

Ethics and Technology:  
*Against Pornography and “Amorality”*

Aaron Stump  
Computer Science  
The University of Iowa

# Three Basic Questions

1. Should moral considerations play a role in creating technology?
2. Is Internet pornography immoral?
3. Is it appropriate to study an immoral activity?

# Three Basic Questions

1. Should moral considerations play a role in creating technology?

**Yes.** Technologists are not responsible for immoral uses of general technology. But they should not create or support technology for immoral goals.

2. Is Internet pornography immoral?

**Yes.** Pornography is immoral, and ubiquity of Internet pornography plus lack of enforcement for exposure of minors makes it much worse.

3. Is it appropriate to study an immoral activity?

**Yes.** This can provide valuable data to discourage or combat the activity.

# Ethical creation of technology

General tools can be misused



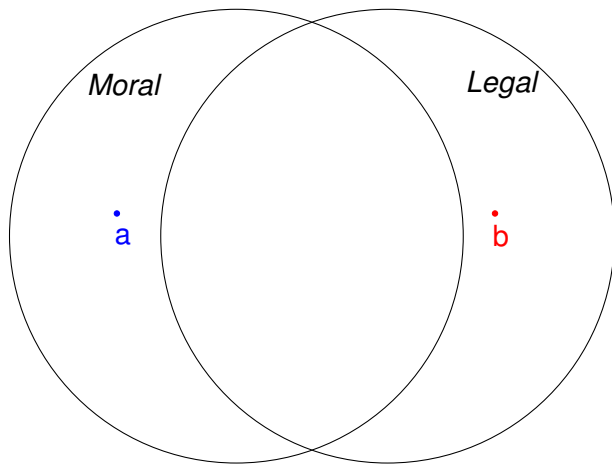
Must: develop for morally acceptable applications

Should: be sensitive to possible misuse

## Acceptable examples from security

- ▷ End-to-end encryption (e.g., WhatsApp)
  - ▶ Provide valuable privacy for all...
  - ▶ ...including criminals
- ▷ Penetration testing tools (Metasploit)
  - ▶ Could also be used for immoral purposes
- ▷ Announcement of new exploits
  - ▶ Made public,
  - ▶ But only after giving company/organization time to release fix

## Moral boundaries for technology?



(a) Iran, 2014, bans WhatsApp (*legal where?*)

(b) Pornography (in U.S.)

# Against Pornography

# So many arguments: production harms

## Exploitation

- ▶ \$12 billion annually in US (2005)
- ▶ Average porn performer makes \$120k

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hollywood-salaries-revealed-movie-stars-737321>

- ▶ Much anecdotal evidence for the *Damaged Goods Hypothesis*

## Sexism and racism

- ▶ Regular users almost exclusively male
- ▶ Degradation of women incessant (e.g. facial ejaculation)
- ▶ Black women at bottom of “pecking order”

with African-American women. As Alice Walker (1980: 103) has pointed out, ‘where white women are depicted in pornography as “objects”, Black women are depicted as animals. Where white women are at least depicted as human bodies if not beings, Black women are depicted as shit.’



# So many arguments: production harms

## Sexual violence

- ▶ Content analysis: 88.2% of 304 scenes from sample of most popular 2005 videos (AVN) contained physical aggression [Bridges et. al 2010]
- ▶ Another study: 73% of raped women stated their partner used pornography [Shope 2004]

## Connections to prostitution and human trafficking

The responses of our participants suggest that pornography is integral to prostitution. Table 4 shows rates by country of those in prostitution who reported that they were upset by attempts to coerce them into imitating pornography and who had pornography made of them in prostitution. Across countries, 47% were upset by attempts to make them do what others had seen in pornography and 49% reported pornography was made of them.

- ▶ 71% prostitutes suffer physical assault
- ▶ 55%-95% suffered childhood sex abuse
- ▶ Prostitutes used for pornography have levels of PTSD comparable to Vietnam veterans

# So many arguments: consumption harms

## Negative impacts on relationships

- ▶ 2002 divorce lawyer survey: 56% of divorces involve one partner having obsessive interest in pornographic web sites
- ▶ Decreased sexual intimacy with real-life partners

## Negative impacts on youth

- ▶ Encourages sexually abusive behaviors by kids
- ▶ Increases risk of sexual aggression among high-risk teens

## Addiction

- ▶ Can become addictive (at a neuronal level) for some people
- ▶ Witness [nofap.com](http://nofap.com): “100% science-based, secular, and sex-positive”

## Focus: Increased Acceptance of Rape Myths

# **Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance and Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault**

JOHN D. FOUBERT, MATTHEW W. BROSI, and R. SEAN BANNON

*Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma*

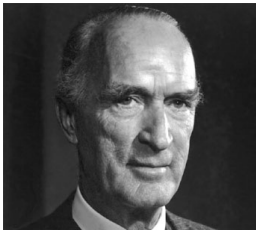
*College men's exposure to pornography is nearly universal, with growing viewing rates nationwide. Substantial research documents the harmful effects of mainstream, sadomasochistic, and rape pornography on men's attitudes and behavior related to sexual assault. The present study surveyed 62% of the fraternity population at a Midwestern public university on their pornography viewing habits, bystander efficacy, and bystander willingness to help in potential rape situations. Results showed that men who view pornography are significantly less likely to intervene as a bystander, report an increased behavioral intent to rape, and are more likely to believe rape myths.*

Against Amoralism

“Technology by itself is amoral.”

**Business**

“Technology by itself is amoral.”



"We Krupps never cared much about [political] ideas. We only wanted a system that worked well and allowed us to work unhindered. Politics is not our business."

– Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, Nazi war criminal

# German industry under the Nazis

- ▷ Employed estimated 12 million slave and forced laborers
  - ▶ Slave laborers were expected to be worked to death
  - ▶ Forced laborers often foreign recruits detained after arrival
  - ▶ Krupp, IG Farben, Siemens, more
- ▷ Many leaders charged in war crimes trials

Amorality was their guiding principle.



## Like it or not...

Human actions have a moral character

We technologists do not get a pass from making moral decisions

Avoiding a choice is making a choice

Pornographers and Nazi-era German industrialists both “amorally” utilized available resource (slave labor, women in bad situations)

**Amoral = Immoral**

## Conclusion

- ▶ Ethical creation of technology
- ▶ Gross immorality of Internet pornography
- ▶ Bogus idea of amorality

It is immoral to help improve  
quality of service for Internet pornography

# Works consulted for this talk

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