
FAMILY SURVEY STUDY

Spring 2007

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

The first decade of the 21st century is quickly becoming part of the history books, and it is clear that there is still much to learn as a science and a society. Even though our standard of living here in America remains relatively high compared to many parts of the world, most of us believe that we have not reached our full potential as an American society. As you are no doubt well aware, our society still faces lots of challenges...and it is often easier to see and talk about those challenges than it is to actually do something about them. The world is a complicated place, and most of us have our hands full dealing with our local lives (let alone all the problems faced by people in neighboring counties, states, and nations), but we believe that your participation in the Family Survey Study has already made significant contributions to solving some of our most pressing social challenges.

We continue to work hard on studying those aspects of families and individuals that can make a difference in people's lives. Our work obviously depends heavily on learning about the lives of real people and, for that, we thank you for being part of the Family Survey Study. As we have mentioned before, this is one of the only studies in the world that has been able to obtain so many years of information from people who began as young adolescents but who are now young adults. Your participation has been incredibly important for helping to advance both scientific

understanding and policy action. We continue to present results from this study at national and international conferences, in professional journals, and through other media venues such as newspapers and public radio. We have much to thank you for, and we hope you feel good about helping us better understand how to promote positive, healthy development across the life span.

In the coming years, we hope to expand this study to include the important experiences you are having as adults. Most studies stop after the teenage years, but we believe it is essential to understand both (a) how events and experiences that occurred during adolescence do and do not relate to events and experiences occurring during adulthood and (b) how these relations might be different for different people. Amazingly, there is very little research on this topic and now, perhaps more than ever before, it would be really nice if we could translate your successes as adults into constructive advice for the next generation of developing youth. We will soon be in touch with you about our future plans, and we sincerely hope that you will join us in our efforts to make this world a better place to live.

We hope that you enjoy this newsletter, and thanks again for all of the help you have given to us by participating in this study for the past 16 years!

Sincerely,

Jacquelynne Eccles
Project Director

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Please check out our website!

<http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/pgc/>

MOVING?

Please send us your new contact information:

familyurveystudy@umich.edu

or leave us a message at: 1-888-764-8060

Choosing an Information Technology Career

Information Technology (IT) is a booming industry in the US and abroad. As career opportunities in IT grow, so does the need for qualified applicants. But women and minorities remain under-represented in computer fields in the US. Women account for less than 30% of the IT workforce. African Americans make up only 5% of the IT field. Why do some young adults get into and stay in IT careers?

The National Science Foundation has been very interested in this topic and has challenged the research community to explain why so few Americans choose an IT career. We took this challenge and turned to you to answer the question! For example, some of you shared your stories of getting on, and sometimes off, the IT track. You gave 4 major reasons including: feeling competent in IT, being interested in IT, valuing the income and benefits that come with IT jobs, and feeling like an “IT person.” Most people indicated more than one reason. Some were motivated by all these factors.

Those with only one motivating factor quickly got out of the IT field. We believe that one factor just wasn’t sustaining enough in a world of career opportunities. One participant felt very competent in IT but her passion was in youth ministry and so she found a job there. Another participant was interested in IT but didn’t feel she was good at IT work; she found a job in education where she felt more competent.

Participants who were motivated by the income of an IT job often stayed in the IT field but told us that they would be willing to leave if a better opportunity came along. One man shared that he would definitely be willing to change careers. He said, “Oh yeah [I’d take another job]. I mean, whatever’s lucrative. It’s all about business, you know?”

Not surprisingly, the lucky participants who were motivated by all 4 factors (they felt competent and were interested in IT, they felt like an “IT person,” and valued the income and benefits that come with IT jobs) stayed in the IT field and didn’t have any plans to leave. Why would they!?

What Do You Rely On to Help You Reach Your Goals?

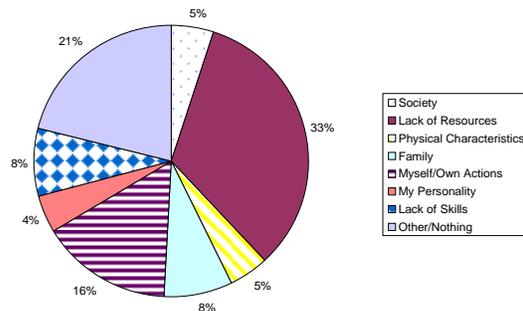
A few years ago we asked some of you what kinds of support you relied on to help you achieve your school-related and work-related goals. Your responses to these questions were quite varied. One thing that helped was having goals that worked well together, so you could work toward both goals at the same time. Another thing many of you reported was that when you relied on yourself by

working hard and staying focused, you knew you could ‘get the job done’ and attain your goals.

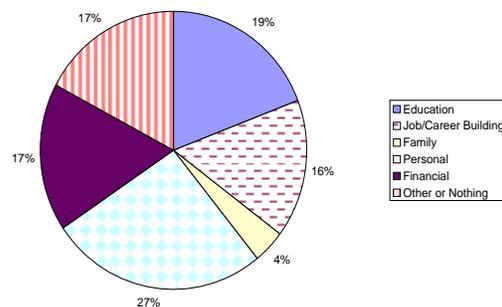
Even though you are now adults, many of you turned to your parents, siblings, and other family members for assistance. The kinds of help that they provide have changed over time. When you were children, your families probably served as role models and gave you lots of social support. Now that you are independent and responsible, your families still try to encourage you but they also do things like help you find good jobs.

We also asked you about what kinds of things might interfere with your job goals and what you were doing to prevent those things from happening. The most common thing that could interfere with your job plans was not having enough resources, such as not having enough money or time to go back to school for training. That’s probably why 17% of you were working on saving money and finding scholarships in order to reach your goals. By far, the most common thing that you were doing to prevent the kinds of things that could interfere with your goals was relying on your self. By working hard, staying focused on your goals, and being positive, you were reducing the chances that something would get in your way.

What kinds of things could interfere with your job goals?



What do you do to prevent the kinds of things that can interfere with your job goals?



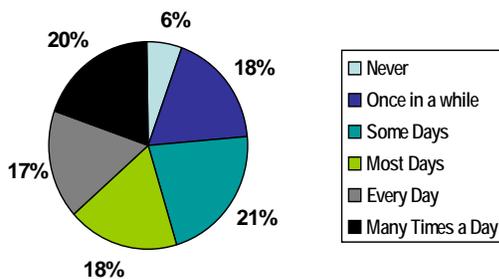
Religion and Spirituality in Your Lives

When you were 21, we asked you several questions about your religious and spiritual life. You were asked “What is your religion?” You could respond in one of three ways: 1) by naming your religion, 2) by answering that you were spiritual but not religious, or 3) by responding that you don’t have a religion. Most of you told us that you have a religion (75%), while far fewer reported being spiritual but not religious (13%) or not having a religion (12%). We also asked you questions about the relevance of religion in your lives.

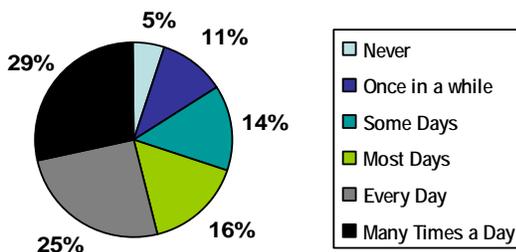
Of those of you who are religious:

- Half reported having a significant gain in their faith at some point in their lives.
- Many found strength and comfort in their religion on “most days” and up to “many times a day” (55%).
- A large number found religion was “very” important in their day-to-day life (43%).
- The majority reported feeling God’s love “most days,” “every day,” or “many times a day” (70%).

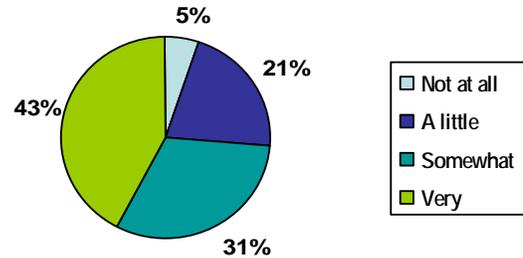
How often do you find strength and comfort in your religion?



How often do you feel God’s love, directly or through others?



How important is religion in your day-to-day life?



Activities You Chose Over Time

Policy makers, educators, parents, and program developers have expressed concern over how young people spend their time. They ask challenging questions about how youth should best use their time in order to promote healthy development. Policy makers are also concerned about the best way to use tax payers’ dollars to support positive development. Should they fund after school programs and if so what kind? Others worry that youth are overscheduled and do not have enough time to just relax and do what they want. More and more evidence suggests that participating in structured activities after school is good for development. But how much is too much, how much is not enough, and what kinds of activities are best?

To help answer such questions, we asked you a variety of questions about how you spent your time. For example, we asked you how much time you spent in a variety of common extracurricular activities. Such activities included sports, school clubs (e.g., chess club, government), community groups (e.g., Boys and Girls club), volunteering, religious activities (e.g., youth group), paid work, and playing a musical instrument. We also asked you how much time you spent in other important activities during your free time, such as reading for pleasure, doing homework, household chores, and participating in more “passive” activities such as watching television and hanging out with friends. We used this information to answer questions like: Among the various activity choices available to adolescents, what are the most common ways they choose to spend their free time during the junior and senior high school years? What kinds of changes are there in how adolescents spend their free time as they mature? We also wanted to learn more about the link between participation in particular combinations of activities and healthy development. (Continued on page 4)

We examined these issues by first identifying subgroups based on each person's unique pattern of activity involvement. While the majority of you spent a lot of your time watching television, there were many variations in how much time you spent in the other activities. For example, at each grade, a large proportion of you spent a lot of time participating in sports (approximately 40% of youth at each grade). However, some of you participated in sports as your only extracurricular activity, whereas others spent a great amount of time in other extracurriculars as well as in sports. Some of you focused your time in an extracurricular activity other than sport, such as school clubs, volunteering, or paid work, and a few of you were highly involved in multiple extracurricular activities. Finally some of you reported very little participation in extracurricular activities throughout your junior and senior high school years. By 11th grade, those who did not participate in extracurriculars also tended to spend less time doing homework and reading for pleasure than those of you who did participate.

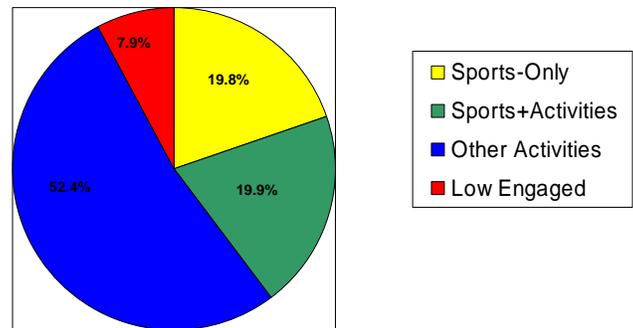
We discovered many interesting things related to how you spent your time in activities. For example, we found that adolescents tended to benefit more from participating in some activity combinations than in others. Those of you who participated in an activity pattern that included sports as the only extracurricular activity did not usually fare as well as those who participated in other extracurricular activities along with your high involvement in sports (see figure below). In fact, youth who participated in a combination of sports and other extracurricular activities (e.g., sport + school clubs, or sport + volunteering) tended to do better academically, socially, and psychologically than their peers.

There were also some long-term effects of participating in certain combinations of activities during adolescence. We found that those who participated in a combination of sports and other organized activities had obtained the highest levels of education and had the greatest declines in depression than all others 1 to 3 years post-high school. These youth also reported having friends with the most positive characteristics and the least negative characteristics throughout adolescence, and were among those with less alcohol use during adolescence, although this difference lessened post-high-school. In contrast, those of you who did not participate in extracurricular activities during the middle and senior high school years were most likely to be doing the least well academically, socially, and psychologically during secondary school and 1 to 3 years post-high school.

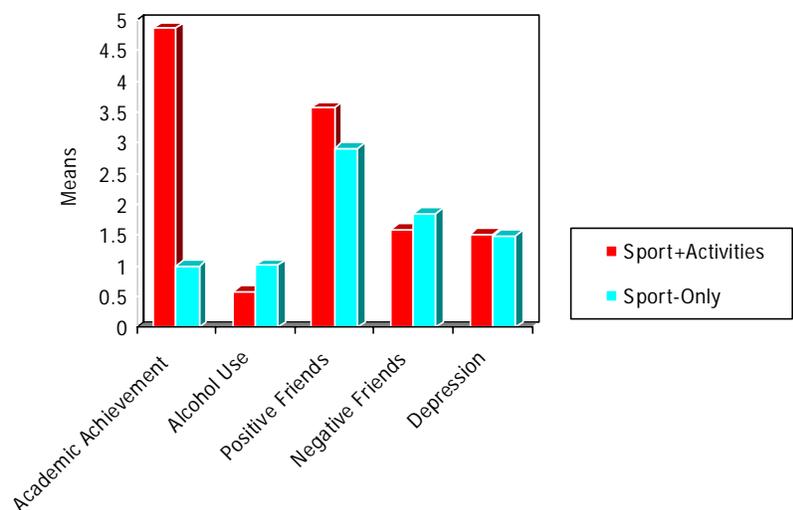
Youth who participated in this highly beneficial combination of sports and other extracurricular activities were most likely to live in neighborhoods and attend schools which provided the resources and safe environments for youth to participate in these positive activities. In fact, we found that if neighborhoods and schools provided the supports needed to participate in these activities (including activity programs and recreational areas for youth, supporting/caring neighbors, and positive school climates),

that you were likely to participate in this combination of activities, even if you came from higher risk neighborhoods that were characterized by high incidences of crime. In sum, these findings indicate that by providing more opportunities and supports for extracurricular activity participation in our communities, we can help promote the positive development of youth from a diversity of economic situations as they mature through the adolescent and young adult years.

Activity Participation Patterns from the 7th to the 11th Grade



Well-Being of Youth by Participation in the Sport +Activities vs. Sport-Only Activity Profiles



Your Political Attitudes

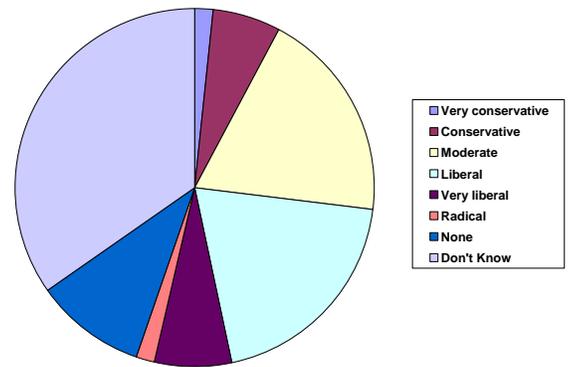
The 2008 presidential race is already heating up and we thought you'd like to know how things look politically in Prince George's County, at least as you reported to us the last time we talked to you. In 2000, 78% of you planned to vote in the next presidential election. Some people were having a hard time describing their political beliefs: While more women than men said they didn't know where they fell on the conservative to radical continuum (38% versus 28%) and another 8% said none of those categories fit them, men were more likely to say none of the categories fit (13%). Most people said they fell in the center and were either moderates (19%) or liberals (20%). There were a few who said they were at either end: 8% said they were conservative or very conservative (8%) and 9% were either very liberal or radical.

Barely half of you identified with a political party (44%) but when you did, it was overwhelmingly the Democratic Party (80%). This was true of more women than men (85% versus 70%). More men who identified with a political party chose the Republican Party (19% versus 9%). Very few people chose the Libertarian (2%) or Green (2%) Parties or said they were Independents (4%).

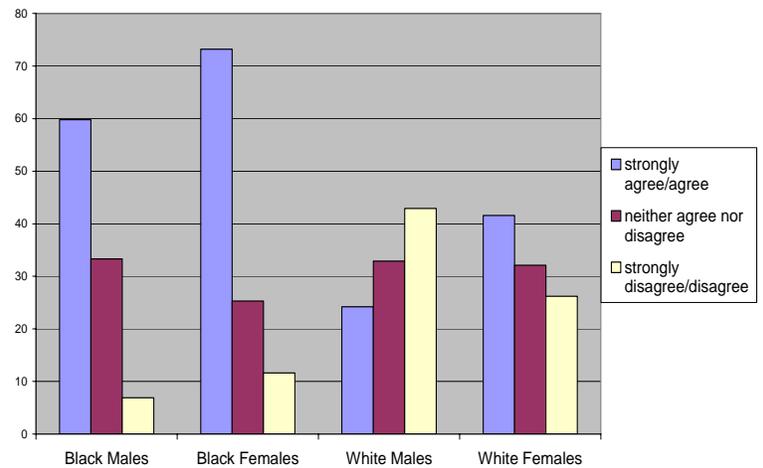
More specifically, we asked you whether you agreed or disagreed with affirmative action programs to correct for (1) racial or ethnic discrimination and (2) sex discrimination. Responses to these questions were very similar. As you might expect, African-Americans were more likely to support affirmative action to combat racial or ethnic discrimination (68%), while European-Americans tended to take either the neutral route by neither agreeing nor disagreeing (32%) or by being against it (32%). When it came to correcting sex discrimination by affirmative action, African-Americans again were in support of it while European-Americans tended not to be. African-American females were mostly in favor (73%) while European-American females were surprisingly much less so (47%). In fact, a few (10%) were strongly against it, as were some European-American males (17%). Most African-American males were in favor of it (58%), as were some European-American males (21%), but many males tended to remain neutral (36%).

That's a snapshot of your political attitudes in 2000. Party identification usually remains stable but there was a large group of you who hadn't yet decided which party you identified with. The 2008 presidential primaries, at least on the Democratic side, should prove interesting and perhaps historical in the offering of a choice between an African-American and a woman as presidential candidates for the first time. Your responses to our questions may be precursors for how you decide to vote in the 2008 presidential race and for the eventual outcome of the race.

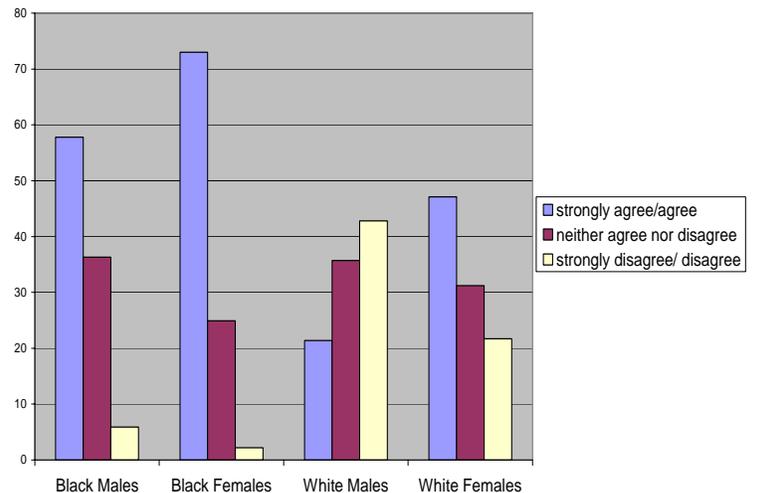
Political Beliefs 2000



Affirmative Action for Race



Affirmative Action for Sex



Adjusting to Life After High School

It's part of growing up, and many of us do it – we graduate from high school. It is an exciting time that leads to a lot of new challenges and signifies the beginning of a new and important chapter in life. However, change can be stressful; especially when there are a lot of changes occurring at once, which is the case after you graduate from high school. For example, after high school graduation people often move out of the home, start a new job or begin attending college, make new friends, and for the first time manage both their own finances and their own household.

After high-school, most of you went on to college (55%) and even more of you moved out of your parents' home (60%). Within a couple years of graduating from high

school, some of you were married (4%) and many of you already had children (19%).

We are interested in understanding how such changes and transitions after the end of high-school impact well-being and development. For example, we looked at how, if at all, your feelings of depression changed over the years following the end of high school. Although there are individual exceptions, the news is generally good. During the years after high-school, feelings of depression were pretty rare. On average, feelings of depression did not increase during these years, which suggests that you and your peers generally adjusted well to the various transitions after high school. In addition, those of you who received lots of social support from your family and friends and went on to attend college were even more likely to adjust easily to life after high-school.

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Thank you for your participation over the years!



We look forward to hearing from you in the future!