On the Internet, No One Knows You're A Researcher

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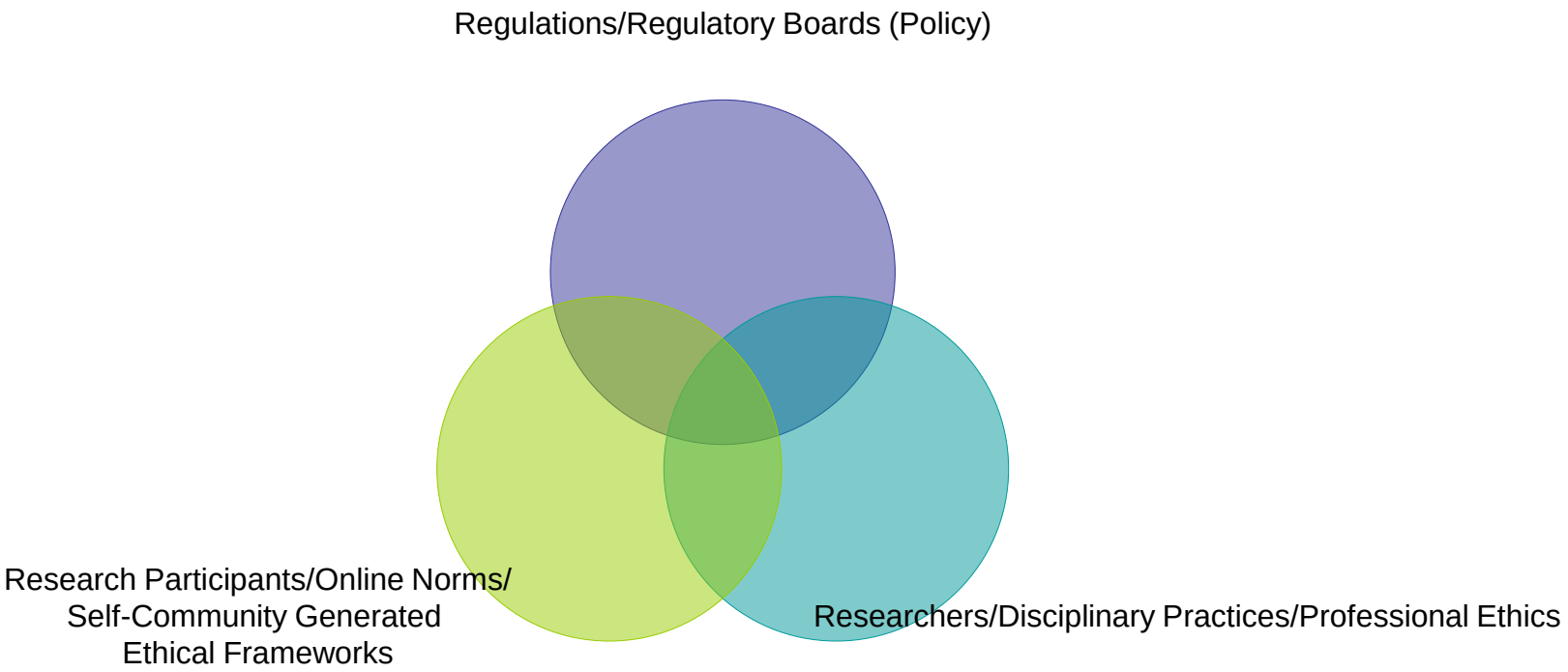
Exploring e-Research in and through Ethics?

- My focus and work
- Getting “inside” e-research by exploring regulations/regulators/researchers
- 'e' in eSocial Science/Research as 'enabling’” (NCeSS)
  - Ethics as restrictive versus what is possible
  - e-research as a transparent public good

How Does the Internet Fit In To Research?

- Internet as a **TOOL FOR** research or…
- Internet as a **MEDIUM/LOCALE OF** research
- TOOL=search engines, databases, catalogs, etc…
- MEDIUM/LOCALE=chat rooms, MUDs, MOOs, newsgroups, home pages, MMORPGs, blogs, skype, tweeting, online course software, etc

The Relationships



The Issues

Identities/PII
Ownership (Formal/ Informal)
Privacy
Consent
Methodology
Ideology
Risk/Harm
Representation
Recruitment Trolling P/O
Security
Anonymity/ Pseudonymity
Ethics

The Conflicts

- Misunderstanding of “human subjects” research vis-à-vis technologies and e-research
  - Representations or humans?
  - Blogs/hyperblogging/social networking
  - Models of ownership, consent, privacy not fitting
  - Rigid regulatory models versus research fluidity
- Intentionality/Context
  - Oversharing
  - Mission Creep
  - Research Creep
- Boundaries of laws/ethics/policy/regulations
- Cultural/Institutional/disciplinary difference
  - (Anglo-American models tend to be more utilitarian-based while Norwegian countries tend to be more deontological, as they emphasize that the rights of human subjects must never be compromised, no matter the potential benefits.)

Precursors to Research Ethics 2.0

- History of Research Ethics
  - Grounded in medical/biomedical research
  - Basic principles of informed consent, human dignity, safety, autonomy, justice
- Balance between greater goods and individual harms (greater good of the individual versus the greater good of society at large) (Nuremburg, Tuskegee, Milgram experiments)
- Similarities exist across cultures in research ethics programs; varying degrees of codification, maturity, and acceptance of research regulations

Regulations and Mission Creep

- “The biomedical focus of the regulations has always posed problems for social scientists since biomedical (especially clinical) research requires standards that are often inappropriate for social and behavioral research. Although these problems existed in the 1970s through the 1990s, it seems that more flexibility prevailed during these years. IRBs tended to interpret the regulations in ways that were not unduly restrictive of social and behavioral research.” (Siebert et al, 2002)
- “We recommend focusing on those areas of research that pose the greatest risk, such as biomedical research, while removing or reducing scrutiny of many fields within the social sciences and humanities that pose minimal risk. Some fields, such as journalism and ethnography, and methods, such as oral history, have their own, well-established sets of ethical guidelines and appeal procedures. In addition, they pose virtually no risk to the subjects.” (Center for Advanced Study, 2005, np)

Enter e-Research

- Contests, problematizes (and/or encourages fertile…?)
  - Methodologies
  - Ethics
  - Application of “rules” to researchers and researched
- Novel reinterpretations
- Trans-border data creation and flow
- Research Creep?
  - Use of resources not intended for/as research?
  - De (or) Re-Contextualization of research data?

Followed by…e-Research Ethics (in our work, IRE)

- Emerged as a “discipline” (or sub-discipline) in early 1990s
- Defined as the analysis of ethical issues and application of research ethics principles as they pertain to research conducted on and in the Internets/interwebs.
- Internet-based research, broadly defined, is research which utilizes the Internet to collect information through an online tool, such as an online survey; studies about how people use the Internet, e.g., through collecting data and/or examining activities in or on any online environments; and/or, uses of online datasets, databases, databanks, repositories.

Methods as Ethics… Ethics as Methods

- An ongoing negotiation
- Research integrity in contestation
  - Replicability
  - Validity/Reliability
  - Accuracy
- Bruckman: “the better you protect your subjects, the more you may reduce the accuracy and replicability of your study”
- Different implications across disciplines

Web 2.0→Research Ethics 2.0

- Zimmer (2008): “Web 2.0 represents a blurring of the boundaries between Web users and producers, consumption and participation, authority and amateurism, play and work, data and the network, reality and virtuality….. Web 2.0 also embodies a set of unintended consequences, including the increased flow of personal information across networks, the diffusion of one’s identity across fractured spaces, the emergence of powerful tools for peer surveillance, the exploitation of free labor for commercial gain, and the fear of increased corporatization of online social and collaborative spaces and outputs.”

Research Ethics 2.0 as Ideology

- Amplify the process of community decision-making
- Blur the boundaries that are essential to more dichotomous models of research ethics (breaking down of binaries)
- Reinforce Habermasian/Feminist/Communitarian models of ground-up ethics, or, ethics as what's possible
- Dictate authorship and the types of content created, thus imposing a pre-determined structure (or anti-structure) to "research data"
- Redefine research within communities

Research Optimism through Research Ethics 2.0?