

# Class 16: Experimental studies of contagion

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Sociology 204: Social Networks  
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1/3 Background



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- ▶ Experiments are powerful but not perfect: internal validity, external validity, and ethics

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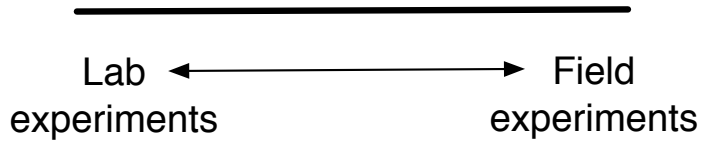
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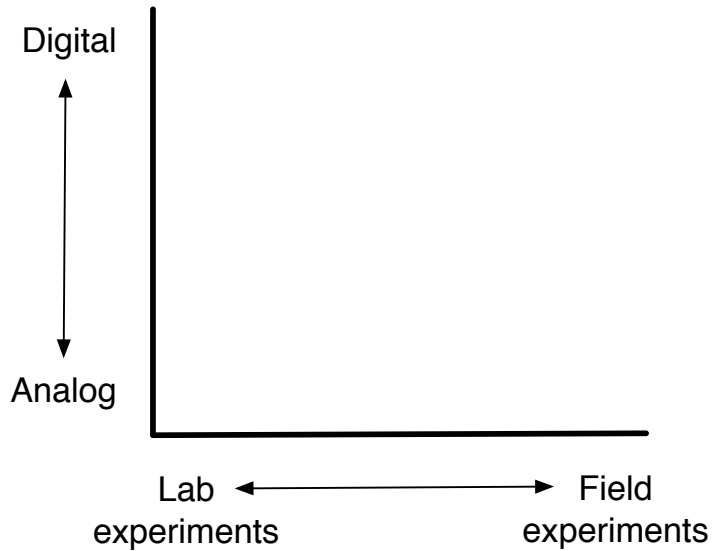
For some traits, selection dominates (e.g., gender). For other traits, all might be at work.

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“It’s like you don’t harass women, you don’t steal, and you’ve got to have a control group. This is one of the things that you can lose your job for at Harrah’s not running a control group.” Gary Loveman, CEO Harrah’s

It is hard to make causal claims without an experiment, as both papers describe. Part of the contribution of each paper is to bring experimental evidence. Here we saw two *field* experiments.





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- ▶ randomization treatment
- ▶ delivering treatment and control
- ▶ measuring outcomes

Both experiments you read put a lot of care into creating the control group.

- ▶ Voting paper by Nickerson: compared Get-out-the-Vote message to Recycling message

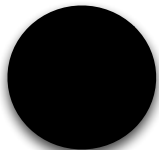
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- ▶ Voting paper by Nickerson: compared Get-out-the-Vote message to Recycling message
- ▶ Emotional contagion paper by Kramer et al.: a control group for positivity reduced condition and a control group for negatively reduced condition because of different base rates (e.g., 22.4% of posted had negative words, 46.8% had positive words)

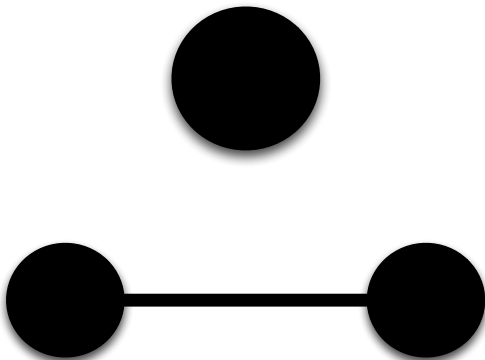
A note on terminology:

Perturb and observe experiments vs randomized controlled experiments

These experiments move from the individual to the dyad.



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You saw internal validity and external validity were categories to organize concerns.  
Explicit in Nickerson study on voting; implicit in Kramer et al. study of emotions

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Given that common background let's dive in