

Rethinking Research Ethics in Digital Times- 20260304_091005UTC-Meeting Recording

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1h 16m 36s

My name is Sara Perry. Welcome to Rethinking Research Ethics in Digital Times.

SP Sara Perry 1:27

Yes, I'd like to blame Microsoft. Thank you. If you're struggling at all, please do drop notes in the chat and I look forward to responding as quickly as possible. I am here on behalf of several others.

including Louisa Nienhaus and Anna Simandiraki Grimshaw. We have been overseeing a programme called Chance Networks for Transformational Change. Several years ago, the Whiter Chance Initiative funded 26 projects focused on digital transformations in the social sciences and humanities.

Sara Perry 2:12

and at the same time, they funded a knowledge exchange initiative to run partly alongside that program. And one of the...

Activities that was funded through this knowledge exchange work between CHANCE was an opportunity for a group of CHANCE projects that weren't previously affiliated to come together to pursue a joint initiative arising from their shared experiences and findings.

and hence, we're here today because one of the programmes that we funded was the Community Research Ethics Initiative. So Josh and the team will say more about that shortly, and I'm just going to do a quick set of house rules for you before I... leave the line. So given that we're here for an event on ethics, I don't imagine that any of this will be a surprise to you, but ageism, homophobia, racism, sexism, ageism, transphobia, or prejudice based on ethics.

ability, asylum status, class, ethnicity, sex, age, gender, presentation, nationality or religion is not welcome in this space. There will be various power dynamics at play here, given that we have registrants from around Europe of all career stages.

from a variety of different sectors, welcome. But of course, power dynamics exist. So please be aware of the space that you're taking up and allow space for everyone to contribute. We'd be grateful for you keeping an eye on creating a safe space for

everyone and being conscious of who is not in the room, which questions are not being asked and which questions may not be ones for you to answer. So once I figured out how to get everybody into the room, it became clear that we were recording live immediately. So I was going to start the recording at this point, but it's already begun. Just to be clear, the presentations and the discussion from our respondent, Katrin, will be recorded and made openly available online after the event on the chance.org website. We'll drop the links into the chat after this meeting. Any discussion that follows the presentations will not be audio or video recorded. So I hope that you feel comfortable contributing your ideas and queries. And I'll end by just mentioning that we are following the Chatham House rule here. That rule, according to their Chatham House website, is meant to help create a trusted environment to understand and resolve complex problems. The guiding spirit is to share the information you receive, but do not reveal the identity of who said it. So the specific rule that we are applying here is that in this meeting, participants are free to use the information you get from the meeting however you wish, but that the identities or the affiliations of the speakers and of discussants, those who ask questions, et cetera, should not, cannot be revealed. So thank you very much for paying attention to that. Thanks again for listening to me. You'll hear from myself again at the very end to familiarise you further with the knowledge exchange work that you can follow. But without further ado, I'd like to turn it over to Josh and the Community Research Ethics Initiative. Thank you for bearing with me, Josh and all.

JE **Josh Edelman** 6:07

Thank you, Sara. I appreciate it. Just one thing about the Chatham Hospital, of course, those of us who authored the report, that's public, they're named and identified. There's no problem with naming us. And as this as the official response Kat is being recorded, I assume you're all right with. with your name being used for what you say. Yeah, right. That's applying to the discussion afterwards, so people can feel free to share their experiences and their questions without. necessarily saying without their any stories they tell kind of getting around the world. So, Alice, if you could go to the schedule quick, please. So, briefly, and you know, we'll see how the time goes. This is the plan for today. These are all European times,

Saturday European times, with the four of us who are members of the initiative for going to present our work, which is in the report that we're launching today. We're very happy to have Professor Kevin Titenberg to offer a formal response, and we're a little bit apprehensive about what it's going to be, but I'm sure it'll be lovely. And then we have lengthy of time for Q&A, and I hope that this is as Sara was saying, a safe space that we can discuss this, discuss these issues. And we have a little bit of an online workshop at the end about how you might implement some of these things. And then we will be distributing the report. I should say that the report is now available on the Chance website.

And if, I'm sorry, I don't have it in front of me instantly, but if someone could stick the link there. But we will try to present you the highlights here. It is my turn to introduce the project, but before I do, I really want to introduce my colleagues. This is a group effort.

Aliaster of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Johanna Simiala (pardon me for masquering names, I'm terrible with this) of the University of Helsinki, and Peregina Glarz, going to get this right.

of the of the Warsaw School of Economics. The four of us, we are all members of the main chance projects of the first calls. We were the three projects we were part of, one was called

The one that I ran was called Rebecca Vera: Religious Schemes in the Digital Age. What others were part of the project, and Avi and Kasia were part of Digit Islam, looking at Islam online in Europe in the contemporary world, and Johanna was part of Digi Death, or DiD, excuse me, Digital Death, looking at that. death, grieving, and mourning online. And...

Through some of the knowledge exchange work that Sara did at some of the conferences, Sara and the team did, I should say, we realised that we had a common concern. This project came out of challenges that we faced. And those challenges were around research Ethics.

In the...

institutional sense. What came together was that we all really wanted to do ethical research. We were committed to the work we were doing, it was very important to us, and we wanted it to happen, and we wanted it to be ethical. But we found that in some cases, the research ethics procedures that we were faced with, were not encouraging that. They were not encouraging necessarily us to

be able to do the work in the most comprehensive and comparative ways we wanted, or necessarily in the most ethical ways we wanted, and not necessarily because there was

they were ill-intentioned. I mean, in no case have we ever heard anyone think it was ill-intentioned, but there was a structural problem about the research ethics procedures and actual ethical research happening. And so the Community Research Ethics Initiative grew out of that desire to

discuss some of the structural challenges that research ethics procedures, especially in Europe, especially in the humanities and social sciences, face today, and how we could make them more fit for purpose. We started with the idea that misaligned Ethics procedures, or ones that weren't doing what they ought to, had dangers, and the report outlines some of those. They, for instance, caused difficulty in our relationship with our with our participants, with people who are participating in our research. I think this is one of the main things

That had happened is that the sort of research we all do was based on.

relationships of trust with the people we were working with on some really sensitive issues like religion and death and personal identity.

And also all of these projects were international collaborations. And sometimes these procedures seem to be based on distrust of other institutions and discouraged or discouraged collaboration between people who were acting ethically in their their own sets. Sometimes we found them that the procedures were costly or disheartening. Sometimes, especially early career researchers who had to be faced with these found that so, that they were

Sometimes they could struggle to understand internet-based or digital age research, what online data was, how it could be used, and that old models didn't always apply in quite the same way. And the important thing was that research was a vital tool.

and for European society, good research, comparative research, bold research, big research. And we wanted to make sure that that was happening without compromising ethics, which is not something we thought we needed to do. So what did we do? Well, our working methods here, we did a literature review of a lot of the on this topic. We talked with many of our chance colleagues on all of the other projects, and I see many of you here now. Welcome. Thank you for being part of our conversations and for your contributions, especially at the meeting in Krakow. And we had focus groups with both research professionals, folks from research Ethics offices, organizers, the people who run these procedures, and we have a lot of

expertise in that.

and research participants, civilians, if you will, who were involved in research to understand what their expectations were. Could you go to the next slide, please, Alaa?

And one of the things that we discovered is that research Ethics had different logics that they often operated in. You can see them listed on there. I won't go through it too. Very often the procedures that we saw, which differed greatly around Europe, and I think that's important to say,

where we admire that diversity and that's important, but that they would use some or all of these logic, a kind of aversion to institutional risk, that's what it was for, a desire to avoid harm or the risk of harm, especially to participants. The idea that research needs to have integrity and ethics protects that,

In some cases, the logic simply seemed to be, this is a requirement that somebody else has bureaucratically, and it stopped at that. And some systems really seem to say that research is a social benefit, has the potential of a social benefit, and that ethics should maximise that.

We are not saying those are good or bad. Our proposal here is based broadly around 4 principles that we think should organise research ethics. What is an ethics of care?

The idea that researchers, participants,

colleagues, society at large, the relationships between those groups should be characterised by care. Part of that is thinking of research as a social act, which involves power, and that needs to be worked out, and thus the care.

And the second principle of that is that these ethics are situational and relational.

They're not one-size-fits-all. They need to be, with the principle of care, need to be adapted for the particular situations.

and relationships that are there. And if they're not doing that, they're not doing their job. We also have the kind of guiding principle that ethics is perceptual, that it isn't a one and done situation, that ethics needs to be ongoing in order for it to be effective. I can never pronounce the word perceptual, but I hope you know what I mean.

And finally, the idea that with all the systems that exist, which are extremely helpful, and with all the really extraordinary colleagues that we have, at the end of the day, the researcher is the one who has to take responsibility. And at the end of the day, that is

any ethics systems that makes the researcher doing the work not responsible for the

ethics of their work is a problem. That is where the responsibility needs to lie at the end of the day. So those are our general principles. And now my colleagues are each going to take you through some of the areas of Ethics that we looked at, and I'll come back at the end and mention some of our recommendations. So, Athi.

 **Avi Astor** 16:11

Yeah, thank you. So I'm going to be talking a little bit about the Ethics involved in international collaborative endeavours like this chance initiative. So I'm going to be talking specifically about some of the difficulties that emerge from when there are asymmetries in the Ethics protocols and procedures across partnering institutions. These are difficulties that we ourselves experienced in our own research that other Chance colleagues expressed in a workshop that we ran.

and during one of the chance conferences, and that also were expressed to us during our during our focus groups. So, one of the limitations that one of the difficulties that emerged from asymmetries is the limitations to research design and implementation. Sometimes when there are differences in protocols and procedures across groups, it makes it hard for certain partners to actually carry out the research that's being proposed. So they might find themselves in a situation where they can't participate in certain work packages.

Some of them might have to refrain from key elements of the research that really contribute to the integrity of the collaborative endeavor. And in order to avoid these situations, sometimes what we found is that group is that researcher research groups might consider

not collaborating with groups from certain countries. Even if they can ultimately overcome these challenges, the anticipated difficulty of doing so might really influence or preclude fruitful lines of research,

or possibilities for collaboration. And another, the second issue that I wanted to discuss is the timing and coordination of research and publication. As we all know, it gets, when you're talking about projects that involve institutions from multiple countries,

It's very, the process of coordinating research can be really, really tricky. And if the Ethics procedures end up taking extremely long in one setting, whereas they go really quickly in another, this can throw off the entire timing of the project. So you

might have

one team that's really advancing quickly and another team that's taking months or even over a year before they can engage in the same research. And this might actually influence the robustness of the results, right? Because a lot of events and circumstances might

change during that time period, such that the data collected is influenced by those external factors, which can ultimately shape the type of information that we're gathering. So

Ultimately, this also influences the publication process, right? Because if ethics procedures are taking up a big chunk of the time that the different partners have to complete the research for a project, ultimately, they're not going to be able to publish as much during the life of the project.

The evaluations will consequently be worse, and it will be more difficult to secure future funding.

So a third issue relates to difficulties with data sharing and management. So even after collecting all this wonderful data for our projects, some of us experience difficulties actually accessing the data collected by our partners.

or sharing the data that we've collected with our partners. It's not always clear which platforms we should be using, what the requirements of these platforms are, whether there's compatibility, institutional compatibility between the platforms used by different partners.

And so this can actually be a major stumbling block to data sharing and ultimately to collaborative publications.

And finally, sorry, and the 4th issue I wanted to mention is the danger of Ethics dumping. This is sort of in extreme cases, we might see research that wouldn't be permitted, say, in one context,

being sort of delegated to other contexts where ethics procedures are more lax and where partners feel like it's more likely that that that research can be undertaken.

This is especially a problem in north-south collaborations.

It involves all kinds of issues related to power, imbalances, the potential for exploitation, and for certain institutions taking advantage of the ethical protocols and procedures and other social contexts. We're not saying that this is something that happens often.

But it is, it has generated enough worry to prompt some scholarly investigation and writing on the topic.

And finally, there is ultimately, if there are really, really significant asymmetries in ethics protocols and procedures, this could lead to the exclusion of certain institutions simply because they're operating.

in an ethical context that's viewed as either too rigid and cumbersome and partners simply don't want to collaborate with institutions that are going to have to go through that whole rigmarole and delay the process of research,

Or perhaps they're perceived as overly lax and too permissive, and there's a lack of trust that the research that the ethics are going to be guaranteed. So, if they're if the if the distances or the gaps are too too large.

the asymmetries are too large, it can result in all these complications, limitations, and difficulties in navigating international collaborations. Okay, I will leave it there and we can pass on to the next.

Slag.

KG **Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska** 23:31

Okay, so in the next slide, we have vulnerability and sensitivity, and we know as social researchers that these are the two main concepts that we have to take into account if we are serious and if we mean no harm. But the problem is that both of these concepts have like fluid boundaries, they lack universally accepted definitions, they are contextual. So you cannot set them once for all, but they depend. And here are like 3 challenges that we identified. There are more in the report. So I invite you to read the report. The first one was actually already mentioned by Josh. It's the procedural ethics and the ethics in practice.

AA **Avi Astor** 24:01

The.

KG **Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska** 24:13

We start with the first one. It's about the compliance with the institutional requirements. It's the protective mechanism for the researcher and the institution. And for us, sometimes it's about thinking boxes. When you submit your application, and then you can go out with your research, or not necessarily. So some of us might find it sometimes rather bureaucratic than a meaningful activity. Some of us. On the other side, we have the Ethics in practice. So we go to the field, we enter the field, and then many things might happen.

So in the ideal world, it would be nice that these two align in practice, which sometimes operate between 2 distinct ethical words. So on the one hand, there might be institutions who tell us not to engage in certain topics because they are sensitive,

because this is about this risk aversion. On the other side, we might, in the field, be left alone and then, you know, who helps us, who does some mentoring. So this is the first challenge. The second natural challenge that we are facing is vulnerability and autonomy.

As researchers, we usually come to our approach, our research subjects or people that would like to talk with us with good intentions. We want to give them the voice, we want to give them the accountability. But on the other side of the story, there is patronising or the risk of patronising them.

of telling them or thinking that maybe some information should not be revealed. Because we are experienced, we are the researchers, they might not know what they are doing. This is what we might think because of the protection. So the challenge remains that on the one side, overprotection might become paternalistic and they might

it might undermine the autonomy, but on the other side, it might silence marginalised voices that are marginalised anyway. So what do we do about it? The third thing, studying sensitive topics. Here, the question is about representation and responsibility.

As I said, our study is also about giving voice and agency to people and communities that we are studying. But should all groups have the same voice? What about groups that advocate for some extremist and democratic ideas? So on the one hand, they would probably love to have this

publicity and what do we do about it? And then on the other side, if we don't study them at all, in order not to give them the publicity, then we like miss a certain part of what is going on in the world and what do we do about it. And the second part, is something that is usually neglected. So our own researchers' positionality, it's quite of an overlooked dimension of Ethics. And I think, or we think that if we also take these into account, it will make overall our research better. Because as researchers, we enter unfamiliar settings. We might encounter linguistic challenges as well that might impact our research. So imagine myself doing research with Josh about performing arts, and I would feel, you know, slightly less competent because of the language. Exposure to suffering.

without the ability to intervene. You know, if we study people who are really like vulnerable, refugees, people who suffer discrimination, and then you end up, you know, like with all this emotional burden, what can you do about it? And there is not much you can do. So how about this one? And then something that started to emerge,

due to political, social issues, the risk of stigmatisation of some of researchers due to the political stance they take on certain things like political activism and also on the staff and the kind of perspective that they are engaging with.

So some researchers started this self-censorship, thinking about shall I engage in certain topics or maybe I should not because of this cancelling culture, silencing and this kind of things. And this is also crucial for ethics in social sciences. Yeah, so that's All from me and I'm now handing over to Johanna.

SM

Sumiala, Johanna M 29:00

Hello, on my part as well. So moving on towards shifting digital context and some of the things that I'm saying here might be overlapping to a certain extent what has been said earlier, but looking at these questions from the digital perspective of context, if you will.

So we've identified, and these are basically highlights, so they are also, please read the full report for more detailed information there. But we wanted to identify perhaps 4 main challenges that are also interconnected.

And the first one has to do with these platforms. And now we are mainly referring to digital platforms and social media and how they are fueled by data capitalism and how that actually impacts and influences our research.

ethics, our practical research, but also research ethics in many ways that we must take into consideration and the asymmetries that can follow there. So when we enter these digital spaces, digital platforms and social media,

For example, and we call it a field, in order to collect material, we actually are the data, become data ourselves, as do our informants. And this is something to take into consideration. So the business logic and the communicative logic of these platforms and of social media, we argue,

strongly influences also our practises in the field and they also have ethical consequences and things that we must consider as responsible researchers. And one of these consequences, among others, is what we call the trap of digital visibility, which means that whether we, that every time when we, when we, for example,

collect data or when we conduct interviews online, there are digital traces that are left there. And in that sense, we are giving digital visibility to our informants. And especially when we do research and work on topics that are considered sensitive or informants that are perhaps in vulnerable situations, this is something that we must ethically consider.

what to do about it. However, there's also and how to how to deal with these issues. But there's also a question of of this line between the private and the public. And sometimes we as researchers have to consider whether we actually should be protecting our informants from themselves, from publishing things, issues, discussing in public matters that might be harmful for them. And this obviously has to do and relates to questions of dignity, but also responsibility of a researcher, but also autonomy of our informants. So there are no easy answers to these.

to these questions either, but instead they must to be, we must to be reflect them and and and and have transparent discussions around those questions. The one thing that we also wanted to emphasise in this report, and that has to do with manipulation of researchers.

And this is also related to the trap of digital visibility, because as Katarzina was also mentioning when going through her slide, is that there are many reasons also, and perhaps many reasons also for our informants to participate in this research. and this has to be taken into consideration. So we may be played out and manipulated and also our research findings can be hijacked and the kind of ethical consequences that there might be there for the research and research results and for the institutions,

that fund and host this research, but also us as researchers. And hence we strongly argue that also when we are developing these new ways of thinking about or rethinking ethics in these digital contexts, that

that we should also provide protection for researchers in those situations and in those conditions. And lastly, and about AI. I mean, AI, it's everywhere, and we are only starting to...

to understand the ways in which it might impact our research and will impact our research and the related research ethics. So, and this is not, this is far from being comprehensive, just identifying 3 things here.

The one has to do with the ability to distinguish between human and synthetic agency. And this is something, I mean, this is anything but trivial. When we are

collecting data and then the material, it becomes more and more difficult to actually to make a distinction of what has been produced by humans and what has been produced by AI. Obviously, the AI is obviously it is produced by humans, but but considering different types of artificial beings that that and bots. So, so this is something to be considered. The other aspect has to do with that, that if and when we apply the AI tools in our research, for example, in data gathering, we must ask that and understand that the Ethics of these AI systems about themselves, that what digital data does given AI tool draw on, where and how, Was the data gathered and what kind of biases are built into the tool? So we know that AI is anything but neutral. It's very biased in any ways and in the ways in which, for example, how it recognises certain elements in the digital, in these digital contexts and what elements and aspects are not considered. Finally, as my last point, and I mean, actually, I wish to go back to the question of opacity. So as a tool, there is an element of opacity that needs to be addressed. But finally, as my final point, we wanted to address the question of using AI, for example, as an augmented ethnography and using AI as tools of ethnography and bots as ethnographers, for example, what might that mean in terms of ethical consideration? And there we wanted to address this urgent need to emphasis on caretaking responsibility and accountability. So we need to develop research Ethics in this framework, and this is also something that Josh already mentioned in his previous, when presenting a previous slide. So these were the things that I wanted to, we wanted to address here, and now I think we move on to recommendations.

JE

Josh Edelman 37:17

Sorry, I'm muted, you think by now I know how to do that. Yes, so some of the recommendations, and as my colleague said, please do download the report. We put a link in the chat, build the chair at the end of this meeting. We are summarising here, but we hope that the report is useful. That's the point of this. The report is not, however, manual of a how-to. It was never intended to and it couldn't be that. All we can give you is principles, recommendations that you will need to implement. But the reality is that none of this works without the

the hard work, the intellectual work of researchers and of Ethics professionals across the research sector to figure out how to implement these recommendations, because they're not self-implementing and they're not mechanical. That wouldn't be possible, right? That isn't possible for any kind of Ethics and applying, you know,

Think of research as a thing people do, as a social practice, and the ethics of research should be ethics in general applied to this particular social practice. But we did want to say here are some recommendations that we hope are useful for you to think about and to see how you could implement in the systems you work in.

So broadly on these three topics, and of course there are overlaps, but we want to divide into chapters. First,

We would encourage folks who work in ethics or in research to have a deep awareness of, to develop a really good awareness of international differences and commonalities in research ethics procedures. We are not suggesting that there needs to be a common research ethics procedure across Europe or across the world or even across every country. But there are

quite striking international differences, and I'm not always sure that everyone is aware of those differences as well as they should be. And certainly at an EU level, this is important, a note for the awareness. There should be, when there is a joint project, there should be better communication.

between Ethics review boards and those doing these systems just to find places, not that they can be the same, but that they can be coordinated. So there aren't huge gaps in misunderstanding or timing, as Avi was saying. And these should be done on the basis of trust. That the idea that another institution is that other universities are ethical.

actors, unless you have some reason to think that they're not, which we almost never do, rather than the basis of suspicion, which I think sometimes is the case right now. For international projects, there should be some ability, when necessary, to have collaborative ethical review.

rather than review at just one institution. And of course, that requires adaptation, which is the last recommendation here. The idea that we have seen too many overly rigid ethics procedures, which lead to the idea that becomes just a bureaucratic exercise and that it's not in fact adapting to the particular risk presented to partner institutions and other things, such as say, the relationships that researchers have with their participants. Alaa, if you can go to the next slide.

The.

This, hopefully you can start to see the similarities which are based on those principles I said at the beginning. Ethics approval should be an ongoing thing and not so the gatekeeping tick box and you're done. Ideally, Ethics procedures should

treat the researcher as the ethical actor, should anticipate dilemmas that they may face in the field and offer some principles of guidance or something like that to address them, and perhaps should have an easy way for ongoing dialogue with ethics professionals if that seems necessary, rather than, well, you've passed ethics, you've done.

Informed consent, which is obviously a pillar of research ethics, should focus on comprehension rather than signatures as such. There are times in which signatures are not the best means of developing informed consent, and there are times when they are.

and that needs to be thought through. This gets to the third one is about the principle of autonomy and treating the autonomy of participants and the rare cases in which we may need to say to a participant, yes, despite your consent to this, we're not going to be able to do this, something that we all encountered. We thought that should be an extraordinary thing when a participant is not allowed to, with their consent, participate in research in the way they want to or have their information shared the way that they want to. How extraordinary? Well, that's where we need your critical ethical judgment.

But the principle of as many protections as necessary and as few as possible, we think is a guiding light. And we saw more situations of overly rigid procedures that imposed unnecessary protections that were

Not useful, rather than the other way around, on the other hand.

The opposite can also, of course, exist. In terms of anonymity and de-masking, something that we talked about, especially when you're dealing with small communities, there may be ways in which the principle of anonymization needs help, that it's not always obvious what is anonymous enough.

and sometimes work validating findings through giving participants access to the way things are going to be presented so that they can say, hey, you might not think this is actually unmasking a person, but in fact it is. That may be a necessary step.

And the last two, that researchers need to think about, researchers at all levels, from early career researchers to more senior folks,

need to think about their own positionality, their own place within the power

structure, but their own place within the research system, what authority they hold or don't hold, what position they hold, and that that should be addressed explicitly in ethics procedures, and that frankly, training in research ethics should be available to researchers from PhD level onward, and it isn't always the case.

Next slide, please. In terms of the digital, we held back a little bit from saying specific things. You should use this platform. You should not use this platform. This is what you should do with AI. This is what you should not do with AI. For the simple reason that these things are changing so quickly. And anything that we you know, said, do this, don't do that, would be out of date by the time we published it. So we're, I think Johanna articulated them very well, but here are some of the things we want to say as more general recommendations that need to be interpreted. First, it's about awareness, that we need to be aware of the logics and the data economies of the digital platforms that we are using as research tools or research fields. And that understanding needs to be part of our research assessments. They are not neutral. We need to understand what these platforms are and how they work.

Um...

We need to pay attention digitally as well as in person to the specific context of meanings and relationships of, say, online data, conversations online, and realise that they need to, they can change quickly.

We also need to see that researchers themselves can experience harms, and that is a risk that ethics procedures should address. That researchers are not invulnerable, and actually they themselves need to be protected through ethics procedures. And finally, that there is a difference between ethical and legal requirements.

that ethical rules are not identical to legal requirements, such as data protection and vice versa. Something can be legal but not ethical or ethical but not legal. That is, both are things that we need to deal with. So, Alaa, if you can go to the next slide. So thank you very much.

for this thing. We've tried to give you a summary of it. We've invited one of the Europe's leading experts in research Ethics, Professor Katrin Tiidenberg, to say a few words in response to this. I should say that we did give her a copy of this of the report a few days in advance, so she's had a chance to look at it, but she has not told us at all what she's going to say. And so with slightly bated breath, but quite excitement, I look forward to it. Kat, the floor is yours.

KT **Kat Tiidenberg** 46:27

Thank you. Also, just so I don't go over the time that was allotted to me and because I'm sharing some resources that I think maybe people might find interesting, I made some slides. So I'm going to now attempt

To.

Shared.

Let's see if that works.

My slides.

Window.

We don't use Teams. It doesn't want to share mine. Maybe because I sent my slides to you guys, could Alaa share mine as well as she shared yours?

JE **Josh Edelman** 47:31

I think so. Alaa, do you have, I should say, Alaa Khaled, who is our wonderful research associate on this project and has been extremely valuable. Yes, thank you.

JE **Josh Edelman** 47:44

There we go.

KT **Kat Tiidenberg** 47:44

Excellent. Okay. So first of all, thank you very much for the privilege of being able to read the report a couple of days before other people. And I do really echo everyone's comments and the team of writers that you should read the whole thing.

It is, it's very accessible reading and and it's full of very thoughtful kind of

operationalizations of how we do ethics. So what I thought that I was gonna I would do is.

kind of comment on some things, but from the perspective of the kind of the blanket statement is that I agree with everything that you say. So there isn't, none of the comments are kind of like pushing back of it on what you've put in the report. And in some cases, I am kind of offering additional

ways of approaching something that you have already flagged that have emerged out of my many conversations across the world with people and in particular early career researchers as things where more resources are needed or more clarity needed. And then some things I am offering kind of to maybe complicate one or two

thoughts that were in the report. If we could go to the next slide, please. So I think one thing that where this report is kind of situated ideologically or philosophically or in terms of values,

but which bears, I think, always repeating very clearly is why are we talking about research ethics at all? Like, what is the point? What is the purpose of research ethics? And, you know, like while we might cynically say that it's for institutions to protect themselves and whatever else, then the basic point of research ethics is to is beneficence, right? So it's to avoid

doing harm and if possible, to do good. And I find this to be an oddly practically helpful thing to remember at each point in doing Ethics, because there is more than one way, always, absolutely always of doing good and avoid doing harm. And while the kind of obvious or kind of conventional

approaches that end up in a lot of ethics guidelines are often at a kind of a very robust top level, you know, like this way of gathering data is ethically problematical. I won't gather this data, right? Whereas this type of kind of

all or nothing approach is really, I think, unnecessary and it's worthwhile reminding ourselves and others around us that there are different ways to approach it. You know, can I adjust how I collect this data? Can I adjust what I later do with this data so that it's linked to possible harmfulness lessons?

These types of kind of flexible approaches, I think, are really helpful. Next slide, please.

So this made me think that if we think of kind of big, broad research sensibilities, then one that we want to take towards our research, or it probably is already present in our research, but we want to again remind ourselves that we can also apply it to our ethics, is creativity.

So being open to emergence, kind of working with complexity, with the mess, being attuned to the unexpected, to affect and senses. So a kind of responsive sensibility. Next slide, please.

And obviously, we don't want creativity without rigor, right? Because just for the sake of creativity, so we want to similarly bring rigour to our ethics sensibility as a kind of approach that increases the quality and input.

impactful of impactfulness of our work. So this is then more about kind of attunement and depth of accountability and reflexivity. Next slide, please. So if we had to kind of operationalize those two really lovely words that we keep hearing across methods, texts that kind of sometimes stop having meaning,

then I would say that as a kind of ethical sensibility, we can talk about ethics as attunement and ethics as accountability. So we have attunement in the sense of kind of being context, affect and emergence sensitive, which goes really well with the kind of situational and practise ethics approach in the report. But I think what's important here and what speaks to the thing that I started with, which is that there's more one way to avoid harm and do good. This directs our attention towards inventing methods with problems, not applying them to problems, right? So if a typical method that is used in a field or applied to a topic appears ethically complicated or problematic, then, you know, like we have the right and should have the agency to invent a new method. And then in terms of ethics accountability, of course, there's the obvious kind of reflexivity that is also in the report and kind of the research positionality that was talked about, but it is also about kind of resonance. Does the work matter? Does it make a difference? Next slide, please.

So this brings me to these little kind of maybe practical ideas or thoughts that I wanted to add to the things that are already in the report. And I said, there's a lot of good stuff in the report. So the consent procedures are kind of analysed with nuance and care in the report. And there's, you know, like Josh also, I think, was the one who today in the presentation, mentioned, you know, signatures versus other ways, you know, like spoken consent, dialogical consent. What I wanted to add to it, what wasn't explicitly talked about and is particularly relevant for kind of digital or online data is pseudonymous consent. So this used to be something that was kind of rejected by a lot of the disciplines, but increasingly with the kind of growing importance of internet research, it has been, it has become a thing that is accepted if argued well, right? So that could mean asking consent from someone about their online participation and accepting it with their online pseudonym or their handle, right? So not having, so I could consent with, I don't know, Black Cat 72 and not as Katrin de Denberg from Estonia.

right? Also, though, then you need to re-pseudonymize, right? So people's online pseudonyms are identifying while not necessarily identifying of their given names and passport identities. They are identifying in communities and networks that are really relevant for their well-being. So we need to then protect them there.

Next slide, please.

Another thing I wanted to add to is there's a section in the report on sensitive topics

in vulnerable populations, again, really well set up. I wanted to add a kind of practical beneficence and harm avoidance tactic that I don't think was mentioned in the report, which is about ethical fabrication.

Again, this is a pair of words that 20 years ago would probably make hair rise up on every social scientist's arms. But thanks to colleagues who have been publishing in this field and kind of exploring it, it is no longer the case. So my great colleague and mentor, Annette Markham, wrote already in 2012 about

of different tactics of ethical fabrication, mostly focusing on textual forms of fabrication. And then Katie Warfield and colleagues in 2019 published a piece that is based on interviews with a lot of researchers on how they do ethics, including with me,

which also includes, for example, visual forms of fabrication, which I have personally been using, I think, since about 2013. So if interested, cheque out those publications. Next slide, please.

Then a moment of complication. So the report positions itself as a proponent of ethics of care, in addition to kind of situational ethics or procedural ethics. And ethics of care are obviously lovely, but I wanted to point out that

It's not without its problems either, because it relies on what can be read as a kind of prescription of empathy, which has been criticised for issues around emotional labor, which in turn has been linked to kind of gendered commodification and alienation from human emotions.

So some approaches of kind of feminist ethics of care have been criticised for also validating or trying to universalize a perspective of a white Western feminist and how they care and who they care about, which has then been found patronizing. And finally, and maybe more interestingly, I think care is not a self-evident term, right? So does care in research settings mean provision of something that is needed for something to flourish?

So we want to be caring. Or is care serious and focused attention? So we want to be careful. Or is care anxiety and worry? So what we really want is to be carefree. And if we mean care as being caring, then there's a question of should we attempt and is it possible to

always care for all research participants. Next slide, please. So Mary Midgley is one of my favourite moral philosophers, and she has this book called *Wickedness*, and in it she has a pointy, if a slightly rude,

quote, which I love, which is that we, the we as in all humans, need to correct a kind

of idiotic optimism about choice. And I think this also applies to research ethics, right? So what I've noticed anecdotally in conversations about research ethics is that within context where we align and our views align and values with our research participants, then it is really quite comfortable to very forcefully articulate for an ethics of care, right? Or to imagine that we can choose between a good and an evil, but sometimes we have to choose between an evil and a slightly less evil.

We have to do research with human subjects that we profoundly disagree with, who do things that are very, very bad, and care as the dominant ethical principle or priority system might make it complicated. Next slide, please.

Then just as a kind of highlight, I think in the references, it's present, but to kind of add to the digital ethics section in the report, really the gold standard of digital research ethics are the four different iterations of the Association of Internet Researchers.

Ethics guidelines, which also, just as the report, are like live in the world of situated and procedural ethics and kind of give questions that we as researchers can ask ourselves. Next slide, please.

And then to add to the section on protecting researchers, which I was really happy to find in the report, because this is increasingly such an important issue and researchers are increasingly under attack or constrained in a variety of different ways. You know, it was mentioned that our unequal position in terms of the platform economies

compared to, you know, researchers working for private sector. But there's also, again, you know, many of the topics mentioned, religion, death, all kinds of sensitive topics, can now bring kind of politicised or badly motivated actors with the whole purpose of attacking researchers.

So here I wanted to plug again a resource that was prepared last year by a very large group of AOIR researchers, which is called a Risky Research Guide, which is available on the Air Ethics page. Next slide, please.

So to kind of bring this all together, I think this report does a really great job. I think we as a community of social researchers and European social researchers, I'm really happy that this is where we are. I'm really happy that these are the conversations we're having.

And I'm really happy that a kind of, you know, like European funded projects or funding scheme has made this possible and given us space and kind of through that partly accepts that this is where research ethics conversations are.

So to kind of just reiterate and maybe emphasise in terms of the recommendations of the report is that ethics always involves risk. I think it's really irresponsible when especially early career researchers are painted a picture of some sort of perfect ethics being possible, because that can create either ethics nihilism or ethics paralysis, and neither of those lead to actually ethical research. So I think we need to keep normalising that ethics involves doubt and discomfort, and those are not signs that you're doing it wrong, but those are signs that you're doing it right.

But there, then we need to lean on each other. So in the report, there were ideas around ethics mentors. And for example, in my university, in Tallinn University, each department does have an ethics mentor in addition to the kind of ethics committee, but also more informally.

Right. So in your disciplinary association, in your project, in a thing like this chance cohort of 26 projects, we can talk to each other because almost always in the case of Ethics, just running it by a couple more people to see what their gut feeling is and if where your spidey senses are.

are going haywire if this resonates with other people will make things better. The second one is that life is messy and this kind of creative approach of accepting mess is really important in ethics as well in terms of wanting dynamic ethics. But again, accepting messiness does not mean being sloppy. So we want rigour here and kind of really hold on

to it. And finally, Ethics review procedures are, I like to think of them as the first step, right? It's an important step, but that alone is not enough. But also before and after the review, none of us need permission to be thoughtful. Thank you.

JE **Josh Edelman** 1:05:08

Thank you so much, Kat. I really appreciate that. Do you want to...

Just so we're going to move into the Q&A, but just to kind of kick that off, do you want to have any particular, so there's a lot of, I'm just taking some notes, plenty of things we can respond to, but was there any particular question you wanted to pose to us to kind of launch the Q&A?

KT **Kat Tiidenberg** 1:05:28

Yeah.

JE **Josh Edelman** 1:05:28

You don't have to. We've given us plenty to respond.

KT **Kat Tiidenberg** 1:05:30

Um...

Well, then let's do it like this. If you already know what you want to respond to from previous, then please respond to that. But I am really curious about your kind of biggest aha moment, because you're all really established kind of experienced scholars, and you did all these kind of conversations with other researchers and workshops and things.

JE **Josh Edelman** 1:05:35

Mm.

Mhm.

And.

KT **Kat Tiidenberg** 1:05:53

So what were maybe these kind of personally, huh, or wow, I haven't thought about it this way, or like this helps me reframe something that I've been struggling with.

JE **Josh Edelman** 1:06:04

I think that's a great question.

● **Sara Perry** stopped transcription