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Course Name and number: Software Ethics COEN 288

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Date: 11/28/2017

Word Count: 1600

ETHICS of Apps: “Girls around me” and “BroApp”

As mobile app designers, it's their job to create compelling and engaging mobile apps that keep people coming back. They *need* people to love their apps. After all, the success of mobile app design is usually measured in engagement, the number of downloads, and time spent in the app. If people love the latest app, they'll use it frequently and tell all their friends about how much they use it. But the developers must never forget the ethics associated with the apps they create. They must make sure that the applications they create are not used in the wrong way or they are not causing any kind of harm, physically or mentally. In today's world of technology, the kind of applications we use in our daily life has a great impact on our behavior. Some apps are really good and beneficial for us as they are developed with an intention of increasing our knowledge. But some applications are developed with no ethical concern. Some examples of such apps are the “BroApp” and the “Girls around me” app.

The BroApp is about men finding a connection with each other beyond the stereotypes people may try to fit them into. BroApp goes beyond using labels, and is for men that are interested in meeting other men, the description says “It's as simple as that. Just sign up, and start looking for new Bros!” ^[1]. This application uses the user's location and finds other users around him and if they both accept each others request, they can start talking. So this an application just meant for men to meet other men, either for friendship, chat or date. There's nothing wrong in using this application, but people are using such applications in a wrong way and thus the developers of the application should have considered all these problems and should have taken steps to solve these problems.

Another application which is a bit creepy application is “Girls around me” application. It's a simple fact of life: men love hitting on women. Whether it's

about scoring, or just having some fun during a boys night out. This application is the Foursquare of hooking up. Once you've logged on, you get to see who is around you in the hotspots based on your location. "Girls Around Me" goes even further by providing you with the guy to girl ratio of your desired location to ensure that you have a better chance of scoring. What's even more creepy is that this app provides you with thumbnail pictures of the girls who are already there so you can choose if the place is actually worth your time. "Girls Around Me" eliminates the element of surprise during a typical night out so you no longer have to play the guessing game. ^[2] This application is built mainly for desperate boys looking and stalking girls. The application developers clearly forgot the hazards this application can cause if someone with cruel intentions uses this application.

There are many ethical problems associated with these applications. As ACM code of ethics clearly states "Avoid harm to others" ^[3.1], so the developers and the people using these applications must follow this code of ethics. Also, the IEEE code of ethics has mentioned this point "to avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or malicious action". ^[4] But these codes were violated by many users as several cases of sexual harassment, blackmailing, physical and mental abuse have been reported. The ACM code of ethics has also stated that "Respect the privacy of others" and "Honor confidentiality".^[3.2] But the applications like "Girls around me" are severely violating this code by leaking the private information of girls to the users of this application. Even though these applications have a user agreement before the user starts using this application that's not enough to safeguard these information. The result of this is that cases have been reported of psychopaths following different girls wherever they go. Also, many cases of assaults, physical abuse, eve teasing, and even rape have been reported and the main reason behind such cases is found to be applications like "Girls around me" and other similar application like "Tinder".

Another ethical tool that can be used to evaluate such applications can be "RISK=HARM X PROBABILITY". The risks associated with these applications are very severe, especially for girls. According to an article written by Miriam Wells, Production Editor at the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Reports of rape linked to online dating applications have increased to 450 Percent in Five Years. The reports said that 85 percent of those reporting rapes were women and 15 percent were men. Just over 40 percent of victims had spent time in

private on their first date, and 71 percent of alleged rapes that occurred on the first face-to-face meeting following online contact was committed at the victim's or offender's residence. Research showed offenders frequently used persuasion, coercion, and perseverance to get victims (who were often initially resistant or indifferent) to agree to a first date early on. Some of the coercion involved persuading victims of a specific location for the date. Thereby concluding that there is a 25% probability of a case of physical violence to occur with the source being dating applications.^[5] Therefore the impact of the risk associated with these dating applications is very high and that is the major ethical problem with these applications.

The final ethical tool that I would like to use to evaluate these dating applications is the "Human Rights Privacy" tool. Privacy is a major concern when it comes to using online dating applications. The cases of abuse that were reported were mainly because the private data of users were leaked to hackers and psychopaths that used this information to commit all kinds of illegal and unethical acts. According to a survey Personal data from more than 1.5 million users of a dating site network that encourages its members to "have a fling" and "have an affair" has been found online. That data included usernames and email addresses, passwords, gender, dates of birth, profile photos, the country of residence. And other personal information like body type, height and weight (if a user chooses to enter it), desires, interests, race, turn-ons, the type of person a user is seeking to interact with, and whether the user smokes and drinks. ^[6] With such a tremendous supply of information it became easy for the culprits to attack the users physically, emotionally and mentally. The developers of these applications were held responsible for leaking this information and thus such applications proved to be dangerous for people all around the world.

One of the best solutions to these problems is never to use such applications which can pose a threat to the user. But not everyone will be ready to give up on these applications because of their desires and lust to find their online love. So other solutions could be to not put excess information about yourself on applications that are prone to be attacked. Be concerned about our own safety. Do not blindly trust anyone you meet online. Before meeting a person face-to-face, analyze the person thoroughly and figure out whether that person is trustworthy or not. As a user, be polite and respect the feelings of the person with whom you are talking online. Make the other person feel safe.

Never have an intention to harm the other person in any way. Respect the privacy of others. On the other hand, as a developer of such applications consider all the factors and problems that can be caused by the application before releasing it. Make sure that your database is secured and well protected so as the confidentiality of the users is maintained and their data is not hacked by potential hackers. And finally, ensure that your application meets all the codes of ethics before it is released.

In the end, I would like to say that in today's world, where surviving without technology is impossible, it is important that we use this technology in a righteous way and even develop them in an ethically sound way. We, the engineers, are the one who are creating this technology and thus it's in our hands to make use of these technologies for the betterment of mankind and make this world a better place to live.

CITATIONS

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