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Homework Week 5

CSC 300

In Professor Turkle’s article “Stop Googling. Let’s Talk”, one of the main points she focused on was how cell phones are taking away from intimate conversations, and consequently disconnecting us. Having a cell phone makes it so that one can always “escape” their current situation and be “present” somewhere else. In effect, this takes away from the value of face to face conversations. If there is ever a moment of awkwardness or uncomfortableness, instead of embracing it nowadays people will just turn to their phone. This habit cuts into intimate conversation, as people are not fully present, and distractions are ever more present. She talks about how studies have shown that even the mere presence of a phone on a table can take value away from conversation. People tend to talk about more surface level topics, for the fear that they would be interrupted while opening up about something. Furthermore, because people aren’t truly paying attention while talking to people, we have gotten worse at reading others. This is especially apparent in adolescence. They are simply not developing the skills of empathy and being able to understand what others are feeling and why they are feeling it. This is because many people are not focused, or do not care about what others are saying, they are truly only focused on their own world in their cell phone.

A second main point from Professor Turkle’s article was that the issue is not just about how we spend our time when we are with others, but also when we are alone. A memorable quote from the article was, “In solitude we learn to concentrate and image, to listen to ourselves. We need these skills to be fully present in conversation”. She is completely correct; being comfortable with ourselves while we are alone helps us to reflect and learn about ourselves. It makes us more okay with feeling uncomfortable, which is crucial for growth. When has anything great or exciting happened inside of the comfort zone. It is especially rare; and the truly eye-opening moments of life happen when you understand that feeling awkward or uncomfortable is part of the process of growth. She makes the point that it is a two-way street; learning how to connect with ourselves makes us better at connecting with others and having intimate conversations with others makes us better at inner dialogue. “If we don’t know how to be alone, we’ll only know how to be lonely”.

As computer professionals, this issue is extremely important, and can be applied to the context of this class. It is our responsibility to be thinking about these things while developing technology, and instead of creating technology whose main purpose is to addict and suck the user in for as much time as possible, we should be creating technology whose purpose is to promote human connection. It presents a challenge, but it is a necessary challenge to overcome at this juncture in humanity. It is easy to say that technology is for the public good, but at the end of the day most technology is made for profit; it will take serious reflection and courage to actually create technology that will promote *not* using technology. As for now, it is our responsibility to lead by example. We are part of the small population who truly knows what is going on behind the scenes with the addiction-based algorithms, and the effects it is having on human connection and mental health. Therefore, if we start drawing lines between technology and real life, others may soon follow and realize that it may actually feel nice to not be dependent on their cell phone.