

## **Case Study 4:**

### **A Question of Ethics**

Jeff and Magda, seniors at a small rural college, had been dating each other since they were freshmen. Jeff loved Magda, and he planned to propose to her after they graduated in spring. At the same time, though, he reluctantly recognized that their relationship had fallen into a bit of a rut over the last six months, and he missed the excitement and romance of their first year together. Although he was troubled by these conflicting feelings, Jeff was unsure what to do about them.

One day while he was surfing MySpace.com, Jeff decided, on a whim, to create a fake user profile for the person he wanted to be in his fantasies. He spent quite a bit of time researching and designing the profile of his imaginary persona, a rap singer/flamenco guitarist/snowboarder/ kungfu expert who went by the user name “MoonDog13.” Jeff inserted photos of an obscure young Romanian actor he found online into MoonDog13’s user profile. He posted lyrics to rap songs he wrote on MoonDog13’s page and joined online user groups for those interested in flamenco guitar, snowboarding, and kungfu. In very little time, MoonDog13 had made a number of online friends, many of whom were admiring young women. MoonDog13 loved to flirt with these girls.

Jeff told Magda nothing about MoonDog13, even when the time he spent online managing the fictitious life of his alter ego began to interfere in his relationship with her. He justified this decision with the belief that MoonDog13 was an imaginary figure who existed only in cyberspace. As long as fantasy didn’t cross into reality, there was no reason Jeff had to feel guilty about anything MoonDog13 said online.

**1.** How is Jeff acting ethically or unethically in this situation?

**2.** Like Jeff, most people act differently in cyberspace than they do in the real world. Are the ethics of cyberspace any different from those of the real world? What about fantasy — are the ethics of our private desires different from the real world? Are we ethically obliged to disclose our fantasies to our loved ones?