

Ethics for Digital Projects and Research

SESSION LEADER:

ALEXIS GRANT, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Based on content created by kelsey chatlosh @kchatlosh

[See: README.MD]



institutional compliance

ethics beyond compliance

[See: README.MD]

What are ethics?

What do we mean by digital
projects and research?

[See: introduction.md]

“situated ethics”

[See: [introduction.md](#)]

for example: how were computers developed? By whom? Where? Why?
(see Broussard 2018, chapter 6)

Ethics from the
standpoint of the
institution



Source: https://intentionalmuseum.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/1609_color_nit-picking_irb.jpg

[See: institutional.md]

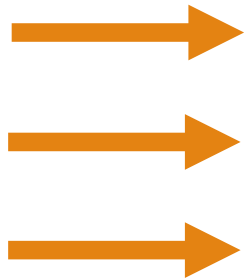
The Belmont Report

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, created as a result of the National Research Act of 1974, published the Belmont Report in 1979.

The Belmont Report

3 CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Respect for persons
2. Beneficence
3. Justice



3 KEY CONCERNS

1. Informed consent
2. Assessment of risks and benefits
3. Selection of subjects

Every university or research institution must, legally, have its own or an affiliated *Institutional Review Board (IRB)*.

IRB

Usually, IRB review is required when research is...

- Conducted at this organization;
- Conducted by or under the direction of any employee or agent of this organization (including students) in connection with his or her organization responsibilities;
- Conducted by or under the direction of any employee or agent (including students) of this organization using any property or facility of this organization; or
- Involving the use of this organization's non-public information to identify, contact, or study human subjects.

Pair up and discuss...

In 1 minute each, what is the *purpose* of your project—
what does it *aim* to do?

In 1 minute each, what is the *design* of your project—
how will you do this?

In relation to each of your projects' purpose and design, what might be some ethical concerns that fall beyond questions of legality or the purview of the IRB?

Share as a class.

[See: [beyond.md](#)]

Ethics beyond compliance

An “impact approach”

(Markham 2016 [tinyurl.com/markhamethics])

[See: [levelsimpact.md](#)]

Overview

This session, drawing from Markham (2016), will focus on three *levels of impact*:

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

Overview

Additionally, this workshop will address the *range of impact*, or the range of accessibility to your work:

- to marginalized populations and communities
- to people with disabilities,
- to people in different countries or who speak different languages, and
- in terms of cost and proprietary accessibility.

Direct Impacts on People

(LEVEL OF IMPACT 1)

Direct Impacts on People

“how our methods of data collection impact humans, directly” (Markham 2016)

[See: [impact1.md](#)]

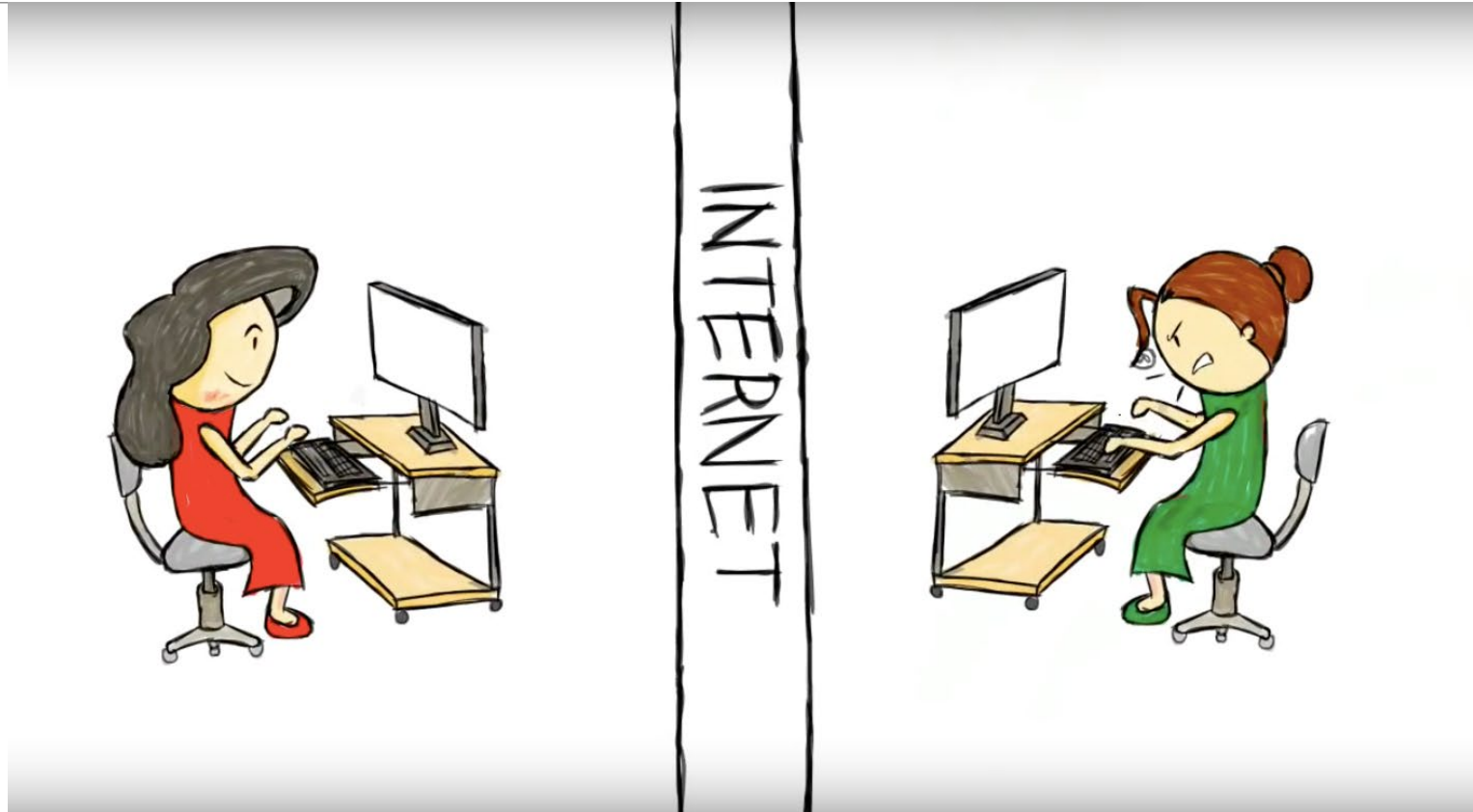
What counts as "human"?
What data should be off limits?

Commonly blurred definitions

- “human subjects”
- public vs. private
- data(text) vs. persons

(Source: AOIR 2012 report)

The Distance Principle



[Image source: A still image from "A real person, a lot like you" by Derek Sivers, shared with his permission]

[See: [impact1.md](#)]

“Public Data”

[See: [impact1cont.md](#)]

The Question of Personhood

[See: [impact1cont.md](#)]

Considerations of Representation

[See: [impact1cont.md](#)]

Reflection

Does this data violate any privacy or confidentiality?

Is my data representative?

Would the people this data comes from want it used this way?

Activity

Review [Joshua Tabak and Vivian Zayas's academic article](#) [tinyurl.com/tabakzayas] and [their summary of it for the New York Times](#) [tinyurl.com/gaydarscience], 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?

Discuss with your table, then share as a group.

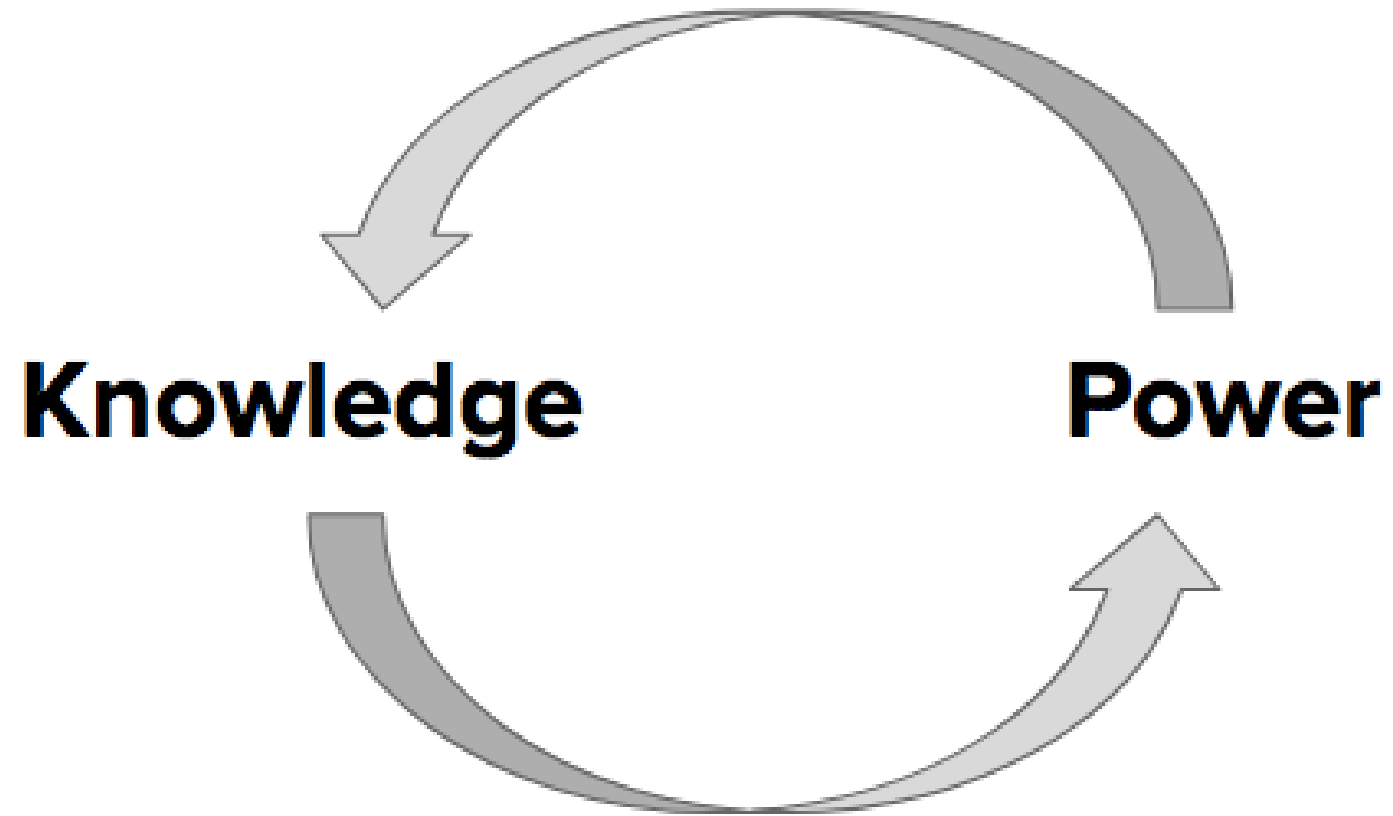
Further reading: [Patrick Sweeney, "Images of Faces Gleaned from Social Media in Social Psychological Research on Sexual Orientation," 2017](#) [tinyurl.com/sweeneyimages]

Politics of Knowledge Production and Categorization

THE RAMIFICATIONS OF (RE)PRODUCING CATEGORIES
(LEVEL OF IMPACT 2)

[See: [impact2.md](#)]

“how our methods of organizing data, analytical interpretations, or findings as shared datasets are being used—or might be used—to *build definitional categories* or to *profile particular groups*” (Markham 2016)



[See: [impact2.md](#)]

Discuss as a group...

How are knowledge and power mutually constituted, according to the theorizations of Gramsci, Hall, Foucault, Freire, or others, perhaps from your own discipline?

How might we apply the concepts below when thinking through ethics for digital research and projects?

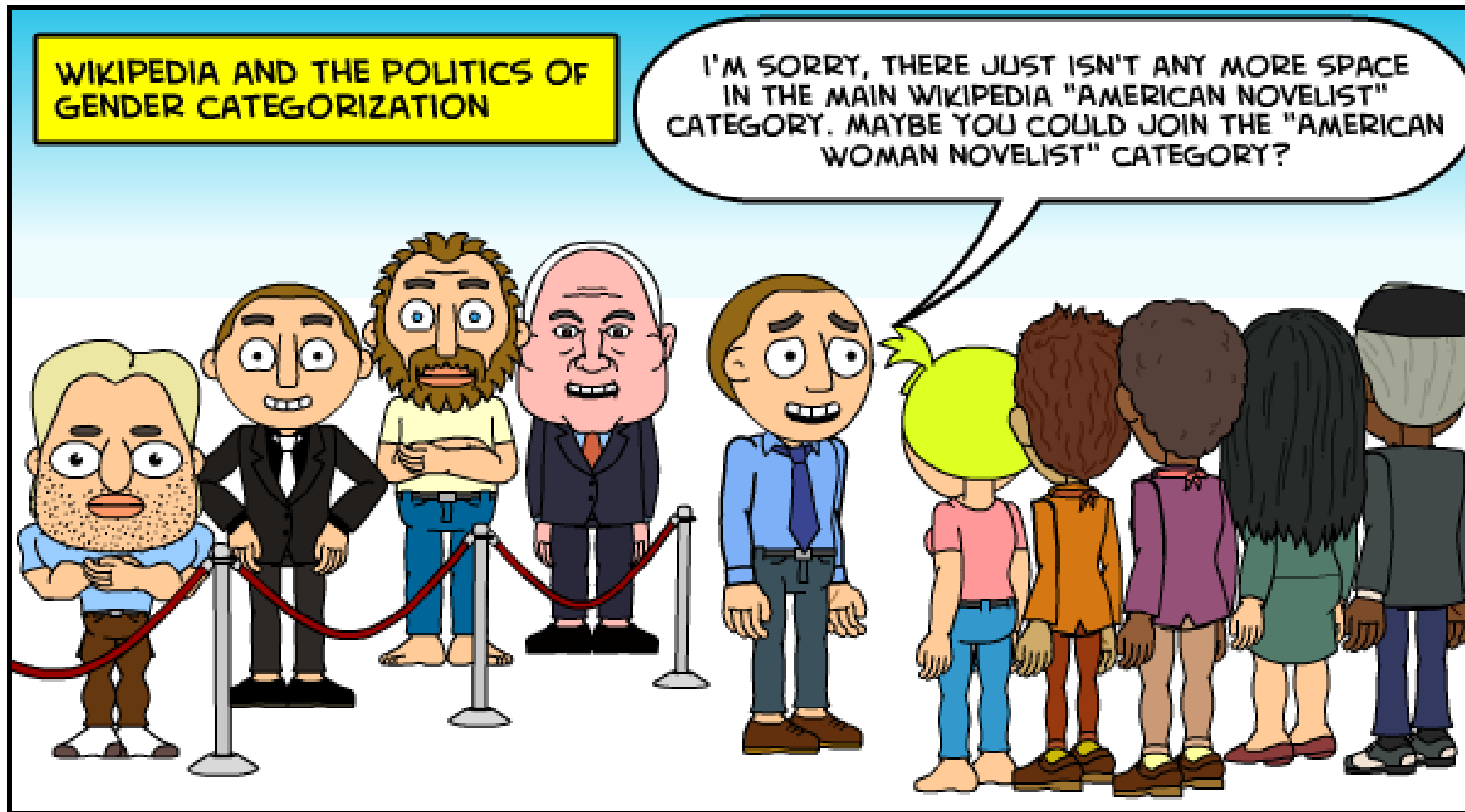
How do my assumptions and biases impact my research approach?

[See: [impact2.md](#)]

How do digital tools and projects
categorize or rely on
categorizations?

[See: [impact2.md](#)]

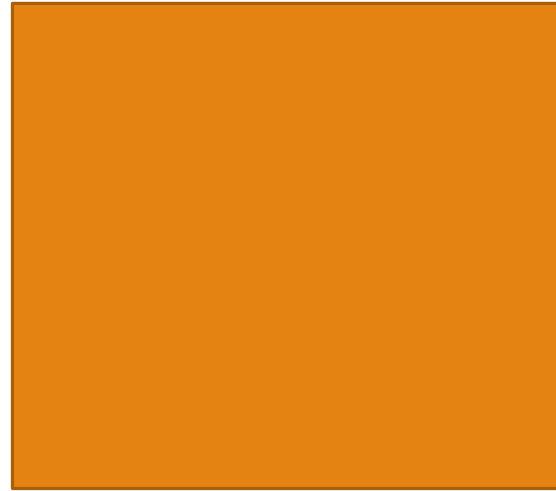
What are some ramifications of
(re)producing categories?



[Image source: A comic by Adeline Koh from #DHPoco: Postcolonial Digital Humanities, shared here with her permission.]

[See: [impact2cont.md](#)]

bias in



bias out

Can categorical hierarchies and existing bias be *resisted* through digital projects? If so, how?

Reflection

What are assumptions that were already made before I got the data?

What assumptions am I making?

How does my own perspective and identity influence my approach?

Activity

Let's analyze and discuss a case study.

Check out the [Interference Archive \(IA\) website](https://interferencearchive.org) [interferencearchive.org], read [this brief article](https://tinyurl.com/joynerhidden) [tinyurl.com/joynerhidden] 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” (Joyner 2016)?
- What levels of impact does IA aim to take into account?

Discuss with your table, then share as a group.

[See: impact2cont.md]

Social, Political, and Economic Impacts

(LEVEL OF IMPACT 3)

[See: [impact3.md](#)]

Whose *labor* and what *materials* are used to make the digital tools we use? How should we attribute others' labor? How can we be held accountable?

How may digital projects or research be used to justify or facilitate potentially harmful *control* or *surveillance*?

How may digital projects or research influence *social or political discourse*? Modes of *profit*?

All projects and research have impacts.



[Image source: Image source: Sergiu Bacioiu from Romania, "Ripple effect on water," Wikimedia, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.]

[See: [impact3.md](#)]

Pair up and discuss...

Whose labor and what materials do you rely upon to do your work?

Could your research or project be used to justify or facilitate potentially harmful control or surveillance?

Will your work be used for profit, for who?

How could your work cause changes to or justify social, economic or political discourses?

Share as a class.

[See: [impact3.md](#)]

Range of Impact

ACCESSIBILITY OF YOUR WORK

[See: [range.md](#)]

What is universal design?
What is accessibility?

Accessibility to marginalized
populations and communities

[See: range.md]

Accessibility to people with disabilities

[See: [range.md](#)]

International accessibility and language access

[See: [range.md](#)]

Openness and accessibility

[See: [range.md](#)]

*A note on "*free software*" and user control (Factor interview with Stallman, 2017)

Other kinds of accessibility?

[See: [range.md](#)]

When might researchers or makers *not* want to make their work or data fully open and accessible?

When might researchers or makers decide *not* to even record data or media, or to delete?

Pair up and discuss...

Who will be able to
access your research or
project?

Where and through
what media will it be
accessible?

Will it cost money to
access?

Will it be accessible in
different languages?

Will it be accessible to
people with visual,
hearing, mobility, or
other physical, sensory,
or cognitive disabilities?

Share as a class.

[See: [range.md](#)]

See additional *case examples*, a *glossary* of key terms and concepts, and a *resources* page on the DHRI ethics curriculum on GitHub

[See: [cases.md](#), [glossary.md](#), and [resources.md](#)]

Debrief

By the end of this workshop, participants have:

- Reviewed ethical practices to satisfy institutional needs (IRB) when working with "human subjects."
- Learned specific ethical questions and levels of impact to consider when doing various forms of digital research and using digital tools.
- Engaged with alternative approaches and case examples.
- Envisioned the ethics of their own projects and methodologies.

[See: review.md]

Next Steps

- Determine institutional requirements
- Explore ethics beyond compliance
- Reassess your research methodology

[See: review.md]