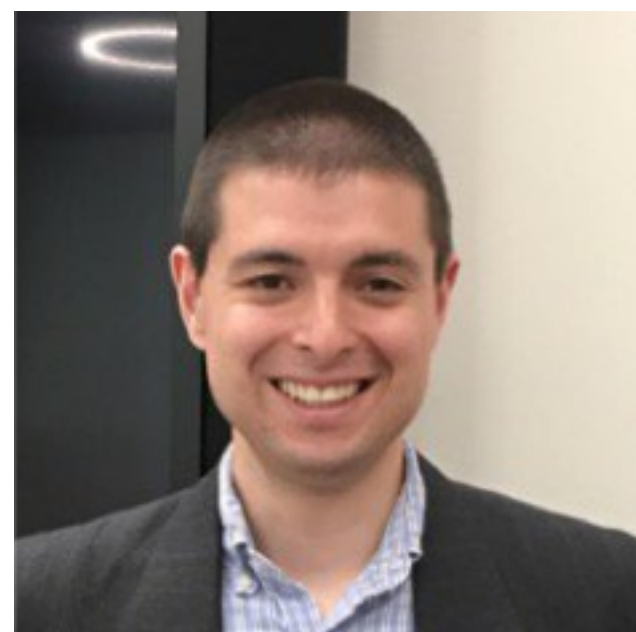# The Uses of Community Experiments

(SOC 412)

Week 12 Lecture 9

Sherrerd Hall 306

J. Nathan Matias

@natematias

civilservant.io

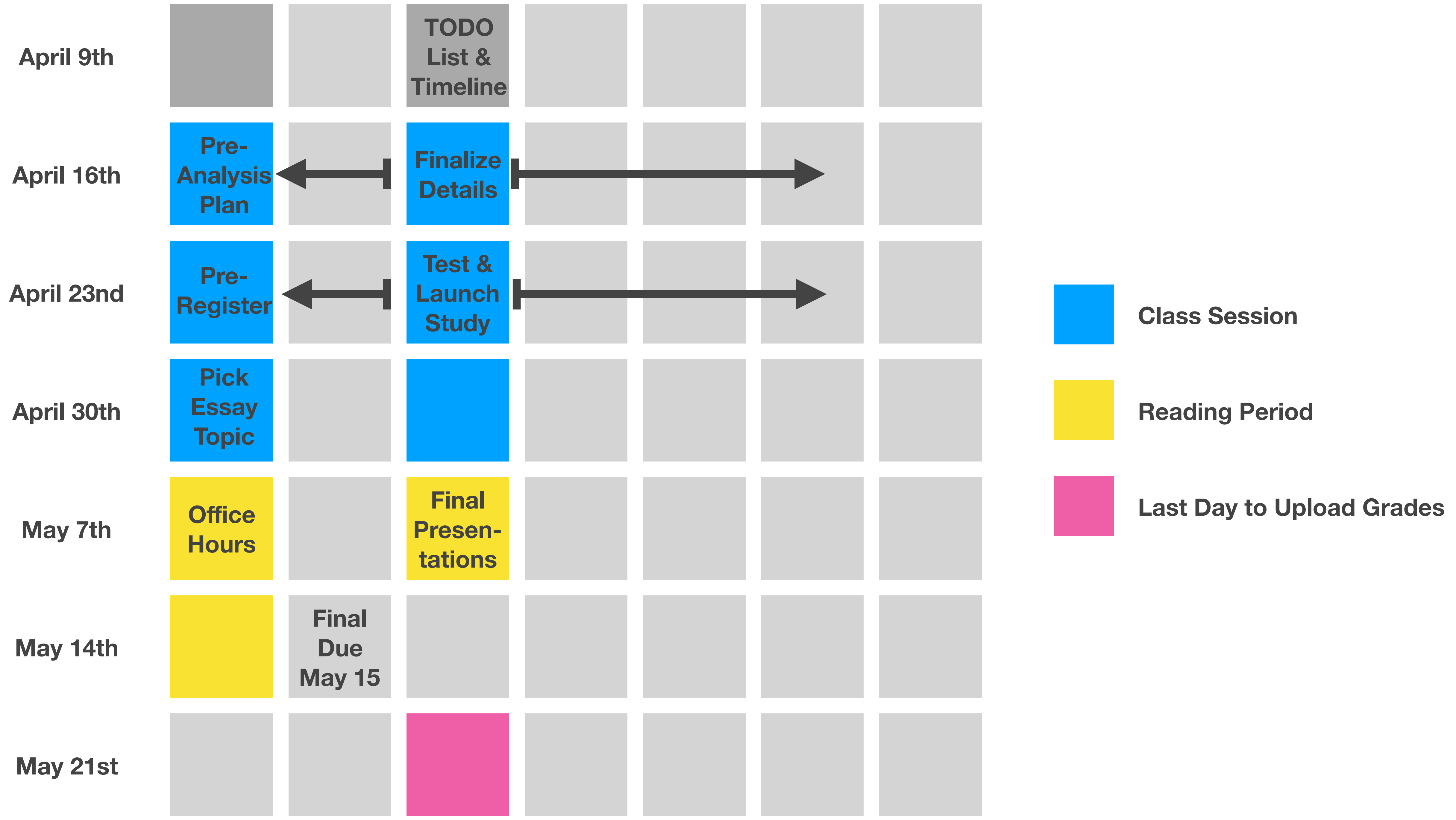medium.com/@natematias

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

mit media lab

Department of Psychology

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

CITP

KAHNEMAN-TREISMAN CENTER FOR BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC POLICY PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

April 9th			TODO List & Timeline				
April 16th	Pre-Analysis Plan	←	Finalize Details →				
April 23rd	Pre-Register	←	Test & Launch Study →				
April 30th	Pick Essay Topic						
May 7th	Office Hours		Final Presen-tations				
May 14th		Final Due May 15					
May 21st							

Legend:
- Class Session
- Reading Period
- Last Day to Upload Grades

How Communities
Use Experiment Results

Illustration: Sam Woolley/Gizmodo

Reddit Is Tearing Itself Apart

How Communities Use Experiment Results

[−] **AutoModerator** ⬡ [M] [score hidden] 7 months ago - stickied comment
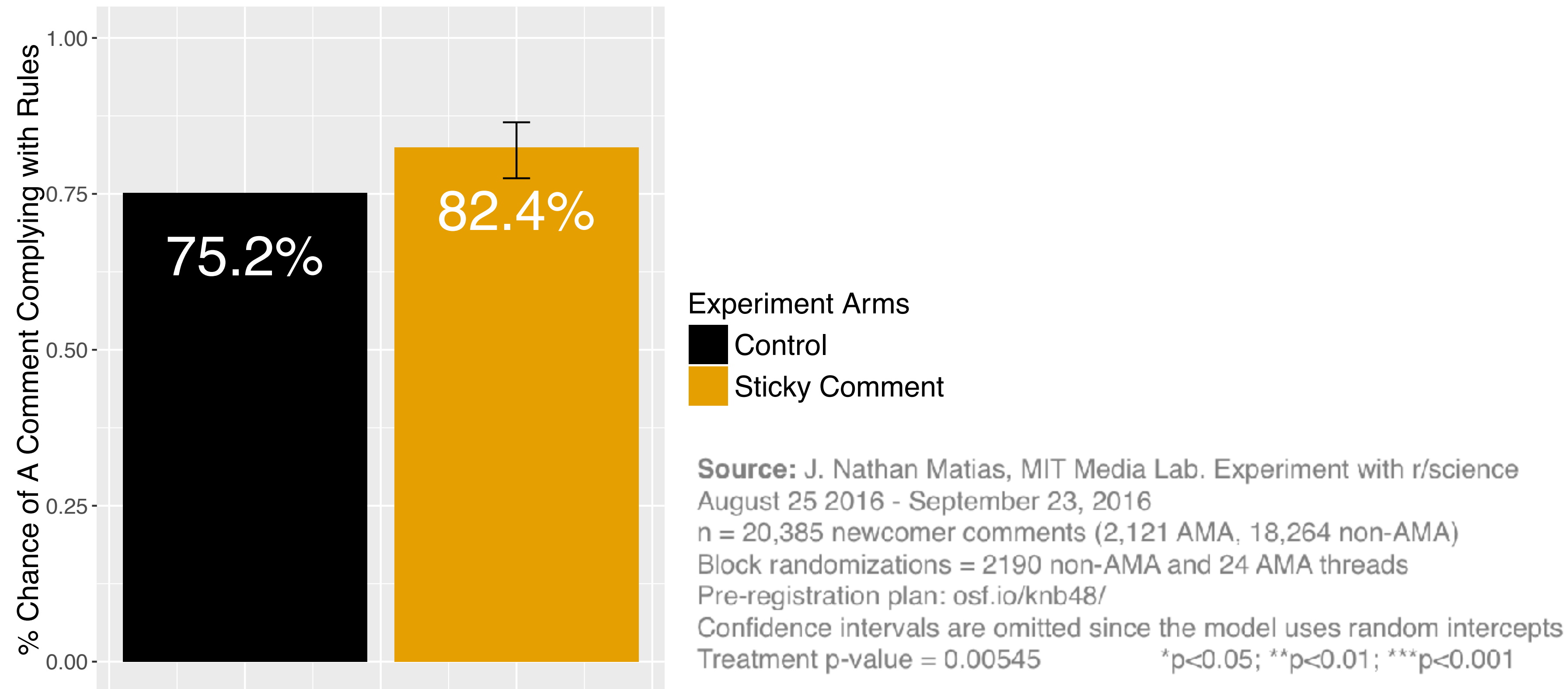
As a reminder, this subreddit is for civil discussion.

- Do not call other users trolls, morons, children, or anything else clever you may think of. Personal attacks, whether explicit or implicit, are not permitted.

- Do not accuse other users of being shills. If you believe that a user is a shill, the proper conduct is to report the user or send us a modmail.

- In general, don't be a jerk. Don't bait people, don't use hate speech, etc. Attack ideas, not users.

- Do not downvote comments because you disagree with them, and be willing to upvote quality comments whether you agree with the opinions held or not.
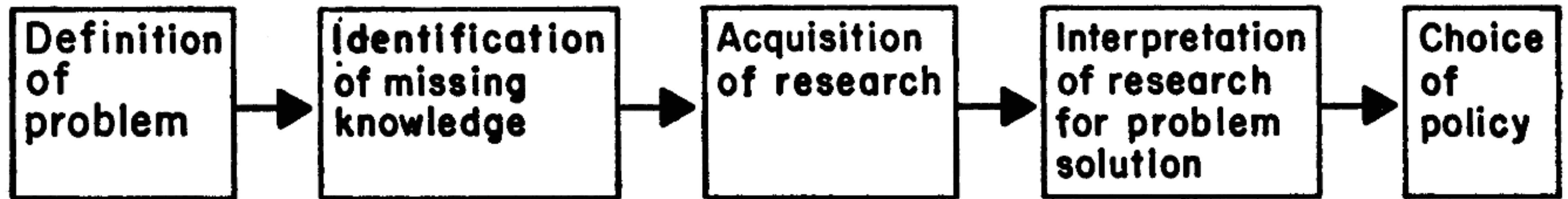
Incivility results in escalating bans from the subreddit. If you see uncivil comments, please report them and do not reply with incivility of your own.

I am a bot, and this action was performed automatically. Please contact the moderators of this subreddit *if you have any questions or concerns.*

"Sticking" a Rule Comment to Threads Increased a Newcomer's Probability of Posting a First Comment Within the Rules

% Chance of A Comment Complying with Rules (y-axis, 0.00 to 1.00)

- Control: **75.2%**
- Sticky Comment: **82.4%**

Experiment Arms
- Control (black)
- Sticky Comment (orange)

Source: J. Nathan Matias, MIT Media Lab. Experiment with r/science
August 25 2016 - September 23, 2016
n = 20,385 newcomer comments (2,121 AMA, 18,264 non-AMA)
Block randomizations = 2190 non-AMA and 24 AMA threads
Pre-registration plan: osf.io/knb48/
Confidence intervals are omitted since the model uses random intercepts
Treatment p-value = 0.00545   *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Weiss, C. H. (1979). **The many meanings of research utilization.** Public administration review, 39(5), 426-431.

4   **How Communities Use Experiment Results**

Data Collection

Data **analysis of moderator roles** in 52,735 subreddits

Data analysis of a **public corpus of reddit comments**

Content analysis of:

- 10 years of **public statements** by the company

- policy history of the r/politics community

Participant observation

Semi-structured **interviews with 12 moderators**, recruited by observing and asking moderators about communities that discussed experiment results

Conversations with **platform employees**

How Experiment Results Were Used

- **community decisions**

- defending policies

- setting new policies

- policy entrepreneurs

- community replications

- platform experiments

- **"pleased and curious"**

- **"insightful"**

- **low urgency decision**

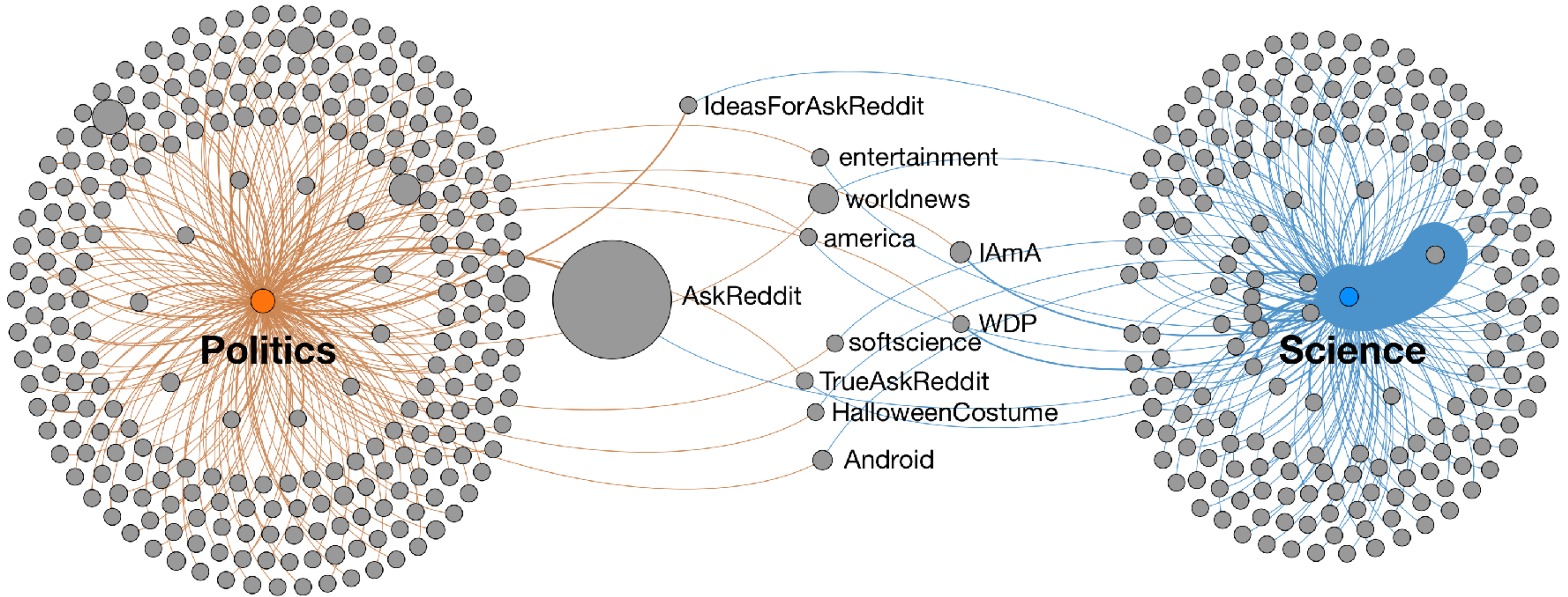- **"It would require redoing a few of the bots"**

How Experiment Results Were Used

- community decisions
- **defending policies**
- setting new policies
- policy entrepreneurs
- community replications
- platform experiments

- **"/r/Science found that posting rules improves discussion quality"**

- **"great stats & research"**

How Experiment Results Were Used

- community decisions
- defending policies
- **setting new policies**
- policy entrepreneurs
- community replications
- platform experiments

- **"I personally brought it up several times when we discussed new ways to improve the sub"**

- **Personal policy work**

How Experiment Results Were Used

- community decisions
- defending policies
- setting new policies
- **policy entrepreneurs**
- community replications
- platform experiments

- **"I represent [two subreddits]. Both subs are looking for automated reminders to help with rules, especially after the recent election. I've been tasked with [learning] from other subs"**

IdeasForAskReddit

entertainment

worldnews

america

IAmA

AskReddit

WDP

softscience

TrueAskReddit

HalloweenCostume

Android

Politics

Science

Sampled July 2015 in a census of moderator positions on reddit

4 **How Communities Use Experiment Results**

How Experiment Results Were Used

- community decisions
- defending policies
- setting new policies
- policy entrepreneurs
- **community replications**
- platform experiments

4 communities testing rule reminders

2 communities testing banning processes

1 community trying to resolve conflict

How Experiment Results Were Used

- community decisions
- defending policies
- setting new policies
- policy entrepreneurs
- community replications
- **platform experiments**
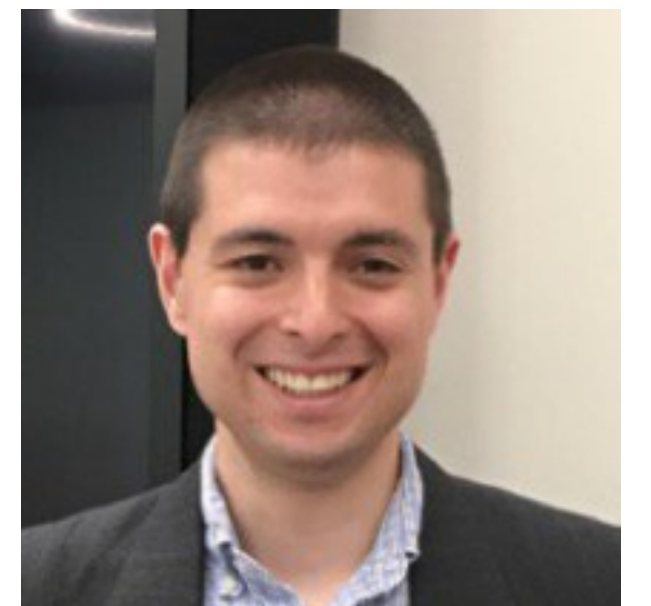
100 communities joined
a reddit-wide study

"I was aware of your study"

Open Science, Independent Evaluations of Platform Policy

- **Legal agreements** guaranteeing independence
- **Ethics review**
- **Data agreements** that
  - Protect privacy
  - Confirm data integrity
  - Constrain post-hoc tampering
- **Public transparency**
- **Reproducible** practices of **open science**

Susan Benesch

J. Nathan Matias