

Describing Ethical Thinking

"We're Sociologists, not technologists, so a lot of this is new to us", and "Sociologists generally want to know as much as possible about the subjects". - Kauffman (2008)

Here Kauffman approaches this from a beneficence perspective. Justifying the behaviour saying he was not *aware* of the consequences of analysing such data, and that the results, which would be better understanding of social behaviour, outweigh the costs. He is consequentialist in terms of that he believes that releasing the data and conducting the study is not harmful, and deontologist in the sense that he believes he as a sociologist is doing his duty in conducting the research. Ethically he is still way off because neither approaches justify the collection of the data or the research without consent.

"What might hackers want to do with this information, assuming they could crack the data and 'see' these people's Facebook info? Couldn't they do this just as easily via Facebook itself?

Our dataset contains almost no information that isn't on Facebook. (Privacy filters obviously aren't much of an obstacle to those who want to get around them.)" - Kauffman (2008)

Kauffman approaches this from a consequentialist perspective, wondering what the *consequences* of this data being released are. His argument is that since this data is already easily enough available publicly, his research has no dire consequences because it doesn't release anything which was not already there. Again, there is a lack of understanding of the nuances of consent here, especially contextual consent, and a consequentialist approach is used to justify this lack of consent.

"We have not accessed any information not otherwise available on Facebook. We have not interviewed anyone, nor asked them for any information, nor made information about them public (unless, as you all point out, someone goes to the extreme effort of cracking our dataset, which we hope it will be hard to do)." - Kauffman (2008)

Here Kauffman is choosing to be a deontologist. Arguing that no ethical considerations or rules were broken during the process of collecting the data and conducting the analysis, he tries to justify the study from a moral perspective as having done their *duty* as researchers. By saying we have done our duty in making sure there are no loose ends, once again the nuances of consent and what people agree to when they share on social media is lost.