

# Ethics and the Social Context of Data

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# Agenda

- What are data/research ethics?
- About the US Census
- Data as Texts
- Power, Privacy, Trust and Justice

# Data Ethics

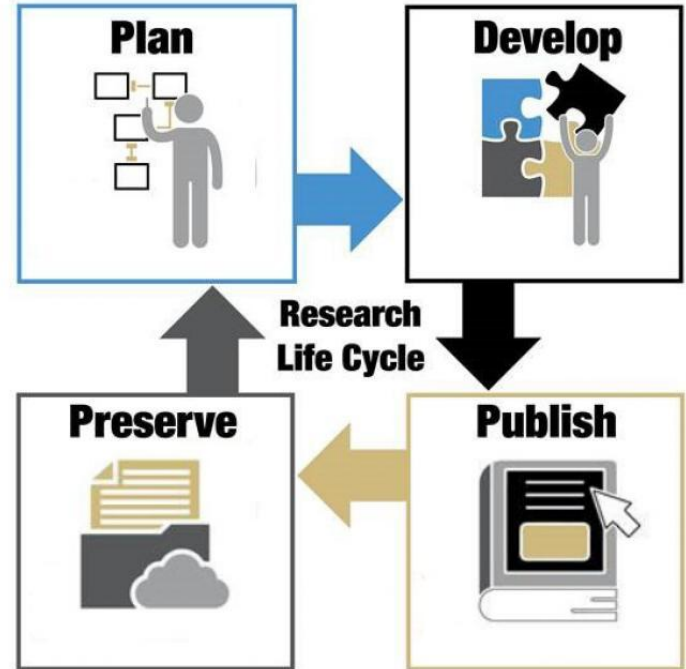
# Data Ethics and the Research Lifecycle

- Uphold applicable statutes, regulations, professional practices, and ethical standards
- Respect the public, individuals, and communities
- Respect privacy and confidentiality
- Act with honesty, integrity, and humility
- Hold oneself and others accountable
- Promote transparency

Based on [Federal Data Strategy](#)

# Data Ethics and the Research Lifecycle

- What does ethics [data / research] mean to you?
- At which stages should you critically engage with your data?



# US Census

Quick facts!

# US Census

## Decennial Census:

- The U.S. census counts every resident in the United States.
- It is mandated by Article I, Section 2 of the US Constitution and takes place every 10 years.

## Other surveys:

- American Community Survey
- Economic Census
- Census of Governments

# How US Census Data are Used (1)

- To determine the distribution of Congressional seats to states
  - Used to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives
  - Used to define legislature districts, school district assignment areas and other important functional areas of government
- To make planning decisions about community services
  - Provide services for the elderly
  - Build new roads and schools
  - Locate job training centers
  - To distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds to local, state and tribal governments each year



# How US Census Data are Used (2)

- Census data informs how states and communities allocate funding for:
  - Neighborhood improvements
  - Public health
  - Education
  - Transportation
- The Age Search service provides information for:
  - Qualifying for Social Security and other retirement benefits
  - Passport applications
  - Proving relationship in settling estates
  - Researching family history or a historical topic

# Data as Texts

# Data as Texts/Artifacts

- Data are not neutral or objective
- Data do not represent a self-evident, discoverable Truth

Rather,

- Data are constructed, the products of biased human choices and perspectives
- The interpretation and analysis of data, like any text, is shaped by our biases and perspectives

# Power

- What's counted, or not?
- How and when something is counted and why?
- Current social and political concerns influencers

# Privacy

- Consent: Permission to use these data
- Anonymization: removing sensitive and identifiable information
- Confidentiality: Whose/what information is protected and for how long?

# Trust

- Forms of Knowledges
- Accountability
- Documentation
- Reproducibility

# Justice

- Missing and incomplete data
- Co-liberation and Impact

# Discussion

- What are some examples of scholarly data and ethical concerns do you handle/encounter in your daily work, scholarship, and/or teaching?
- What do these various data sets capture?
- What do you wish you could learn about your data's origins?
- In what ways do you think power is reflected in your data?
- What data are missing? How might this missing data be useful?
- How might thinking about your data as a text change how you document and share your work?



# THANKS!

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