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9/3 CSCI 77800 Ethics:
Assignment #1

ZOOM DOOM

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/7/8/20687014/zoom-security-flaw-video-conference-websites-hijack-mac-cameras>

This is an article from 2019 about Zoom. It reports that on a security researcher who discovered that the Zoom video conference software had a serious bug in its implementation that made it possible for hackers to spy on people without their knowledge through the webcam of Mac devices. This revelation itself is disturbing in its own right. I used to think that people who put a piece of tape over their webcams were paranoid, conspiracy theorists, and over-alarmed. What's even more shocking though is the mechanics of the bug and what makes it possible. These details will raise serious ethical questions.

The bug has to do with the way Zoom runs on a client's computer. Normally when you download a program, you download a bunch of files that the program needs to function. If you no longer want to have the program on your device, you uninstall it and all of the associated files get deleted. For a program that works over the internet, the program runs on your computer but uses some kind of "web server", a computer owned by the program that exists somewhere else, to connect online. For Zoom though, this is not the case. When a user downloads Zoom onto their computer, they also install a secret web server. This web server lives on the user's computer and is used by Zoom to make internet connections. If a user doesn't want Zoom anymore and decides to uninstall it, **the web server does not get deleted.**

This is a simple explanation and basis for the vulnerability. Hackers can access this web server that Zoom installed that you didn't even know existed. They can manipulate this server without your knowledge to use your webcam. Imagining this case happening, how much should Zoom be liable? How can a company give you more than you asked for in a product, not tell you, and then misrepresent the cancelling of its services if a user chooses so? This story made me think about what "uninstall" really means, because in this Zoom case it didn't mean what I thought it did. Serious harm can happen because of this vulnerability, and it is possible because people can exploit a system that was misrepresented to the victim that initially made the action and consented to own that system.