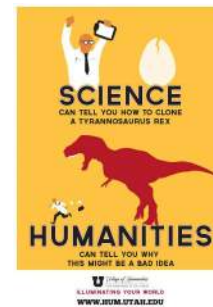Different Strokes for Different Folks: Navigating Ethical Questions and Cultural Differences Partnering Technologies, Test Sites, and Target Audiences

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Why ethics?

What is ethics?

- The "good life"
- Moral motivation for human behavior
- Decision-making (thinking and action)

Ethical dilemmas

- Right versus right
- Wrong versus wrong
- **Right versus wrong: power differentials, and justice issues**

A case study:

- Developing nation
- Periurban community
- Visible welfare problems
- Current options: killing or nothing
- New option: NSS for males
- Intervention?

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Beliefs and values

- Personal
- Social
  - Professional, etc.
  - Norms, standards, laws
- Red flags: ethical differences and ethical relativism

Navigating ethical relativism

- If everyone is right, then how can I prove I'm right?
- Grounding principles
  - Universal moral theories

Utilitarianism

- Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832): the greatest good for the greatest number
- John Stuart Mill (1806- 1873): different pleasures have different value.
- Peter Singer: experience of pleasure and pain contingent on cognitive ability

Utilitarian questions:

- Who are the stakeholders?
- What are the consequences?
- What course of action is likely to bring the most happiness and least pain to most of the stakeholders?

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Deontology

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
- Duty, rationality, respect, universality
- Categorical imperative:
- Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction
- Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end
- Therefore, every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends. (Kant, I. Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals).

Deontological questions:

- Are we willing to universalize our rules and assumptions?
- Are we treating equals equally? Are we equally respectful of all stakeholders
- What are our requirements for an individual to count as a stakeholder (worthy of being treated as an end)?

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Rights-based ethics

- John Locke (1632-1704): theory of natural rights
- Moral rights
  ◦ Welfare rights (freedom to)
  ◦ Liberty rights (freedom from)

Rights-based ethics questions

- What welfare rights versus liberty rights are at stake?
- Is there a conflict between rights and duties?

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Virtue ethics

- Aristotle (384 BC- 322 BC): moral character
- Shaped by habit
- Virtues: prized characters
- Reasonable middle ground

Virtue ethics questions

- Does a certain course of action promote the social and moral development of those involved?
- Is the course of action being imposed as a rule, or through the habitual performance of a certain desired behavior?

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Ethical problems in research

- Uncertainty
  - Systematic: kinds of knowledge
  - Specific: methods for seeking knowledge

Ethical problems in research

- Risk/ benefit ratio
- Step 1: define
- Step 2: balance
- Some degree of relativism in both

Vulnerability

- Being at a disadvantage in a specific context, and against a set of background expectations about normal or typical capabilities (Beauchamp 2002:548)
- May compromise autonomy

Clinical equipoise

- No good basis for a choice between two or more options
- An "honest" null hypothesis
- Principle is violated if the risk-benefit ratio is known to be significantly different in the two "arms" of the trial, or the options made available

Ethical questions in the field

- What kind of uncertainty is present? If specific, should methods be improved before taking it to the field?
- How are risks and benefits defined? Is there relative agreement among stakeholders? Are r/b balanced?
- Is there vulnerability? How is it being handled?
- Is there clinical equipoise (a legitimate question)?

Thank you!

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