

The Internet Disconnect in Children's Policy:

A User Study of Outcomes for Internet Access Subsidies and Content Regulation

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Abstract

This study presents a 16-week analysis of network traffic at a public Internet access center in an inner city children's library. It contrasts "digital divide" policy initiatives intended to benefit children with empirical data on use by children under 14. Overall use of the center is consistent with home and school use by children, yet this does not achieve the skills-acquisition implicitly advanced as a goal by digital divide policy. Children frequently watch other users and share the computers at the center, learning about computers from strangers. Although games and chat are not seen legitimate in goals of digital divide policy, children are most likely to share computers during games and chat. Policies about pornography and filtering are much debated, but young children at this center are uninterested in pornographic content. Privacy protection rules now apply to children's sites, but children prefer adult fora for information disclosure.