

Interesting Social Science Activity: What Would You Do? A Researchers Dilemma

Read the following case study from Fordham University's Center for Ethics Education (<http://www.fordhamethics.org/casestudies.htm>):

OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH: A study proposes to examine informal group formation and dissolution of alienated marginalized inner-city adult males in a Bronx park that is a popular hang out for drug users and dealers. In the first phase of the study the investigator plans to "hang out" in the park for a period of 2 months, taking extensive written notes on the timing and manner in which "social" groups are formed each day and the stability and variability of group membership and composition over time. The second part of the investigation requires participant observation. Based upon knowledge gained from his preliminary observations the ethnographer will attempt to informally join some of the social gatherings to acquire additional information on verbal and non-verbal social cues that are used to establish group membership and hierarchy. At no time will the investigator record the names of individuals or any physically identifying information. The investigator plans to disclose his investigatory role to the individuals he observes upon completion of data collection.

Discussion Questions:

- A. Does the design protect the identity of those involved? How?
- B. Should there be a period when folks don't know they're being researched? Why or why not?
- C. What are the problems, as you see it, with this research design?
- D. What sort of ethical issues could arise in **your students** doing social science research?