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Reflection on Ethics in Computing

In the opinion article “I Visited 47 Sites. Hundreds of Trackers Followed Me” by Farhad Manjoo, the author recaps an experiment he took part in, where he allowed an editor from the New York Times to track his every move on the internet for a week. This was done using “a modified version of the Firefox web browser that was created by privacy researchers to monitor how websites track users’ data.”¹ After browsing the web for a week for both professional and personal use, Manjoo uploaded all of the data collected from the experiment to the editor, where it was analyzed and turned into a beautiful image that showed all of the trackers following Manjoo around the web, which trackers were sharing information between one another, which were logging his location, which were building a profile on him, and more.

When reflecting on this article, the first thing that comes to mind is my students. I think about how little most of them know about the internet, tracking, and social media. They have been using the internet for almost their entire lives, and many were exposed to it in some form before they could even speak. I have had students tell me that they feel no sense of fear when it comes to what they put out there on the internet and what companies are looking at what they do, which makes my concern grow even more. I don’t think students truly understand just how much information is being collected about them, how aggressively they are being targeted by ads and political information, and how companies are building complete profiles on them, that contain more personal information than they would ever care to share with a close friend, let alone a random company. I will definitely work to educate my students moving forward on how much information they are sharing, but I fear that social media is like a drug that they have already become dependent on. At this point, I believe most students would choose to relinquish their personal information in order to keep using their social media accounts.

As a society in general, I believe we have become so reliant on technology, that very few people would be willing to stop using it in order to protect their privacy. I think another important factor in this is that so many people are ignorant to just how much data is being collected, who it is going to, and how often it happens. If every website stated “to use this website, we will collect your location, shopping habits, gender, political views, and information about your preferences collected from past websites”, far fewer people would simply roll over and accept tracking.

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/23/opinion/data-internet-privacy-tracking.html>