Problem 1. [100 points] As discussed in classes, the incident of Cambridge Analytica scandal and Facebook data leaking have brought significant attention on the Computer Ethic issues. Please search and read information about the event, and do the following:

(a) Describe what happened. [30 points]

Facebook exposed the data of up to 87 million Facebook users to a researcher who worked at Cambridge Analytica, and was working alongside the Trump campaign. Cambridge Analytica has its work done by the SCL Group, which is a public relations and messaging form with clients all around the world. Vox describes Cambridge Analytica as “basically a shell for the SCL Group”. The data was collected using a Facebook app that was a quiz, that collected data from the quiz as well as using a loophole in the Facebook API to collect data from the friends of those who took the quiz. Facebook was not okay with data being collected this way, but Cambridge went ahead with selling the data anyway.

(b) Point out at least two scenarios in the event where you believe to be ethical or unethical. Explain your opinions. [40 points]

The method Cambridge Analytica used to gather the data was unethical. They utilized a loophole in the Facebook API to access data from those who downloaded their Facebook quiz app, as well as people on their friends lists.

I believe the foundation of the SCL as a company is somewhat unethical. The article states that the SCL says that their sophisticated understanding of human psychology allows them to manipulate people into believing what their clients want them to believe, using “psychological warfare” and “influence operations”.

(c) What are your opinions and suggestions to address issues raised in this event. [30 points]

Based on the article I’ve read, it would appear Facebook was not aware of the exploit used to collect data through their platform, although it sounds like there is something else going on in the background. Former Facebook employees have said that there is tension between security and legal teams at the company when it comes to how much they should be protecting their user’s data. I’m not entirely sure how to interpret this statement, but one interpretation is that maybe Facebook did not have their security as tight as it should have been. My opinion is that despite them claiming ignorance, Facebook should still take some of the blame for allowing the users data to be accessed, either because their security wasn’t good enough, or because they allowed a shady organization like the SCL to develop a program using their API. I believe that companies like Facebook should put more emphasis on protecting their users’ data, and should take responsibility for the events that unfolded just as much as the SCL Group.

While I believe there are benefits that come from collecting data and using it to cater services to the individual, this event causing me to question whether this much data should even be collected in the first place if it can be stolen this easily. I believe users should have more control over what is collected and what isn’t, and should be able to opt-out of data collection at any moment, as well as request any records of their data be deleted immediately. They should also be given full transparency as to where their data is being used, and by who it is being used. I believe that these few principles would be a good start to fixing issues like this happening in the future.

Chang, Alvin. “The Facebook and Cambridge Analytica Scandal, Explained with a Simple Diagram.” *Vox*, Vox, 23 Mar. 2018, https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/23/17151916/facebook-cambridge-analytica-trump-diagram.