ETHICAL DESIGN:
Is It Possible?

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Kent State University Master of Science Program in User Experience
IN THIS TALK

Ethical design, through the lens of onboarding.

Onboarding principles, patterns, and anti-patterns.

Dark patterns and ethical dilemmas.

ME

Trained as an aviation human factors researcher.

I’ve built small and large UX teams.

Teach at and lead the Kent State UX master’s program.

Provide UX research and design consulting.
I’m also a Pixar plot device.
Designing The Onboarding Experience
The process of getting people to adopt your application or service.
When you’re onboarding the user, you’re trying to get them to like and want your product.

In economic terms, you want them to derive value.
What is value?

The worth of a good or service as determined by people’s preferences and the tradeoffs they choose to make, given their scarce resources.

- Investopedia.com
What is value really?

Something you derive a benefit from.
They’re adorable. They also provide value.
The Importance Of Onboarding
We all know onboarding is important. How important is it?
It’s literally a matter of survival.

The average app loses 95% of its user base within a few months.

Users try out a lot of apps but decide which ones they want to stop using within the first 3-7 days.

The key to success is to get the users hooked during that critical 3-7 day period.

- Ankit Jain
A Simple Adoption-Abandonment Model
Users are constantly - and consciously - assessing your offering on two dimensions:

- Time investment
- Perceived value

![Graph showing adoption and abandonment zones based on time investment and perceived value.](image-url)
Deriving value is an aspirational activity.

We adopt new behaviors and tools because we hope it improves some aspect of our life.
People don't buy products; they buy better versions of themselves...are you listing the attributes of the flower or describing how awesome it is to throw fireballs?

- Sam Hulick

http://www.useronboard.com/features-vs-benefits/
If people feel like they’re nearing better versions of themselves, they’ll adopt your solution.

If that better version of themselves seems out of reach…they’ll abandon it.
This is where onboarding plays a crucial role.
Some Common Onboarding Patterns
MODAL STEPPED TUTORIAL

Not many advantages. It’s out of context. People won’t really remember.
FIRST-RUN CALLOUTS

Better than the modal stepped pattern.

It draws the user’s attention to key areas and provides concise, clear explanations.

But how do you see it again if you wanted?
Another first-run callout example.

But what if I just want to explore now and see this later?
NEW FEATURE CALLOUTS

It also draws the user’s attention to key areas.

But again…what if you wanted to check it out later?
NEW FEATURE CALLOUTS

Firefox’s new feature callout is interactive.

There’s a good chance I’ll remember how to do this.
VIDEO TUTORIAL

Provides video and voice.

Ugh, just let me in…I’ll check out the video later.

Wait, how do I get back to it?
VIDEO TUTORIAL

Yeah…they got that covered.

And they have a link to new features, as well as a new feature count badge.
Good in theory… often not so good in practice.

Just look up “Clippy” or “Microsoft Bob.”
Gamification and social comparison trigger people’s desire to complete a process and earn achievements.

Both can be effective… but also expensive to implement.

Social comparison can also backfire and cause users to abandon.
I earned a badge!

Yay.
SOCIAL FACILITATION

Showing frequently asked questions and answers.

Providing easy access to user forums and expert help.
MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM THESE PATTERNS

Let the user return to the onboarding content later.
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Contextual assistance is great in theory, but hard in practice.

Gamification and social comparison can increase motivation, but are costly. And social comparison can backfire.

Social facilitation requires critical mass or it suffers from the “empty store shelf” problem.
Going Deeper:
Onboarding Principles
10 ONBOARDING PRINCIPLES

1. Present a clear value proposition.
2. Engage emotional and aspirational motivations.
3. Doing is better than showing or telling.
4. Minimize friction and barriers.
5. Stock the shelves. Avoid the empty store.
6. Don’t ask for a commitment before the user is ready.
7. Leverage social comparison and gamification. But don’t be cheesy.
8. Support learning and mastery at the point of need.
9. Share content via different channels to encourage engagement.
10. Measure and test!

Partially adapted from Lisa Battle, First Impressions Matter: Onboarding for First Time Users. UXPA 2016.
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Office Lens

Clear value proposition
Medium

Clear value proposition

Read and write the stories that matter to you.

Sign in with Twitter
Sign in with Facebook
Sign in with Google
Sign in with email
Amazon Silk Browser

Unclear value proposition.

I’d like another browser please.
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Aspirational appeal - “my best self”
Moqups

It’s all about them.

Not me and my better self.
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WordPress

Showing and telling at warp speed.

I’m not going to remember any of this.
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Moqups again

No signup!

Get in there and play!
Medium again

I just want to read some stories...

Do I really have to slog through yet another dumb signup flow?
Ugh.
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InVision

They give you nice samples to play with.
Flipboard

Takes you right to the content.

The callout also supports learning.
Pocket

Big empty.

But at least they gave me some calls to action.
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Moqups again

No commitment until I’m good and ready!
Google News

Gives me a good reason for tracking my location.
Google News again

Same flow!

I know what notifications are. Why would I want these notifications?

Denied.
Facebook

Um, no.
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Stack Exchange

Badging and reputation are rewards.
I couldn’t find any gamification and social facilitation anti-patterns…probably because they’re removed for failure.

But I’m sure they’re out there.

Maybe Amazon’s reviewer system?

Wikipedia?
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Gmail

I started selecting multiple items.

It recognized this and offered information.
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InVision

Lower the perceived cost of adoption.
Proto.io

Lower the perceived cost of adoption.
And don’t forget the obvious...
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Dark Patterns In Onboarding
Are there dark patterns lurking in the onboarding experience?
Tricks used in websites and apps that make you buy or sign up for things that you didn't mean to.

- DarkPatterns.org
TYPES OF DARK PATTERNS

Bait and Switch
Confirmshaming
Disguised Ads
Forced Continuity
Friend Spam
Hidden Costs
Misdirection
Price Comparison Prevention
Privacy Zuckering
Roach Motel

https://darkpatterns.org/types-of-dark-pattern
Privacy Zuckering

You are tricked into publicly sharing more information about yourself than you intended to.

- DarkPatterns.org
LinkedIn

Friend spam + privacy Zuckering.

Social facilitation run amok.

https://medium.com/@danrschlosser/linkedin-dark-patterns-3ae726fe1462
LinkedIn

Friend spam + privacy Zuckering.

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LinkedIn

Friend spam + privacy Zuckering.

Social facilitation run amok.

https://medium.com/@danrschlosser/linkedin-dark-patterns-3ae726fe1462
LinkedIn

We'll import your address book to suggest connections and help you manage your contacts. Learn More

Wait..what?

https://medium.com/@danrschlosser/linkedin-dark-patterns-3ae726fe1462
LinkedIn

What does Cancel do?

If I click it, did I just waste a lot of time?

https://medium.com/@danrschlosser/linkedin-dark-patterns-3ae726fe1462
LinkedIn

Intentionally “misused” error message

https://medium.com/@danrschlosser/linkedin-dark-patterns-3ae726fe1462
Mild shaming

The “make it stop” link.

https://medium.com/@danrschlosser/linkedin-dark-patterns-3ae726fe1462
The dark patterns continue…

The confirmation email looks like a lowering cost of adoption pattern.

It’s actually just more Zuckering.
Oh FFS…
Is this ethical?

Why or why not?
Ethics And Design
A realization I had while writing this talk…
Not necessarily immoral or unethical. But it’s divorced from ethics and morality.
Ethics

Dictionary

Enter a word, e.g. "pie"

eth·ics
/ˈeTHiks/

noun

1. moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity.
   "medical ethics also enter into the question"
   synonyms: moral code, morals, morality, values, rights and wrongs, principles, ideals, standards
   of behavior), value system, virtues, dictates of conscience
   "your so-called newspaper is clearly not burdened by a sense of ethics"

2. the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.

Translations, word origin, and more definitions

So says Google
Ethics

eth·ic | \
\-thik

Definition of ethic

1 ethics plural in form but singular or plural in construction : the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation

2 a : a set of moral principles : a theory or system of moral values
   // the present-day materialistic ethic
   // an old-fashioned work ethic
   —often used in plural but singular or plural in construction
   // an elaborate ethics
   // Christian ethics

b ethics plural in form but singular or plural in construction : the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group
   // professional ethics

c : a guiding philosophy

d : a consciousness of moral importance
   // forge a conservation ethic

3 ethics plural : a set of moral issues or aspects (such as rightness)
   // debated the ethics of human cloning
Ethics are internal guidelines - our “firmware” - governing how we treat each other.
Ethics are influenced by national culture, religion, ethnic culture, upbringing, education, profession, etc.
A person, with their unique upbringing, education, economic status, etc.
Everything affects our personal ethics.

People in the same profession will differ. Sometimes in big ways.
Ethics determine how we treat the living…and the dead.
Ethics are really interesting because they don’t necessarily align with inherently moral or good behavior.
Professional vs. personal ethics

Think about a defense attorney...
What’s a primary ethical guideline in organized crime?
Let’s make an assumption…

Designers want to do right by people.
And yet, some organizations employ our designs in ways that add to human suffering.
Facebook use, envy, and depression among college students: Is facebooking depressing?
EC Tandoc, P Ferrucci, M Duffy - Computers in Human Behavior, 2015 - Elsevier
... satisfaction reduced self-reported depression scores, but the former had a larger effect on reducing ... Because envy resulting from exposure to Facebook can lead to such negative health issues, Krasanova et al ... software showed that for the study to be able to detect effects as small ...
☆ 99 Cited by 269  Related articles  All 8 versions

[HTML] Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults
E Kross, P Verduyn, E Demiralp, J Park, DS Lee, N Lin... - PloS one, 2013 - journals.plos.org
... If harmful social comparisons explain how Facebook use predicts declines in affective well-being, it is possible ... Future research should administer two unipolar affect questions to assess positive and negative affect separately to address ... Appl Psychol Health Well Being 3: 1–43 ...
☆ 99 Cited by 719  Related articles  All 30 versions ▷

Negative social comparison on Facebook and depressive symptoms: Rumination as a mechanism.
BA Feinstein, R Hershenberg, V Bhatia... - ... of Popular Media ..., 2013 - psycnet.apa.org
... of research to test a priori hypotheses regarding Facebook use and mental health, we hope to shed light on the processes that may render individuals more vulnerable to negative effects of Facebook ... That said, that this effect was so robust in a nonclinical sample that commonly ...
☆ 99 Cited by 174  Related articles  All 4 versions
**Instagram**: instasad?: exploring associations among *Instagram use*, depressive symptoms, *negative* social comparison, and strangers followed

K Lup, L Trub, L Rosenthal - Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social ..., 2015 - liebertpub.com

... the way for future research that more closely establishes and explores the moderating effect of following ... for their well-being, and to help parents, teachers, and mental health workers help children and teens navigate social networking to reduce *negative effects* and support ...

🌟 🔮 Cited by 92 Related articles All 10 versions

**Instagram unfiltered**: Exploring associations of body image satisfaction, *Instagram* selfie posting, and *negative* romantic relationship outcomes

LJ Ridgway, RB Clayton - Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social ..., 2016 - liebertpub.com

... *use*, including Facebook and Twitter *use*, can have damaging *effects* on health 3 and ... associated with Facebook and Twitter *use*, as well as the *negative effects* associated with ... the form of *Instagram* selfie posts, risk of *Instagram*-related conflict and *negative* romantic relationship ...

🌟 🔮 Cited by 49 Related articles All 4 versions
And let’s not forget…

Destructive social discourse

Societal polarization

Violence
Clearly there’s a dark side to “persuasive” and “seductive” design.
What are our professional ethics?

Do we have any?
Code of Conduct for User Experience Professionals

Introduction

This code of conduct is intended to cover situations commonly encountered by user experience (UX) practitioners. Membership includes acceptance of this code. The Code is stated in two parts. Part One is a list of statements of UXPA Ethical Principles. Part Two contains examples of the practice of the Principles.

Adherence to This Code of Conduct

User experience (UX) practitioners shall ensure that their work meets the Ethical Principles laid out in this code of conduct. UX practitioners shall report any violations of this code of ethics to the Vice President of the User Experience Professionals Association. A review of the allegations will be conducted by the UXPA Ethics Advisory Committee. Violations of this code may lead to expulsion from the User Experience Professionals Association.

Part One: Ethical Principles

- Act in the best interest of everyone
- Be honest with everyone
- Do no harm and if possible provide benefits
- Act with integrity
- Avoid conflicts of interest
- Respect privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity
- Provide all resultant data

https://uxpa.org/resources/uxpa-code-professional-conduct
Code of Conduct

The IxDA seeks to advance the discipline of interaction design by fostering a community of passionate individuals dedicated to moving our mission forward.

Our mission is broad and inclusive, and our membership is passionate and diverse. While these attributes make the IxDA a strong and vibrant organization, they also bring the possibility of disagreement and cultural disconnect. As a volunteer-led organization we rely on the active participation of our community, which can only happen if all of our members feel safe and respected.

To achieve this goal, the IxDA respectfully asks the following of our membership, both for online and in-person interactions under our brand:

- To be considerate and respectful of other cultures, backgrounds and perspectives
- To maintain a professional manner and refrain from harassment or exclusionary behavior toward other members
- To endeavor to resolve misunderstandings directly, through open dialogue and respectful feedback
- To notify the organizers or moderators if you feel you have experienced harassment or have witnessed the harassment of others.

https://ixda.org/code-of-conduct/
A designer is responsible for the work they put into the world. Design is a discipline of action. You are responsible for what you put into the world.

And while it is certainly impossible to predict how any of your work may be used, it shouldn’t be a surprise when work that is meant to hurt someone fulfills its mission.

- Mike Montiero, A Designer’s Code of Ethics
What good is a frictionless onboarding experience if using the product or service makes people feel bad?
Yes, but…we don’t own the business decisions.

This is the definition of an ethical dilemma.
We may not have our hands on the financial levers of the organization.

But we do have agency. We can take action.

You can take action.
When you find yourself in a professional ethical dilemma…

Leave

Stay
When you find yourself in a professional ethical dilemma…

**Leave**
Find a better fit for you

**Stay**
Try to change the organization
When you find yourself in a professional ethical dilemma…

**Leave**

Find a better fit for you

**Stay**

Try to change the organization

…and if you are unable
When you find yourself in a professional ethical dilemma…

**Leave**

Find a better fit for you

**Stay**

Try to change the organization

…and if you are unable
So…is ethical design possible?

Of course it is.

But it’s up to us as designers to act on our ethical principles.
You have to be willing to walk away.
A person is truly ethical when they obey the compulsion to help all life, and shrinks from doing injury.

- Albert Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization
Thank you.

Talk to me about...

The UX Master’s program

KSU UXD workshops
On campus and on-premise / on-demand

psherma4@kent.edu

UX consulting
Building guitars
Whiskey

paul@shermanux.com