

Tuskegee Syphilis Studies (various authors, 1930s - 1970s)

In 1932, the US Public Health Service began a longitudinal study that came to be called the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male." Black men in Macon County, Alabama were recruited by circulating word in the community that they could receive free tests for "bad blood" at the teaching hospital of the Tuskegee Institute.

616 men (412 diagnosed with syphilis and 204 disease-free controls) eventually participated. At the start of the study, syphilis was poorly understood and untreatable, but penicillin became widely available as an effective cure for the disease in 1943. Nevertheless, participants were not informed of their disease, not treated, and actively encouraged not to go elsewhere once viable treatments were known.

The medical community was aware of the study through numerous scholarly publications, but no one formally objected to the study until 1965. The PHS convened an ethical review panel in 1969 that found no ethical violations and recommended the study continue. It was not halted until 1972, when an Associated Press expose appeared, causing widespread public furor.

The Bell Curve (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994)

The authors argue that cognitive ability is largely inherited, and that there are meaningful differences in intelligence between culturally recognized racial and ethnic groups. They assert that cognitive ability is now the strongest force stratifying educational and occupational access and performance, as well as mating decisions.

In blunt terms, smarter people tend to get more and better education, get better jobs and more promotions, and marry other smarter people - thus transferring greater cognitive stratification into the next generation - and those smarter people tend to overwhelmingly be white or Asian. In their minds, this explains continuing racial differences in life chances, particularly between white and black Americans.

As a consequence they argue that social, educational, and other ameliorative programs cannot overcome these advantages and are effectively a waste of public funding and effort. Their findings are almost universally discredited by other researchers due to methodological flaws, and yet their book significantly contributed to the public perception that "race" is a real biological category and that those "races" are irrevocably unequal.

Regardless of one's political views, is there anything inherently *unethical* about Herrnstein and Murray's research?

'Zimbardo Prison Experiment' (Zimbardo 1972, 1973; Zimbardo, et. al. 1973, 1974)

Male students, testing psychologically "normal," were divided randomly into "prisoners" and "guards." Prisoners were given plain uniforms, numbers, and had all personal effects removed. Guards were given military-style uniforms, nightsticks, and mirrored sunglasses. Prisoners were incarcerated in cells and had to maintain their roles around the clock. Guards were given eight-hour shifts and told simply to maintain a "reasonable degree of order" without inflicting physical harm.

The prisoners soon began antagonizing the guards and the guards rapidly resorted to mental and physical abuse to maintain order among the prisoners. Though the experiment was scheduled for two weeks, conditions became so dangerous that it was called on the sixth day.

Middletown studies (Lynd and Lynd 1929, 1937; Vidich and Bensman 1968; Vidich 1999; and others)

Though the Lynds promised confidentiality and followed the standard convention of changing names and locations, it soon became common knowledge that "Middletown" was Muncie, IN. Once that was known, it was also easy to recognize individuals in what was then a community of only twenty thousand. Of course, many of those portrayals were unflattering and related private information, causing some participants to feel as if they had been betrayed.