Ethics in Network Research
Attempt for a Relaunch

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Workshop

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The Power of social networks lies in their informality

In network analysis we deal with the eliciting of relationships which are to a high degree:

- **informal** (ties, and what flows in between them)
- **personal** (edges, and who is hidden behind them)
- **collected personally** (whereby partly confidential informations are disclosed)
„In need for extra care“
Differences between „conventional“ and network studies

• "There are many ways in which network studies differ from conventional studies, that make them more in need of extra care.
• Perhaps the most obvious difference is, that in a network study, anonymity at the data collection stage is not possible.

• For the data to be meaningful, the researcher must know who the respondent was, to record a link from that respondent to the persons with whom the respondent indicates having relationships."
• Steve Borgatti/ JoséMolina 2003: 338

http://netmap.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/img_0296-e1286977927615.jpg?w=225&h=300
“Network analysis always makes visible that which cannot be seen by the naked eye”

“In the case of analysis using public records, the data were already there for “all to see” but in fact, without first collecting data from various sources and putting them in a data base and only then analyzing and graphing them, the data would have remained invisible.” (Charles Kadushin 2005:142)

- „A Wall Street journalist who had written on the Bush-Bin Laden connection is said to have been poring over Lombardis graphs for fourty minutes steadily murmuring :"Oh, my God...”
- Mark probably got his information from that article. But the journalist said, he hadn't fully understood the implications until he saw it all laid out that way.”

Mark Lombardi, late American neo-conceptual artist, famous for his meticulously hand-written sociograms on global networks like the Bush-BinLaden connection out of mostly public resources

# Sensitivity of network data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less critical</th>
<th>More critical</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>written and tabular form</td>
<td>Visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whole network</td>
<td>ego-network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publicly accessible information</td>
<td>personally collected data</td>
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<tr>
<td>aggregate data</td>
<td>individualized data</td>
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<tr>
<td>academic/knowledge-oriented</td>
<td>practical / application-oriented</td>
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Clean Hands?

Is the merging of data, which ...

• are publicly available
• are used in scientific contexts
• are aggregated
• ... in every case ethically sound?
Reliability of data and ex-post prediction

- “The ethics lie in making assertions about connections, centrality, and power when there may be some question about the reliability and accuracy of the sources of the data even when they are publicly available.

- Perhaps asserting that IBM has a central position in the network of computer firms in the internet is one thing, but asserting that a given named person has a central role in a terrorist network (and thereby marking the person for arrest or even “elimination”) is another.” (Charles Kadushin 2005:142)

- Predict, what already has happened

Charles Kadushin Emeritus of Sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.
„Uncloaking Terrorist networks“  
Suspect within 2 degrees?

- “Certain people are more suspicious than others. They make frequent trips back-and-forth to Afghanistan, for instance. “So you start with them. And you work two steps out. If none of those people are connected, you don’t have a cell. You [NSA] don’t have to collect all the data in the world to do that.”

- → Guilt by association?:
- “Being linked to a terrorist does not prove guilt - but it does invite investigation”

Valdis E. Krebs (orgnet.com): „How can we help you see what is hidden?”
www.military.com: „a leading authority in the field...”
A Bin Laden talk tapped by the NSA

- "The brothers, who conducted the operation, all they knew was, that they have a martyrdom operation, and we asked each of them to go to America, but they didn't know anything about the operation, not even one letter. But they were trained and we did not reveal the operation to them, until they are there and just before they boarded the planes."

- “Those who were trained to fly didn't know the others. One group of people did not know the other group. “

- a small network of less than 20 nodes, an average path length of 4.75 steps. Several of the hijackers are separated by more than 6 steps (Krebs 2002).

The sixty-four thousand dollar question to evaluate the ethical implications of network research

- Who gathers whose networks with whose knowledge and with what consent, with whose sources, and with what objective, to whose benefit, to which costs, and with what sort of consequences for whom?

„Ownership“: ...in whose hands...
The Power of network visualization in the hand of the management „studying (ruling) down“ (Laura Nader 1969)

„With network analysis power structures and central actors in your enterprise can be better elicited as would be with simple organizational charts“

„Only enterprises who succeed in identifying their central actors and network bottlenecks, can increase their performance sustainably.“

„The Power of network visualization “
.... In the hand of „Equals“ (strategic management)
„studying (negotiating) sideways“ (Dina Bowman 2010)

Free Listing of actors /stakeholders & Ranking (influence on decisions in the organization)
1= strong; 2= inbetween; 3=weak

First structuring by the management board (group process) (Foto: author)
The Power of Network Visualization
.... To give Voice to Subordinates
(In team and project development)
„studying up“ (Laura Nader 1969)
The Power of network Visualization in Coaching-processes

*Studying through („empowering oneself“)*

**Ego:** Expatriated manager in Asia

- **Corporate Level of Activity**
- **Market Level of Activity**
- **Living Level of Activity**

- Red „conflict prone“ ties of ego
- Optional ties of ego which could improve the success

C: Bridging Cultural Distance
B: Broker
General claims
(after Borgatti/Molina 2003,2005 and Kadushin 2005) und their limitations

• „Avoiding harm to Innocents“: only visualizing and publishing aggregated data, in a way that roles and positions can’t be identified by insiders nor clients, nor participants

• → loss of valuable scientific knowledge?

• „Providing Value to Participants“: „free, prior and informed consent“, Feedback of own results as a minimal re-imbursement

• → but how do you give back singular results without exposing other persons in the network?

• Publishing NWA only, if people concerned are profiting from it (already claimed by Jacob Moreno)

• → Terrorist networks?

• In Whole networks: leave it up to individuals whether or not they want to participate [„non-participation“]

• → but what if A 3 and A 4 in the following research network would have refused to participate (or being shown in the graph)? →
• What, if A4 and A3 would have rejected, or redrawn their consent to be portrayed in the graph?
Research cluster – „Djungle camp“: interest-networks

- What, if A4 and A3 would have rejected, or redrawn their consent to be portrayed in the graph?: →

- **before 2003**: ningún! “dead loss” (Ronald Breiger)
- **2003**: article by Stephen Borgatti/José Molina: “Ethical and Strategic Issues in Organizational SNA”
- **2005**: Issue of Social Networks (5 articles): “Ethical Dilemmas in Social Network Research”
- **2000-2013**: INSNA-Sunbelt-Conferences: Sunbelt 2003 “session on network ethics”; 2 contrib.s in 13 years explicitly dedicated to ethics &SNA (Berbara 2010, Andersen 2013)
- **2011** George Barnett Encyclopedia of Social networks: 2-page entry (mainly review of Borgatti/Kadushin)
- **2011** Kadushin: Understanding SNW (Chap. on Ethics)
- **2012** The Sage Handbook of SNA: 38 articles, 622 S. None(!) deals with ethical aspects
Ethical Guidelines for SNA 2014? non-existent

- 2005: “Our fundamental purpose in writing this paper is to argue for the immediate development of ethical guidelines for network research in both academic and managerial settings.” *Stephen Borgatti/José Molina*

- 2013: “With millions of adolescent users, social network sites (SNSs) are a rich data source for academic research studies. But ethical guidelines governing how researchers should obtain and use this data is seriously lacking”. *Ben Shapiro 2013 (Science 339, 6116 pp. 144-145).*
Why is this so?
The ethical network dilemma

- “The nexus between getting good data and doing the right thing is a dilemma for network researchers”
- “On the benefit side, academic researchers always benefit, organizations, society and science may benefit, but individual respondents rarely do” (Charles Kadushin 2005)
- Touching ethical questions in SNA seriously and explicitly, might endanger its domestic business base.

Charles Kadushin: Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He has also taught at Columbia and Yale universities.
Creating bureaucratic monsters
IRB Boards – a waste of time for SNA?

• “In general, I think that IRBs waste a lot of time reviewing quite innocuous social science research.
• It's been my experience that it is often easier to get approval for a randomized, control trial of a novel anti-cancer drug (wherein the risks to patients are morbidity or death) than for a social science survey project (where the risks are a loss of confidentiality, at worst)"

NICHOLAS A. CHRISTAKIS
Physician and Social Scientist, Harvard University; Coauthor of “Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives.”
On the other side....
If we do not act, we might be „enacted“

- **EU Data Protection Regulation 2014**: New rules to put citizens in control of their personal data
- **right to be forgotten**: When you no longer want your data to be processed and there are no legitimate grounds for retaining it, the data will be deleted.
- **Specific, Explicit Consent**: When your consent is required to process your data, you must be asked to give it explicitly. It cannot be assumed.
- **‘Privacy by design’ and ‘privacy by default’**: Data protection safeguards should be built into products and services from the earliest stage of development; privacy-friendly default settings should be the norm – for example on social networks.

The current [EU Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislationdata/en/directives/95/46/EC) does not consider important aspects like globalization and technological developments like social networks and cloud computing sufficiently and determined that new guidelines for data protection and privacy were required.
Muchas Gracias!

• Let’s discuss...
Role models?

an orientation, if one deals with:

- negotiating occupational minimal standards with employers that one can draw on in case of conflict *before the contract (basis of negotiation)*;
- different protagonists in the context of development *while carrying out the contract (guiding principle)*;
- colleagues, employers and local groups according to the present guidelines after the contract *(accountability)*.