

Digging in the Digital Dirt: An examination of the ethical considerations of utilizing deceptive participant observation strategies as a tool of ethnographical longitudinal research methodology designed to study potential dangers to children on the Internet.

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ABSTRACT

The technological advances of the past two decades, with particular emphases placed on the World Wide Web/Internet, is changing the way our world lives and learns. This avalanche of new technology is opening multiple research possibilities in many directions of varying degrees of importance. As a parent and educator I can think of no area more in need of substantial research efforts than the study of the dangers the Internet potentially holds for children. An ancillary consideration is to discuss what role, if any, educators need to assume in this new frontier.

This kind of research appears to be as lagging as it is necessary for a variety of reasons that will be discussed in length in the paper. Exacerbating the problem, and justifying the urgency for this kind of sustained research is partially centered upon the fact that the children logging onto the Internet are much more technologically savvy than the average adult in their lives.

Parents and educators may try to control informational access using various software, yet it seems that we do not yet have the technology to control all the potential pitfalls that are waiting for children on-line. Perhaps even more alarming is the fact that many educational leaders are seemingly unprepared, or unwilling to deal with the primary questions this paper raises.

Specifically, this paper will discuss the ethical considerations of utilizing deceptive participant observation strategies as a tool of ethnographical longitudinal research methodology designed to study potential dangers to children on the Internet.