

APPLYING KNOWLEDGE II



Unit Overview

You have learned about a variety of topic in Units 10-17. In this unit you will apply your knowledge through activities and testing.

Case Studies

Read the following two case studies. You will be answering questions about them in the questions section of this unit.



Case Study 1: Changes in Children's Time with Parents

The following press release announces a study examining changes in the time American children spent with their parents between 1981 and 1997, and the contribution to these changes made by shifting patterns of female labor force participation, family structure, and parental education. Conducted by the University of Michigan and the Institute for Social Research, the study found that, despite a sharp increase in the number of dual-career families, today's children spend more time with their parents than children did two decades ago.

The University of Michigan and Institute for Social Research study finds that children between the ages of 3 and 12 in two-parent families spent about 31 hours a week with their mothers in 1997, compared to about 25 hours in 1981. The amount of time spent with fathers increased from about 19 to 23 hours a week.

“Contrary to popular belief, the increase in female labor force participation has not led to a decrease in the amount of time children spend with their parents,” says John Sandberg, first author of the article and a sociologist at the UM Institute for Social Research (ISR), the world’s largest academic survey and research organization.

“Even though parents, and especially mothers, may be busier than ever, many seem to be managing to fit in more time with their children than an earlier generation of parents did.”

The study, by Sandberg and ISR senior research scientist Sandra Hofferth, is based on comparison-of-time-diary data from two nationally representative samples of U.S. families, both conducted by the ISR. The 1980 sample included information on 243 children, and the 1997 sample included information on 2,125 children. The children (helped by a parent if necessary) filled out two time diaries, one each for a weekday and a weekend day, describing what they did, with whom they did it, and who was present. The time diaries include activities parents engaged in with children as well as time spent just being in the same room with them.

While the study shows that there have been positive and dramatic increases in children’s time with mothers and with fathers in two-parent families, these changes are not paralleled for children in single-parent families, Sandberg notes. He found that time spent with mothers in single-parent families remained about the same over the period studied—about 21 hours a week.

Sandberg and Hofferth also analyzed how maternal employment affected the amount of time children spent with mothers and fathers. In 1981, U.S. children spent, on average, about 3.5 fewer hours a week with mothers who worked than with mothers who didn’t, he found. In 1997, the difference was about 5.5 hours. But in fact the amount of time children spent with both working and non-working mothers increased over the period studied, so that children whose mothers worked in 1997 spent about the same amount of time with their mothers, on average, as did children whose mothers did not work outside the home in 1981.

Whether a mother was working or not had no significant effect on the amount of time children spent with fathers in 1981 or in 1997, the authors found. However, in families with working moms, children spent considerably more time with dads in 1997 than they did in 1981. “This suggests that fathers may be taking more responsibility for child-care when mothers work,” says Sandberg.

Questions about this case study will be answered at the end of the questions section of this unit.



Case Study 2: How the Internet Is Changing Daily Life

As Internet use grows, Americans report they spend less time with friends and family, shopping in stores, or watching television, and more time working for their employers at home—without cutting back their hours in the office. The following information was taken from a press release announcing the major preliminary results of a study that assesses the social consequences of Internet use based on a large representative sample of American households, including both Internet users and non-users. Conducted by the Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society (SIQSS), the report includes a sample of 4,113 adults in 2,689 households.

A key finding of the study is that “the more hours people use the Internet, the less time they spend in contact with real human beings,” said Stanford Professor Norman Nie, Director of SIQSS and principal investigator along with his co-investigator Professor Lutz Erbring of the Free University of Berlin. “This is an early trend that, as a society, we really need to monitor carefully.”

Some of the preliminary findings are:

- People spend more hours on the Internet the more years they have been using it.
- Up to a quarter of the respondents who use the Internet regularly (more than five hours a week) feel that it has reduced their time (in person or on the phone) with friends and family or attending events outside the home.
- A quarter of regular Internet users who are employed say the Internet has increased the time they spend working at home without cutting back at the office.
- Sixty percent of regular Internet users say the Internet has reduced their TV viewing, and one-third say they spend less time reading newspapers.
- The least educated and the oldest Americans are least likely to have Internet access, but when they do use the Internet, their use is similar to that of others.

About two-thirds of those surveyed who have Internet access said they spend fewer than five hours a week on the Internet, and most of them did not report large changes in their day-to-day behavior, the researchers said. But the other 36 percent who use the Internet five or more hours a week do report significant changes in their lives. The largest

changes are reported by those who spend more than 10 hours a week on the Internet - individuals who currently account for only 15 percent of all Internet users but are likely to be a much larger fraction in the future.

“As of today, heavy Internet users are still a small fraction of the total population,” Nie said, “but that fraction is steadily growing.”

“Moreover,” Erbring added, “time spent on the Net also grows with the number of years a person has been connected.”

“Internet time is coming out of time viewing television but also at the expense of time people spend on the phone gabbing with family and friends or having a conversation with people in the room with them,” Nie said.

Most Internet users use e-mail, and undoubtedly have increased their “conversations” with family and friends through this medium, he said. “E-mail is a way to stay in touch, but you can’t share a cup of coffee... with somebody on e-mail or give them a hug,” he said.

“The Internet could be the ultimate isolating technology that further reduces our participation in communities even more than did automobiles and television before it,” he said.

For the most part, Nie said, the Internet is an individual activity. “It’s not like TV, which you can treat as background noise. It requires more engagement and attention.”

Of regular Internet users who use the Net five or more hours per week, about one-quarter report spending less time with family and friends, either in person or on the phone, and eight percent say they spend less time attending social events outside the home.

On the other hand, Erbring said, “those who use the Internet most also report spending fewer hours a week caught in traffic, fewer hours in shopping malls, and especially, less time watching television.”

Questions about this case study will be answered at the end of the questions section of this unit.

Final Exam

Before taking the final exam, review Units 10 – 17. Study the major theorists, the major concepts, and definitions.



Now stop and answer questions 1 through 52.