

# Professional Workshop

## Ethical Dimensions of Internet Research

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# Acknowledgements

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- Ethical issues related to scientific research
  - Belmont Report
  - 45CFR46
  - ASA Code of Ethics
- Ethical issues related to internet research
  - AAAS report
  - Nissenbaum workshop papers
  - Thorseth book on applied ethics

# Professional Workshop

## Ethical Dimensions of Internet Research

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- Introduction to the Workshop
- Overview of the Content
- Workshop Procedures
  - Informal
  - Questions expected
  - Participation fully welcomed

# Changes in the Research Context

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- International Changes
  - Codes of Ethics
  - Privacy Rules
- US
  - IRBs more active
  - Privacy concerns changing
    - More concern
    - Less privacy

# Using the Internet for Sociological Research

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- ❑ Guiding ethical ideas – same as other research
- ❑ Belmont Report
  - Respect
  - Justice
  - Beneficence
- ❑ Risks and Benefits
- ❑ Human Participants in Internet Research

Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains: (1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information.

# Internet-Enabled Research

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- Traditional research conducted via the internet, e.g., surveys
- Data through intervention or interaction with the individual
- Rights of participants and obligations of researcher the same
  - Informed consent
  - Right to privacy
  - Confidentiality of private information
  - Special protections for children, prisoners, vulnerable groups

# Internet-Specific Research

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- Collections of available materials
  - Data harvesting
  - Data mining
- Collecting data from multiple sources on individuals
  - Rights and responsibilities of researchers?

# What is the Internet – What/Who is it?

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- Humans participating in computer mediated conversations
- Virtual posthumans
- A collection of texts

“A human subject means a living individual.”

# Public vs Private on the Internet

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- ❑ Ethical principles used for research in public places
- ❑ Ethical principles used for research with private information
- ❑ Private spaces within public places – ethical principles

# Internet-Available Information

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- Ethical principles regarding the analysis of websites, chat rooms, forums, and other information publicly available
- How do we apply:
  - Right to privacy
  - Who controls the use of the information
- Rights of groups vs individuals
  - Sociology studies groups
  - Ethics applied to individuals

# Considerations for the Ethical Issues With Internet Research

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- ❑ Think about how you would feel if your public behavior was analyzed
- ❑ Are there differences between the legal and research use of information
- ❑ We need to distinguish between what's legal, what's right and what feels right
- ❑ Will you be uncomfortable at the end of the study, eg, if permission isn't requested to analyze a group

# Summary

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- ❑ Societal changes, international changes, technological changes affect internet-enabled research
- ❑ What it is we are researching when we do internet-specific research – humans, posthumans, texts
- ❑ What is private? What is public
- ❑ What kinds of permissions do we need