Ethics

Overview, and topics for discussion

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Today’s Agenda

Ethics

- Overview and topics for discussion.
- Course conclusion and wrap-up.

Overview

And topics for discussion

Ethics

Motivation

- I think we can agree that **the more science, the better**.
- Thanks to science we know that:

  ☑ Vaccines save lives.

  ☑ Democracies perform better than autocracies.

  ☑ **Examples from your field?**
  Comment on those sort of "truths" or "facts" that exist in your respective paradigms.

- **How far are we willing to go, ethically and practically, to uncover these "truths"? What is the limit?**

Why do we need to care about *ethics*?

Moreover, what are the ethicals parameters we should follow?

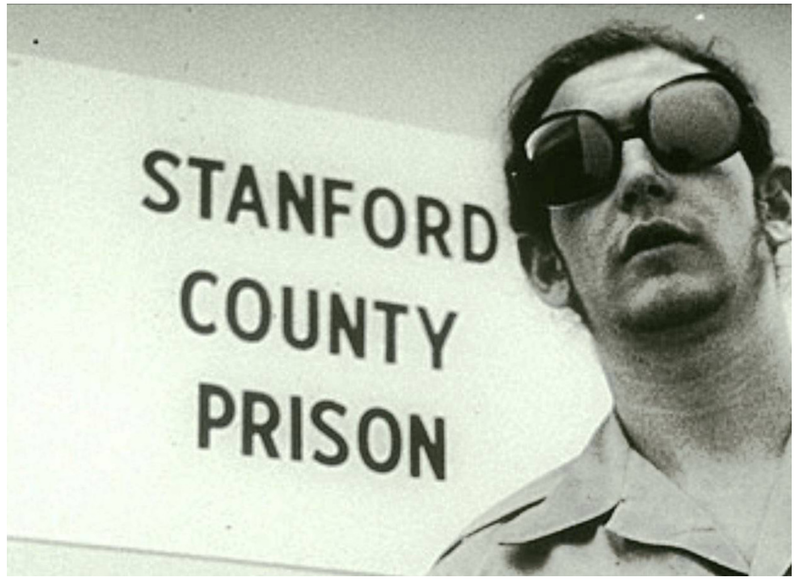
Since anything could be claimed as an "experiment in the name of science," we have to mind ethical considerations

There are horrid examples of "scientific" experiments.

Ethics

Motivation

- Unfortunately, there are countless of **experiments** that went **horribly wrong**.
- In **natural** "**sciences**," the Nazi regime performed a number of **atrocities** "**in the name of science**."
- In **social sciences**, there are also examples of **bad science**:
    1. **The Milgram Experiment**.
    2. **The Stanford Prison Experiment**.



Social Psychology

Milgram Experiment

Link

Social Psychology

The Stanford Prison Experiment

Link

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Motivation

- Otherwise, these are designs that answer **important questions**:
  - **What makes ordinary people to follow cruel orders?**
  - **How do situational factors and assigned social roles (guard, prisoner) influence individuals' behavior?**
- Moreover, one could argue that *some* lessons were learned.
  - **E.g., now we might know more about the "authoritarian personality."**
- But at what cost**?** (What was wrong with these experiment)**?** Is it justified**?** **Discuss**.

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From Nuremberg to Modern Guidelines

- The **foundation** **of ethical research practices** can be traced to the **Nuremberg Code** (1948), established in response to atrocities committed during World War II.
- It emphasized:
  - **Voluntary consent**.
  - **Risk minimization**.
  - **Proportionality between societal benefits and individual risks**.

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From Nuremberg to Modern Guidelines

- Subsequent developments, such as the **Belmont Report** (1979), expanded on these ideas:

  1. **Respect for participants**: autonomy.
     - Deception.
     - Informed consent.
  2. **Beneficence**: minimizing harm while maximizing potential benefits.
  3. **Justice**: achieving a “healthy” balance between benefits and risks/costs/burdens.

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Deception in Experiments

- What is **“deception”?**
  - The **intentional** provision of **false** or **misleading** information to participants or the i**ntentional withholding** of critical details about the study’s purpose, procedures, or outcomes.

- **Why would we like to deceive participants?**

  ✓To prevent participants from **altering their natural behavior** due to awareness of the study’s goals (“**demand effects**”).

- **It’s tough: It is not ethical to deceive but sometimes we need it.**
  Deception increases internal validity of the study (minimizes biases).

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Deception in Experiments

- **Deceptive purpose**: misleading participants **about the true objectives of the research** to avoid biasing their responses.
  Tough question: do we always have to tell them the truth, and nothing but the truth to our participants?

- **Deceptive materials**: using **fabricated or false stimuli** (fake news articles, emails, or videos) to “elicit” (**?**) authentic reactions.

- **Deceptive identities**: employing **actors** who pose as participants to influence the study’s outcomes.

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Informed Consent and Voluntariness

- What is an “**informed consent**”?
  - The process by which researchers ensure that participants voluntarily agree to take part in a study after being with sufficient information about its purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits.

    Have you read/seen/written one?
  - This ensures that their decision to participate is **free from coercion or deception**.

Title of the Study:

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by [**Researcher's Name(s)**] at [**Institution Name**]. **The purpose of this study is** to [briefly describe the study's objective]. Your participation is voluntary, and **you may withdraw at any time without penalty**.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to [describe what participants will do]. The study will take approximately [insert duration].

Potential Risks and Benefits:
- **Risks**: The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, you **may feel [describe potential risks, such as mild discomfort or emotional response]**.
- **Benefits**: While there may be no direct **benefits to you [or you will be compensated with e.g. 30 euros**], your participation will contribute to a better understanding of [topic of study].

Confidentiality:
Your responses will remain confidential/anonymous. [**Add details about data storage and handling**.]

Voluntary Participation:
Participation is completely voluntary. **You are free to skip any question or stop participating at any time**. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate.

Questions:
If you have any questions about the study, please contact [Researcher's Name] at [Email Address] or [Phone Number]. For questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact [Institution's Ethics Board/IRB] at [Ethics Board Contact Information].

Consent:
By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood this information, and you agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher's Name and Contact Information:
[Name]
[Email]
[Phone]

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Informed Consent and Voluntariness

- Some potential **challenges**:
  - In **field experiments**, obtaining individual consent may be **impractical** when studying communities or institutions. **Why?**
  - In **survey experiments**, providing **full information about study objectives** may introduce biases (**demand biases**), compromising internal validity. **Why?**
- How can we address these challenges**?**
  - "**Debriefing**" (**?**)
    - **Informs participants about the study's true nature *after* their participation.**

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Balancing Risks and Benefits

- **We would like to avoid situations where the benefits are so little (say the research question is unjustified) and the human costs are too high.**
- Thus, we should weight the potential **benefits** (**knowledge**) against the **risks** to participants.
- **Can you think of a research question that is *unbalanced* in terms of potential harms and expected benefits?**

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Balancing Risks and Benefits

- **Expected benefits:**
  - Everything we do should generate insights that can inform policies, improve understanding of social phenomena, or address critical issues in society. **Justified**.
  - **What are the kinds of gains in your respective fields?**

- **Potential Harms**:
  - **Physical harm**. **Is it possible in our field?**
  - **Psychological harm**. Stress, discomfort, or embarrassment, especially in studies involving sensitive topics. **Examples?**
  - **Social Harm**. Breaches of confidentiality or public exposure can damage participants' reputations. **Examples?**

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Justice

- **No group of participants** should bear too many risks or burdens without a proportionate share of the benefits.

☑ Researchers must avoid targeting **vulnerable populations** solely because they are **accessible**, **convenient** (cheaper), or **less likely to resist** participation (**?**).

- **Benefits of research** (e.g., knowledge, direct interventions) should be distributed equitably among the populations studied.

☑ Populations bearing the risks of research should also have **access to the benefits**, whether they are scientific advancements, public health policies, or direct interventions (**?**).

Course conclusion and wrap-up

Course Wrap-up

What we did

- **Learned about different kinds of experimental methods used in social sciences**.
- Hopefully:

  ☑ Identified the **strength** and **weaknesses** of each design.

  ☑ Recognize the different trade offs between **realist** v. **synthetic** designs, and how it relates to **internal** and **external validity**.

⭐ **Important: what drives the type of experiment you need is your research question.**

Course Wrap-up

What we DID NOT do

- In future iterations (hopefully, a longer course):
  - ☑ More practical and hands-on exercises:
    - **Design own experiment**.
    - **More advanced students get to implement their own designs (dissertation/papers)**.
    - **Analyze more experimental data**.
  - ☑ Include in Ethics section of the syllabus aspects of "**good practices**."
    E.g., "**p-hacking**" and **preregistration**.
  - ☑ Cover the basics of the **process** of designing an experiment.
    Design → cost analysis → preregistration → **piloting** → data collection → data analyses → publication.
  - ☑ Address issues of **statistical power** and **sample size**, and how it relates to **costs.**
- **Suggestions?**

Thank you

and good luck