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### Case Analysis on Professional Ethics

In the article, “The Code I’m Still Ashamed of” by Bill Sourour, he talks about how he obtained a full time coding job with an interactive marketing firm in Toronto, Canada. While working there, he was given a project that involved a drug to target teenage girls. This was provided through a website where through graphics and and the general style made it prevalent that it was catered towards young women. On the website, there was a quiz that would ask girls several questions and would recommend them a type of drug based on their answers. Sourour notes that the website did not advertise for a particular drug and that it posed as a website that can provide general information. Sourour was responsible for coding the quiz. However, the requirements concerned him since the quiz was designed to recommend only the client’s drug no matter what answers you put in. Furthermore, Sourour did not know that depression and suicidal thoughts were among the side effects of the drug. In this Case Analysis, I will argue that utilitarianism shows us that the code was morally problematic because it caused more harm than good and that Sourour should have done things differently because he did not act in a way that would promote “the greatest good for the greatest number” of people.

One concept from the Code of Ethics that relates to this article is avoiding all conduct or practice that deceives the public. The company that Sourour worked for still continued to advertise the products even after suicide cases started to arise. It was even stated in the article that Sourour’s project manager tried out the quiz to see for herself and she found out that all it did was prompt her to take the client’s drug. For clarity, she states, “everything leads to the

client's drug" (Sourour, 2016). However, she still did not think anything of it when it came to how it would affect the lives of these young girls that they were targeted. All they cared about was profit.

Circling back to this concept in the code of ethics, I think that this company took advantage of how naive young girls are in order to sell their product. They did not have good intentions and, unfortunately, Sourour did not realize it until lives started to be taken far too soon. Even though he was not primarily responsible for what took place, Sourour was still a part of setting this plan into motion. Going along with this, from an ethical standpoint, I do not believe Sourour took this into consideration until it was too late. For instance, he states "the more software continues to take over every aspect of our lives, the more important it will be for us to take a stand and ensure that our ethics are ever-present in our code" (Sourour, 2016).

Sourour was not thinking about how writing the code for the pharmaceutical quiz would affect the girls taking the quiz in a negative way. He even stated in the article that he did not think much of it and that he was simply doing his job at the time. Sourour even justified it by saying that "nothing that we were doing was illegal", which shows that he was not thinking from an ethical standpoint, more specifically from a utilitarian perspective. A utilitarian would not have attempted to hide or deceive information from the public for their own personal gain unless it was to help the greatest number of people. In this case, this quiz only negatively affected young women by prescribing them a drug without even consulting a doctor or their own individual medical history.

A utilitarian would have acknowledged what this drug has done to the girls in our society and would have changed the way the quiz filtered out results. The people in this company, especially the project manager, should have looked at the ramifications that this would bring to

society. Furthermore, she should have looked at how it would affect her business if the families of the young women were to sue for emotional distress and misinformation. Overall, a utilitarian would have been honest and upfront about the consequences of the drug and would not have hid that information from the public. If the drug was actually helping more women than causing harm, a utilitarian would be able to understand it, but since it only hurt people and left the public in the dark about the information, it was a highly unethical decision.

In Armstrong's article, she starts by talking about how important it is for companies to have confidential information that is not known to the public as long as it is for good reason. This is understandable as some things are of course not meant for everyone to know for the sake of the company and the people that support it. Armstrong calls this professional confidentiality as a *prima facie* duty. To clarify, "it therefore follows that it is morally binding on professionals unless it is in conflict with equal or stronger duties" (Armstrong, 1994). However, there are many companies out there that do not have the public's best interest. One of them being the company that promoted a drug from the quiz that Sourour coded.

From a utilitarian standpoint, it points out "the positive benefits to society when professionals can be trusted to keep confidences" (Armstrong, 1994). With regards to Sourour's article, this is also important when it comes to pointing out how unethical actions were taken in the pharmaceutical quiz. For starters, the questions on the quiz would have had to have been questions that involved disclosing private information about one's self in order for them to properly diagnose them to provide them with a drug. This alone is highly unethical since the quiz is not secure and anyone could have hacked in to see the answers that these young women were putting into use to their advantage. Confidentiality can be a difficult concept to analyze when it

comes to companies because we may have different views on what we think should be publicized and what rights companies have to keep certain information private.

In the article, Armstrong gives the example of the AIDS epidemic, which was controversial when it came to confidentiality, to demonstrate the complex concept of confidentiality. During this epidemic, those who had AIDS were looked down on in society. For instance, Armstrong states “AIDS patients are often ostracized from society and left to die” (Armstrong, 1994). This among other things have affected how confidential medical information should be and what should be shared with the media. The concept of confidentiality is challenging because it is hard to protect those involved and spread awareness to an issue that is occurring. In regards to utilitarianism, it would argue for protecting the general public from contracting the disease by informing everyone of it regardless of if people with AIDS are affected by discrimination.

A utilitarian would argue that protecting as many people in society is more important than protecting those with AIDS. They would want doctors to be transparent to the public as far as the risks of contracting the disease. However, with the pharmaceutical quiz, no one had those young girls' best interest when they came up with this idea to sell their drug. Even though Sourour was writing code for the pharmaceutical quiz, he did not intend for it to get out of hand. On the contrary, his willful involvement even after learning that the quiz led to only one outcome makes his actions unethical.

In conclusion, Sourour knew what he did was wrong but still proceeded with coding the quiz anyway. I believe the company should not have continued to go on functioning after it came out that women were committing suicide after taking their drug. Also, the fact that the company is highly unethical should also be a reason because it shows that they do not care how their drug

affects people. Furthermore, the fact that Sourour resigned is one of the best decisions he made and shows that he does have some morals and recognizes what he did was wrong. Overall, a utilitarian would have concluded that writing the code was morally wrong because it did not help the greater population. It was only killing a part of it. At the end of the article, Sourour explains “since that day, I always try to think twice about the effects of my code before I write it. I hope that you will too” (Sourour, 2016). This is a wake up call to many because there are others out there probably writing code for companies like these without realizing the repercussions from it. Sourour should be a prime example of why ethics should be considered before financial gain especially if the good does not outweigh the bad.