Ethics

"Just because you can doesn't mean you should"

Ethics are part of a broader set of social, political, and economic norms that govern society. These include **responsibilities**, **obligations**, and **entitlements**.

Ethics are also governed by our professional identities:

- What to study
- How to study
- What data (information) we retain, how long, and what we report
  - Research, intellectual property, & workplace speech: http://www.ala.org/tools/ethics
  - Ethical decision making https://aoir.org/ethics/
  - ACM CHI - Research Ethics Committee https://www.facebook.com/groups/866225810172460/

Ethical Principle: Autonomy

"Participants exercise their rights as autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study."

Consent has been referred to as a negotiation of trust, and it requires continuous renegotiation

> Three criteria for informed consent… "...participants must be competent to give consent; sufficient information must be provided to allow for a reasoned decision; and consent must be voluntary and uncoerced" (Schinke and Gilcrest, 1993)

- We have potential to gain an incredible amount of information about participants - Autonomy is difficult to maintain
    - As a participant how would you opt out of a Canvas study?
    - As a researcher, how would you negotiate consent in scraping data?

Ethical Principle: Beneficence

Obligation to secure a participants' well being… and do research which provides a societal good.

"If researchers are maintaining the principle of beneficence, overseeing the potential consequences of revealing participants' identities is a moral obligation."

- Reward outweighs risk is necessary but not always sufficient for this ethical principle.
- Facebook studies on data privacy might be good for privacy changes within the platform … Would we feel differently if the study were NOT published?

Ethical Principle: Justice*

"The principle of justice refers to equal share and fairness.One of the crucial and distinctive features of this principle is **avoiding exploitation and abuse of participants.**"

- Abuses can come in a variety of forms
- What is just can be regulated, but that often as a result (not an antecedent) of exploitation and abuse
    - Think of Alexa, Nest, and other smart devices… There is a variety of pending legislation
    - Technology moves faster than the law: Is that a good or a bad thing?

*Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of nursing scholarship*, *33*(1), 93-96.

Ethics of the sociotechnical

Sociotechnical premise

- (1) the **mutual constitution** of people and technologies (and, specifically, digital technologies);
- (2) the **contextual embeddedness** of this mutuality (aka it is impossible to disentangle people and technologies from their economic, political, and ecological contexts)
- (3) the importance of **collective action**

"Move fast and break things"

- Engineers defend this being about technology.
- Social Scientists often bristle at this BECAUSE of a sociotechnical premise.

Sawyer, S. B., & Jarrahi, M. H. (2014). Sociotechnical approaches to the study of Information Systems. In *Computing handbook, third edition: Information systems and information technology* (pp. 5-1). CRC Press.

Ethics of the sociotechnical

"Just because you can doesn't mean you should"

"We collected data from **3.9 million users over 17 days** and associate **self-censorship behavior** with features describing users, their social graph, and the interactions between them. Our results indicate that **71% of users exhibited some level of last-minute self-censorship** in the time period, and provide specific evidence supporting the theory that a user's "perceived audience" lies at the heart of the issue"

Das, S., & Kramer, A. (2013, June). Self-censorship on Facebook. In *Seventh international AAAI conference on weblogs and social media*.

Ethics of the sociotechnical

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"The actual information about users collected included their username, age, gender, location, religious and astrology opinions, their number of photos, and more. The pair also collected the users' answers to the 2,600 most popular questions on the site. For the paper, Kirkegaard and Bjerrekær explored things such as whether it was possible to work out users' **general cognitive ability from their answers**."

Emil O. W. Kirkegaard and Julius D. Bjerrekær "The OKCupid dataset: A very large public dataset of dating site users."
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8q88nx/70000-okcupid-users-just-had-their-data-published

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"We noticed recently that people didn't like it when Facebook 'experimented' with their news feed. Even the FTC is getting involved. But guess what, everybody: **If you use the Internet, you're the subject of hundreds of experiments at any given time, on every site**. That's how websites work."

Christian Rudder, founder of OkCupid

Emil O. W. Kirkegaard and Julius D. Bjerrekær "The OKCupid dataset: A very large public dataset of dating site users."
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8q88nx/70000-okcupid-users-just-had-their-data-published

Ethics of the Sociotechnical - Privacy

"The makers of the Constitution conferred the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by all civilized [people]—the right to be let alone." Justice Brandeis

- Terms of service are a good start, but they are not enough
    - Have you read ToS for Canvas?
    - What about Spotify? TikTok? Outlook? Zoom?
- Often we understand norms and expectations to privacy through engagement with and membership in communities.
- Research ethics are evolving with technology and the law
    - Obtaining informed consent at scale.
    - Sharing and reusing social media data
    - de-identifying participants, and the re-identification fallacy

Ethics in Research - Final thoughts

- IRB is an approval mechanism - but it is not an institution meant to be the final arbiter of what is right and wrong
- Designing research should be a constant check on autonomy of participants, benefit of findings, and justice for communities studied
    - Key informants (what your readings called "access to the field")
- Research design is a conversation
    - Ask your peers
    - Ask your mentors
    - Ask IRB
    - Ask your participants