

Ethics for Digital Projects & Research

Workshop leaders:

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GO TO:

<http://tinyurl.com/digiethics17>



Ethics

n. Moral principles, or a system of these.

^Oxford English Dictionary Online

Digital projects & research

Projects or research that engages with the digital - i.e. that examines, uses or creates digital tools or platforms

Our approach to ethics

→ “Do the right thing”

→ Keep questioning

→ Levels of impact

1. Direct impacts on people
2. Ramifications of (re)producing categories
3. Political and economic effects

& Range of Impact

-- accessibility to your work

(We will return to this topic in more depth later...)

Source: [Annette Markham, “OKCupid data release fiasco: It’s time to rethink ethics education” \(2016\)](#)

Your digital work

Ethical concerns vary between people, disciplines, projects and tools.

Introduce yourself to the person next to you:

Name

Program

Current or upcoming digital research or projects?

Digital tools that you use?

Ethical concerns?

Workshop goals

We will:

- **consider** ethical practices to satisfy institutional needs (IRB) and working with “human subjects,”
- **create** a [working set of guidelines](#) for ethical research,
- **explore** ethical questions when doing various forms of digital research and using digital tools,
- **discuss** the ethics of example projects and methodologies,
- **envision and elaborate** on our own ideas and concerns!

Okay, ready?

Starting with ethics from the standpoint of the institution

We'll organize our review of guidelines around the following steps:

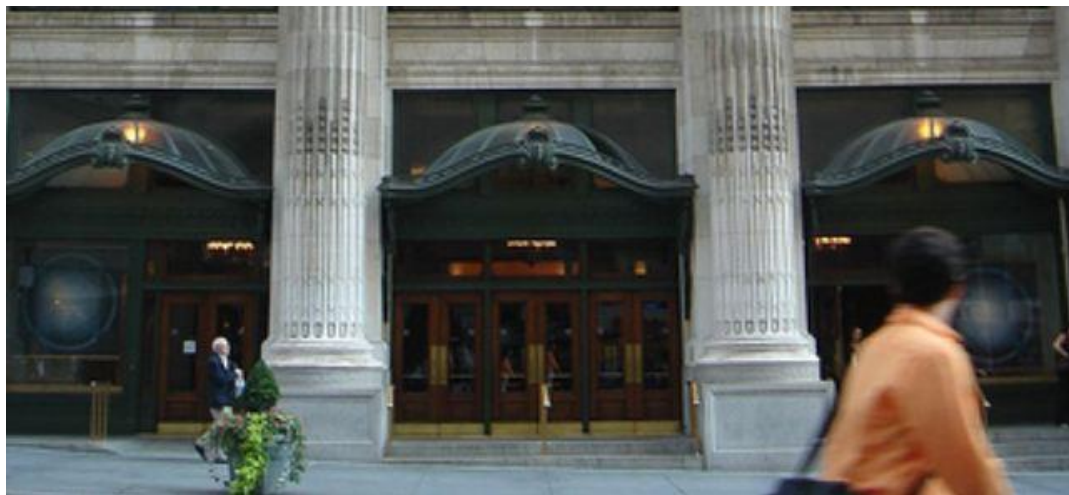
- **Institutional** ethics
- AND more **radical** ethics

THEN

- **Questions / case examples**

Assess / Share results.

Messy categories, and we'll discuss why.



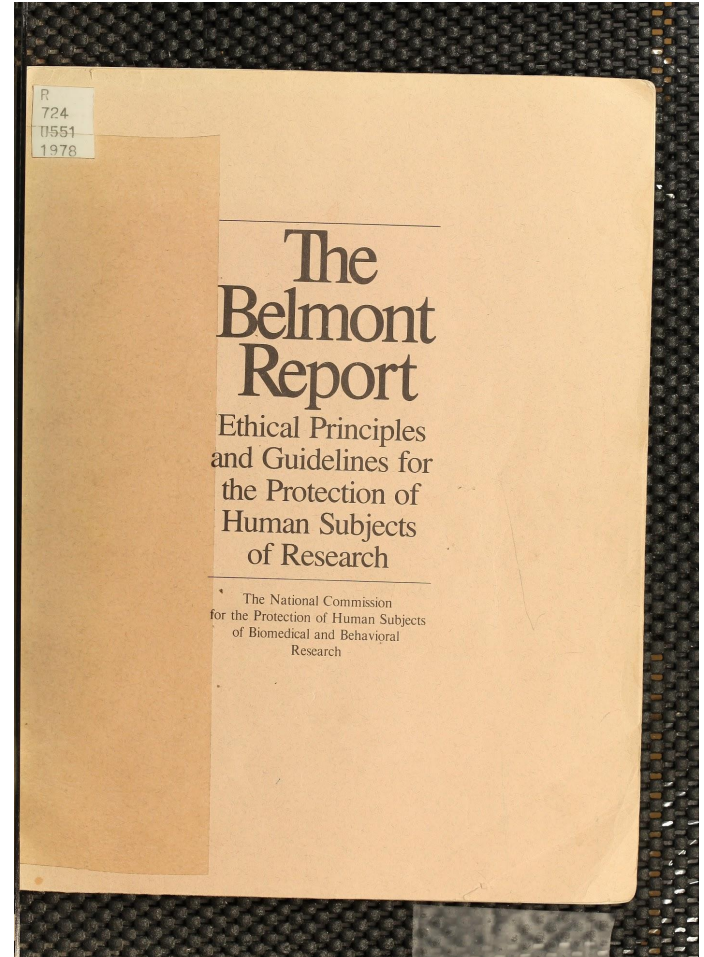
<https://gcdi.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>

Belmont Report

National Research Act of 1974

Est. the National Commission for the Protection
of Human Subjects of Biomedical and
Behavioral Research

Learn more [here](#)



<https://archive.org/details/belmontreporteth00unit>

Belmont Report

3 core principles:

1. **Respect for persons**
2. **Beneficence**
3. **Justice**

Learn more [here](#)

Belmont Report

Key concerns when applying the 3 principles:

1. Informed consent

- a. Information, not deception
- b. Comprehension
- c. Voluntariness & right to withdraw

2. Assessment of risks and benefits

- a. The nature and scope of risks and benefits - always minimize risk of harm!
 - i. E.g. question of anonymity
- b. The systematic assessment of risks and benefits

3. Selection of subjects

Source: *The Belmont Report*

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The [CUNY Human Research Protection Program \(HRPP\)](#)

“The program provides oversight, administrative support and educational training to ensure that CUNY research complies with federal and State regulations, University policy and the highest ethical standards...

The CUNY HRPP comprises of 5 University Integrated Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and 19 on-site HRPP offices.”



<http://www.southernfriedscience.com/interdisciplinarity-and-the-irb/>

For guidelines on when CUNY HRPP or IRB Review is required, click [here](#)

For additional information on the CUNY HRPP policies & procedures, click [here](#)

Pause.

**Jot down some notes to our
guidelines.**

Dig Deeper...

More radical ethics

Levels of impact:

1. Direct impacts on **people**
2. Ramifications of (re)producing **categories**
3. **Political and economic** effects

& Range of impact:

→ **accessibility** to your work

Source: [Annette Markham, “OKCupid data release fiasco: It’s time to rethink ethics education” \(2016\)](#)

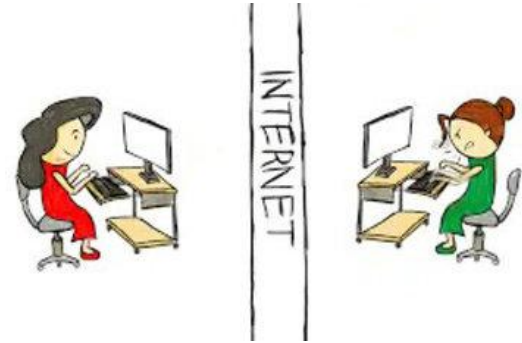
... But what counts as human? & what (personal) data should be off limits?

Some commonly blurred definitions:

- “Human subjects”
- Public vs. Private
- Data(Text) vs. Persons

Learn more from the [2012 Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research report by the the AoIR Ethics Working Committee](#)

Human subjects & the “distance principle”



<https://www.englishcentral.com/video/13391/the-real-person-behind-every-computer>

A working definition of the “distance principle”:

- “the extent to which Internet texts or data sets might connect to persons” even when “the conceptual or experiential distance between the researcher and author/participant [does not appear to be] close” (Markam & Buchanon, page 10)

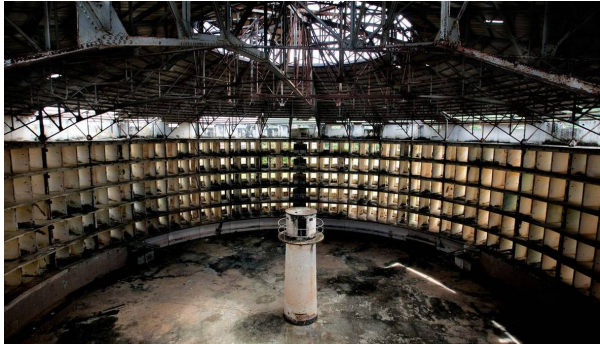
Source: Annette Markam & Elizabeth Buchanon, “Ethical Concerns in Internet Research”

“Public” data

“In an age of digital media, do we really have any **privacy**?” Is the internet itself a panopticon for the surveillance of our interactions? (Barnes)

What **forms of “public” data** are ethical to use? Or require **attribution**?

How might we (inadvertently) **share data**?



<http://filosofiagarraf.blogspot.com/2015/06/encuentro-filosofico-abril-de-2015.html>

Useful sources:

- [Gregory Donovan, MyDigitalFootprint.ORG](http://MyDigitalFootprint.ORG)
- [Susan Barnes, “A Privacy Paradox” \(2006\)](#)
- [Berendt, Büchler, & Rockwell, “Is it Research or is it Spying? Thinking-Through Ethics in Big Data AI and Other Knowledge Sciences” \(2015\)](#)



Kate Crawford ✓
@katecrawford

Follow

Repeat after me: 'just using public data' doesn't make it ethical. Just because you're researchers doesn't mean you're not doxxing.

9:59 AM - 3 Mar 2016

↩️ ↻ 310 ❤️ 389

<http://annetmarkham.com/2016/05/okcupid-data-release-fiasco-its-time-to-rethink-ethics-education/>

The question of personhood

“Is an avatar a person?”

“Is one’s digital information an extension of the self?” (AoIR)



"An Avatar Forever Voyaging 051" Flickr user Torley, 2006

Source: the [2012 Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research report by the the AoIR Ethics Working Committee](#)

Pause.

Update our guidelines...

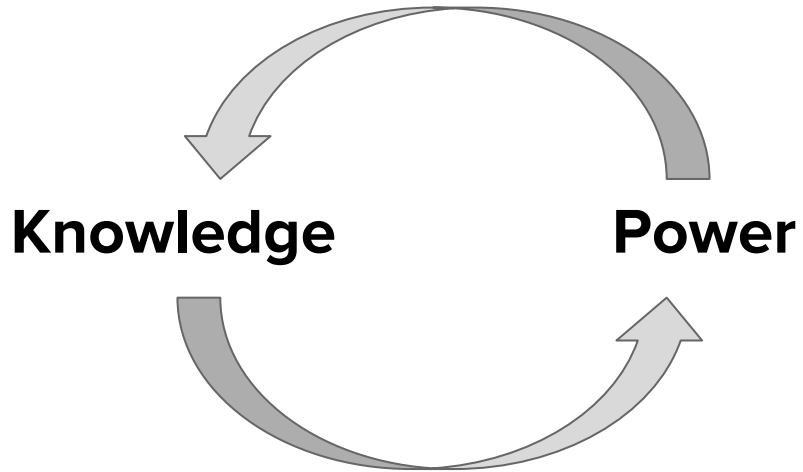
Ramifications of (re)producing categories

Decisions on the categories & boundaries we use shape our:

- Datasets
- Algorithms
- Maps

... & (re)producing definitional categories in our projects may have political or economic effects!

Politics of knowledge production

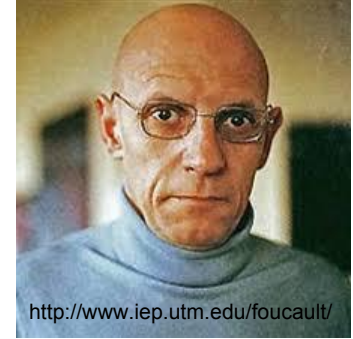


Stuart Hall



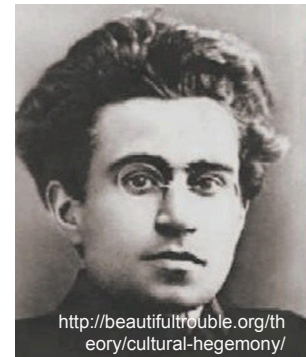
<http://quoteaddicts.com/author/stuart-hall>

Michel Foucault



<http://www.iep.utm.edu/foucault/>

Antonio Gramsci

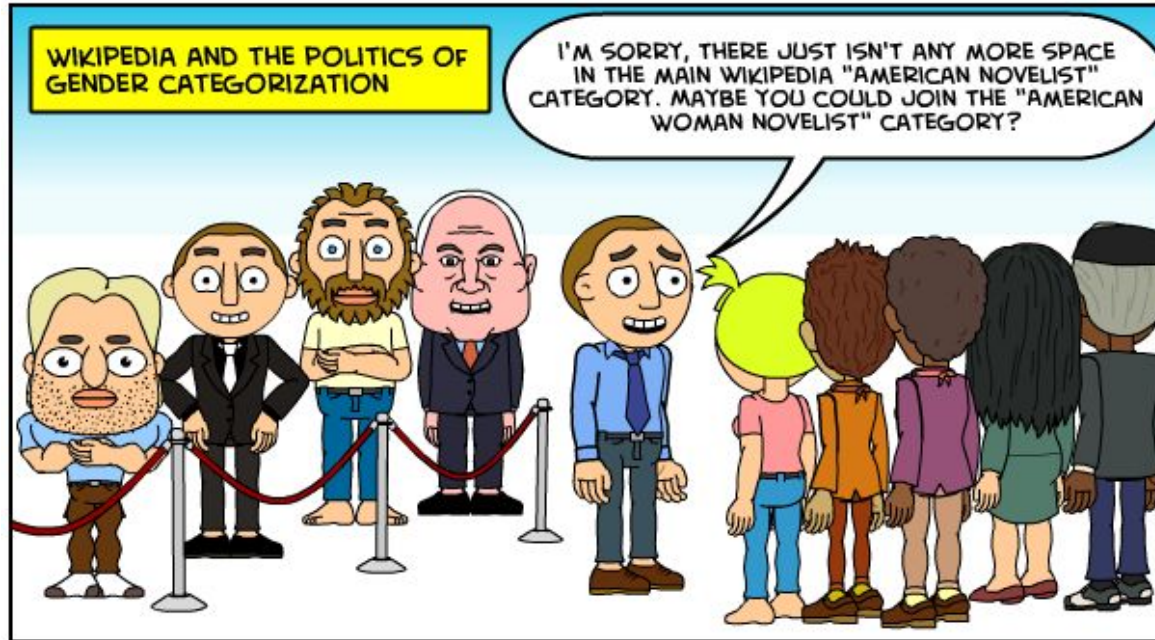


<http://beautifultrouble.org/theory/cultural-hegemony/>

Ex: Wikipedia & other sites or archives

POSTCOLONIAL #DH, NO. 28

BY ADELINE KOH



<http://dhpoco.tumblr.com/tagged/comics>

WWW.BITSTRIPS.COM

Learn more on [Postcolonial Digital Humanities](#)

Political & economic impacts

Some questions to consider:

- Whose **labor** and what **materials** are used to make the digital tools you use?
- Could your research or project be used to justify or facilitate **state control** or **surveillance**?
- Could it influence **political discourse**?
Modes of **profit**?



<http://www.kirbasinstitute.com/2016/02/politics-environment-care-and-what-we-can-do/>



Accessibility to your work

- Why use or produce open source tools? Or [creative commons](#) materials?



- Digital accessibility for differently abled and language-speaking individuals

Some sources to check out:

- Scott Dexter's book, [Decoding Liberation: The Promise of Free and Open Source Software](#)
- [Dr. Joshua Miele](#)'s work on digital accessibility - see a review of his GC talk by Nanyamkah Mars [here](#)
- Gideon Lewis-Kraus, ["The Great AI Awakening"](#) on Google Translate

Pause.

Update our guidelines...

Ready for some case examples?

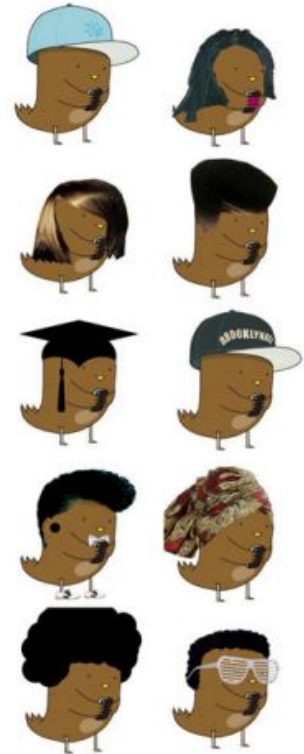
Ex. 1: USC Study on “Black Twitter”

Check out [their project summary](#), read [this brief article](#) and discuss:

Does this project involve “human subjects”?

Are Tweets “public” data?

In reference to the article, why did this project invoke such controversy?



Ex. 2: Interference Archive (IA)

Check out [their website](#), read [this brief article](#) and discuss:

What kinds of materials does IA host and do they have rights to it?

In reference to the article, how does IA see itself as “resisting the hierarchy”?

What levels of impact does IA aim to take into account?



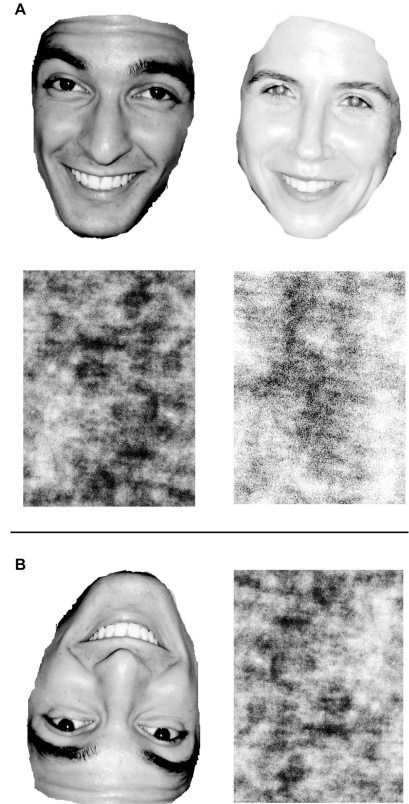
Ex. 3: “The Science of ‘Gaydar’”

Check out [their academic article](#) and [their summary of it for NYT](#), and discuss:

What kinds of “human subjects” are involved in this study?

Is a social media photo of oneself an extension of the self?

Does their methodology raise any ethical concerns?



<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0036671>

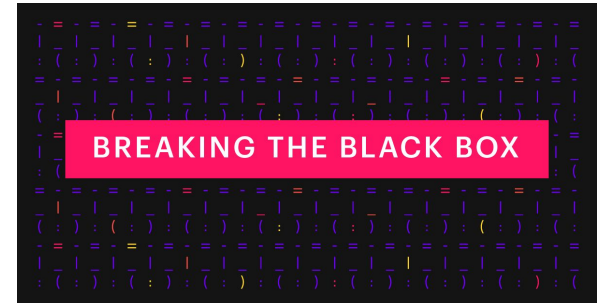
Ex. 4: “Breaking the Black Box”

Check out [ProPublica](#)’s project “[Breaking the Black Box](#),” and discuss:

What kinds of tools and information is this project producing?

What levels of impact does it aim to take into account?

Does this project involve “human subjects”?



An overview of areas of concern for digital research

- Go to [this page on “Internet Research”](#) by the USC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects,
- Look through the various subheadings,
- Find an example of an issue that you have encountered or think you might run into in your own work,
- Discuss with your partner

Then we will share as a class

Fill out the exit slip!

Developing our own ethical digital research

{determine institutional requirements}

will you apply for IRB?

{explore more radical ethics}

what levels of impact will you consider?

{reassess your research methodology}

how will the above affect your research methods & design?

Review the collective guidelines we have created so far and any additional notes you jotted down, and make a few notes by yourself about the questions listed on the left.

Discuss with your partner, and share with us!

Debrief.

- **developed** our understanding of ethical practices when doing digital research
- **explored** ethical questions when doing various forms of digital research and using digital tools
- **discussed** alternative approaches and case examples
- **created** a [working set of guidelines](#) for ethical digital research

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