to be much

better than Skype," Kaye says, "but when you have friends in

Together, Apart, and Apart Together

connect in the same or similar ways. It used to be that

new methods to stay connected.

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There is no right way to connect with people. It's more important

that we identify what works for us, and find others who want to

friendships would solidify over a shared love of something—live

music, working out together, sifting through thrift stores, or

adventuring abroad—so while that's on hold, we need to find

If you haven't tried voice memos yet, I hope I've convinced you

to give it a shot. Your friend with three kids might not have time

to talk, but she'll love to hear your voice telling her she's doing a

great job juggling both her work and her kids' schooling. Your

grandma across the country might go to bed early, but sending

her a message that she can wake up to and replay over and over

different time zones it makes some communication better than

will make her day, and I guarantee it will be well worth your 45second investment. There are any number of ways to get started with voice memos, but there are few options that never go out of style and usually hit the spot: "Thank you," "I love you," and "I miss you" are terrific places to start. **More Great WIRED Stories** • Want the latest on tech, science, and more? Sign up for

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