CSCI 2070 Introduction to Ethics/Cyber Security

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Are Cyberethics Issues Unique?

- Does CyberTechnology introduce new and unique moral problems?
Are Cyberethics Issues Unique?

- Consider the Amy Boyer case of cyberstalking in light of issues raised.
- Is there anything new or unique about this case from an ethical point of view?
- Boyer was stalked in ways that were not possible before cybertechnology.

In October 1999, Twenty-year-old Amy Boyer was murdered by a young man who had stalked her via the Internet. The stalker, Lim Youens, was able to carry out most of the stalking activities that eventually led to Boyer’s death by using a variety of and resources tools generally available to any internet user. Via standard online search facilities, for example, Youens, was able to gathered personal information about Boyer. And after paying a small fee to Docusearch.com, an online information company, Youens was able to find out where Boyer lived, where she worked, and so forth. Younes was also able to use another online tool, available to Internet users, to construct two Web sites, both dedicated to his intended victim. On one site, he posted personal information about Boyer as well as photograph of her. On the other Web site, Youens described, in explicit detail, his plan to murder Boyer.
Are Cyberethics Issues Unique?

Two different evaluations of the “Cyberstalking Incident”

- **Traditionalists** argue that nothing is new – crime is crime, and murder is murder.

- **Uniqueness Proponents** argue that cybertechnology has introduced (at least some) new and unique ethical issues that could not have existed before computers
  
  - Cyberstalking actives are hardly new. Cybertechnology tools are now available to aid stalkers in carrying out actives
  
  - New form of behaviors made possible by cybertechnolgy: Anonymous stalking through the Internet
Uniqueness Issue (Continued)

- Both sides seem correct on some claims, and both seem to be wrong on others.

- Traditionalists underestimate the role that issues of *scale* and *scope* that apply because of the impact of computer technology.
  - Cyberstalkers can stalk multiple victims simultaneously (scale) and globally (because of the scope or reach of the Internet).
  - They also can operate without ever having to leave the comfort of their homes.
Uniqueness proponents tend to overstate the effect that cybertechnology has on ethics per se.

- Maner (1996) argues that computers are uniquely fast, uniquely malleable, etc.
- There may indeed be some unique aspects of computer technology.
Sally Bright, a recent graduate from Technical University, has accepted a position as a software engineer for a company called CyberDefense, Inc. This Company has a contract with the U.S. Defense Department to develop and deliver applications for the U.S. military. When Sally reports to work on her first day, she is assigned to controversial project that is developing the software for a computer system designed to deliver chemical weapons to and from remote locations. Sally is conflicted about whether she can, given her personal values, agree to work on this kind of weapon-delivery system, which would not have been possible without computer technology.
Uniqueness Issue (Continued)

Two points of view to Sally scenario:

- Sally ethical concerns are new and unique because of the invention of computer technology
- Sally ethical concerns are not unique
  - Example: Engineers were confronted with ethical choices involving whether or not to participate in the design and the development of controversial technological system
Harry Flick is an undergraduate student at Pleasantville State College. In many ways, Harry’s interests are similar to those of typical students who attend his college. But Harry’s is also very fond on classic movies, especially films that were made before 1950. DVD and videocassette copies of these movies are difficult to find; those that are available tend to be expensive to purchase, and very few are available for loan at libraries. One day, Harry discovers a web site that has several classic films (digital form) freely available for downloading. Since the movies are still protected by copyright, however, Harry has some concerns about whether it would be permissible for him to download any of these films.
Uniqueness Issue (Continued)

- Two points of view in the Harry’s case:
  - Harry’s ethical concerns are new and unique, they existed because of the practice of downloading digital media from the internet
  
  - Harry’s ethical concerns are not unique
    - Example: using tape recorder to make unauthorized copies
In the two case evaluations of the Harry’s scenario:

- The behavior associated with the unauthorized copying raises a number of moral concerns:
  - Property
  - Fairness
  - Right
Distinguishing between unique technological features and unique ethical issues

- The Moral issues in our analysis of the two scenarios concluded that:
  
  - *There is no new and unique moral issues associated with cybertechnology*
  
  - *Computing technology has unique features:*
    
    - *Uniquely complex*
    - *Uniquely coded*
    - *Uniquely fast*
Distinguishing between unique technological features and unique ethical issues

- But uniqueness proponents tend to confuse *unique features of technology* with *unique ethical issues*.

- They use the following logical fallacy:

  - *Cybertechnology has some unique technological features.*
  - *Cybertechnology generates ethical issues.*

  Therefore, the ethical issues generated by cybertechnology must be unique.
Uniqueness Issue (Continued)

- So we must distinguish between: (a) unique technological features, and (b) any (alleged) unique ethical issues.

- Two scenarios from the text:
  
  (a) Computer professionals designing and coding a controversial computer system

  (b) Software piracy
Alternative Strategy for Analyzing the Uniqueness Issue

- James Moor (1985) argues that computer technology generates “new possibilities for human action” because computers are *logically malleable*.

- **Logical malleability**, in turn, introduces *policy vacuums*.

- *Policy vacuums* often arise because of *conceptual muddles*.
Case Illustration of a Policy Vacuum: Duplicating Software

- In the early 1980s, there were no clear laws regarding the duplication of software programs, which was made easy because of personal computers.
- A policy vacuum arose.
- Before the policy vacuum could be filled, we had to clear up a conceptual muddle: What exactly is software?
Case Illustration of a Policy Vacuum: Music sharing online

- Free exchange of the music over the internet and the P2P system that facilitate this exchange

- Conceptual confusion or muddle underlying the using of P2P system for digital transaction is introduced

- A policy vacuum has arose
Cyberethics as a Branch of Applied Ethics

- *Applied ethics*, unlike theoretical ethics, examines "practical" ethical issues.

- It analyzes moral issues from the vantage-point of one or more ethical theories.

- Ethicists working in fields of applied ethics are more interested in applying ethical theories to the analysis of specific moral problems.

- Ethical theories is concerned of establishing standards and rules for evaluating moral problems.
Cyberethics as a Branch of Applied Ethics (continued)

- Three distinct perspectives of applied ethics (as applied to cyberethics):
  - Professional Ethics
  - Philosophical Ethics
  - Descriptive Ethics
Cyberethics as a Branch of Applied Ethics (continued)

Example of practical ethics issue involve the use of cybertechnology (sharing of digital music online)

Ethical issues:

- Should proprietary information, in a digital format known as MP3 files be allowed to exchange freely over the internet?

Two points of view:

- A Utilitarian might argue free exchange of MP3 files is a practice that make the majority of user happy and thus contribute to the greatest good for the greatest number of peoples

- Other might argue that freely exchange of MP3 files over the internet will violate the right for those who created and own them.
Perspective # 1: Professional Ethics

- According to this view, cyberethics is the field that identifies and analyzes issues of ethical responsibility for computer professionals.

- Consider a computer professional's role in designing, developing, and maintaining computer hardware and software systems.
  - Suppose a programmer discovers that a software product she has been working on is about to be released for sale to the public, even though it is unreliable because it contains "buggy" software.
  - Should she "blow the whistle?"
Don Gotterbarn (1991) argued that all genuine computer ethics issues are *professional ethics* issues.

Computer ethics, for Gotterbarn is like medical ethics and legal ethics, which are tied to issues involving specific professions.

He notes that computer ethics issues aren’t about technology – e.g., we don’t have automobile ethics, airplane ethics, etc.