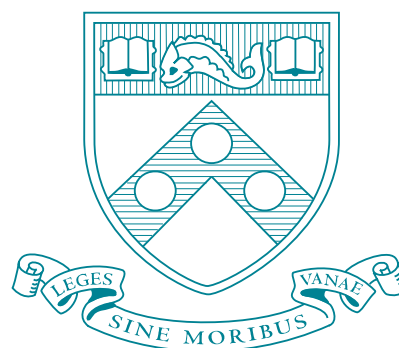


# The Internet and the Family: The View from Parents The View from the Press

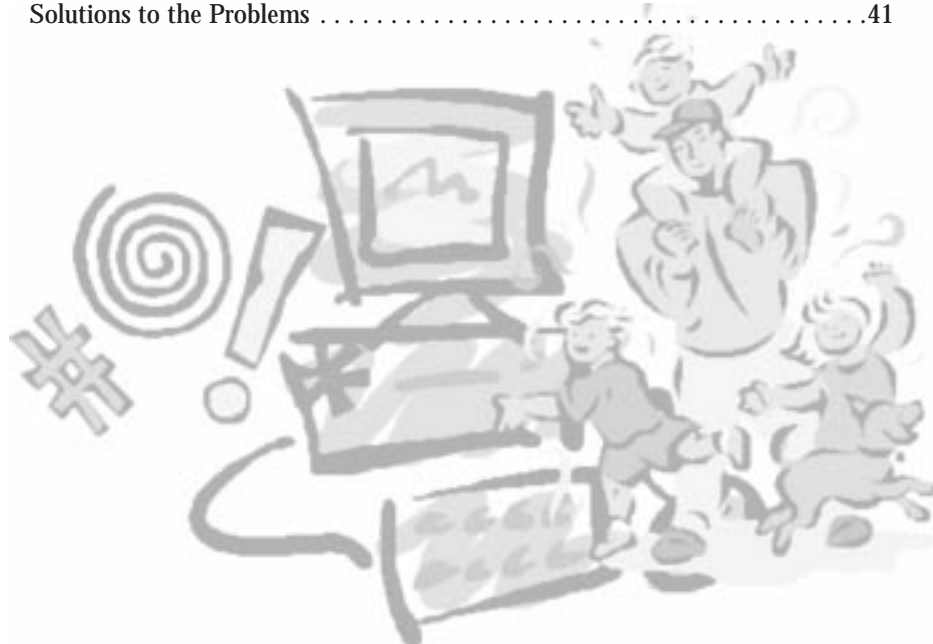
By Joseph Turow

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## FOREWORD

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania which would address public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels. Consistent with the mission of the Annenberg School for Communication, the Center has four ongoing foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; and Health Communication. Each year, as well, a special area of scholarly and social interest is addressed. The Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas. This series of publications disseminates the work of the Center.

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## PART 1: THE VIEW FROM PARENTS

### **Capsule of findings:**

*The majority of American parents with computers at home juggle the dream and the nightmare of the Internet at the same time.*

The rush to connect the Web to American homes is happening despite parents' substantial insecurities about it. Most parents with online connections at home are deeply fearful about the Web's influence on their children. For example, over 75% of these parents are concerned that their children might give out personal information and view sexually explicit images on the Internet.

## PART 2: THE VIEW FROM THE PRESS

### **Capsule of findings:**

*"Your children need the Internet. But, if they do go online, be terrified."*

From October 15, 1997 through October 15, 1998, stories in 12 newspapers presented the Internet as a Jekyll-and-Hyde phenomenon over which parents are left to take control with little community backup. Sex crimes regarding children and the Web were featured in one of every four articles. The press' portrayal of the Internet reflects the results of the national survey presented in Part 1.



# PART 1: THE VIEW FROM PARENTS

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## OVERVIEW

The majority of American parents with computers at home juggle the dream and the nightmare of the Internet at the same time.

- 60% of U.S. households with children aged 8 to 17 have home computers. Of those, 61% are connected to the Internet.
- American parents are conflicted about the Web. Across the nation, 70% of parents with computers in the home say the Internet is a place for children to discover “fascinating, useful things” and nearly 60% say that children who don’t have the Internet are disadvantaged compared to their peers who do. At the same time, over 75% of parents are concerned that their children might give out personal information and view sexually explicit images on the Internet.
- Most parents with online connections at home are deeply fearful about the Web’s influence on their children. Online parents can be categorized as *online worriers*, *disenchanted*s, and *gung ho*s. The gung ho group, the only one with overall positive attitudes, makes up only 39% of online parents.
- Attitudes toward the Web, positive or negative, are not good predictors of whether the parent will have an online connection at home. Parents with home computers but no online connections fall into three groups that are surprisingly similar in outlook to the corresponding groups of “online” parents. The groups are *offline worriers*, *bah humbugs*, and *ready-to-go*s.
- Education and income are also not major determinants of whether a household will have an online connection once a computer is in the home.
- Instead, the most important predictor of an online connection in a household with a computer seems to be a parent’s experience with the Web outside the home.
- 32% of parents with online connections use protective software that guards children’s access to sites—a sign that a substantial number of parents have gone out of their way to try to deal with the concerns they hold.

These are highlights from the first *Annenberg National Survey on the Internet and the Family*. The groundbreaking study of parental attitudes and activities around the Web was conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide for the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. 1,102 parents in households with at least one working computer and at least one child between ages 8 and 17 were interviewed by phone between November 12th and December 20th, 1998.

The purpose of the study was to understand what parents think and do about the Web. We also wanted to find out what factors determine adoption of the Internet or not, when people already have a computer at home. By limiting the research to families with computers, our analysis could look beyond the number one obstacle to being online: having the discretionary income necessary to have a computer.

- Our findings reveal that the rush to connect the Web to American homes is happening despite parents' substantial insecurity. In certain ways, the fears parents have revealed to us are similar to the fears parents have expressed during introduction of the movies, broadcast television, and cable TV. But the concerns are not merely repeats of past litanies.
- Parents are nervous about two features of Web programming they haven't seen in broadcast or cable television: its wide-open nature and its interactivity. Parents fear the Web for its unprecedented openness—the easy access by anybody to sexuality, bad values, and commercialism. They also fear the Web for its unprecedented interactive nature—the potential for invading a family's privacy and for adults taking advantage of children. These fears are heightened among many parents because they don't believe they understand the technology well enough to make the best use of it. Yet they believe their children need it.

To ask whether children *really* need to have the Web may be irrelevant, since the Internet is quickly becoming an integral part of the audiovisual environment. In a few years, there may be little real distinction between “television” and “the Internet.” With that in mind, policymakers should fund research to help parents learn more about whether they should be scared of the Web at home, why, and what they can do about it. Some key questions:

- Do children's Web-surfing habits reflect their parents' values? Or are the tactics of marketers and other Web forces subverting parents' values, leading kids into areas that challenge, and even try to change, the basic precepts that parents hope their children will have?
- Do children use the Web the way their parents think they do? What are the implications of different sorts of Web use for a child's success in school and in life?
- What steps should parents take to alleviate their fears and channel their children toward Web habits that benefit them?
- Can courses for parents in Web literacy—given in schools, libraries and community centers—help offline and online parents evaluate the costs and benefits of the Web, and of filters and “safe haven” sites that aim to eliminate objectionable material?

These basic questions will become increasingly important as more and more American, and world, families, go online. The best time to start addressing them is now.



# THE STUDY AND THE POPULATION

Roper Starch Worldwide conducted the research based on a set of interview questions prepared at the Annenberg School for Communication. The interviews averaged about 17 minutes in length. Through them, we sought to

- delve deeper than previous research into parents' attitudes and beliefs about the Internet and the potential impact this new phenomenon is having on their children and the entire family unit;
- understand how parents who have the Internet at home are coping with the potential uses and abuses of this new technology that is rapidly becoming a fixture in people's lives; and
- begin identifying factors that contribute to, and even predict, why parents in some computer households subscribe to an online service and others do not.

Tables 1 and 2 present basic demographic characteristics of our population of 1,102 parents. All have computers and children aged 8-17. In the tables, the population is divided into those whose households are and aren't online<sup>1</sup>. Both groups of parents are predominantly in their 30s and early 40s, white, married, and employed. Most have a yearly household income of \$50,000 or more.

Parents from online homes are somewhat more highly educated and wealthy than parents with home computers that aren't connected to the Web. The main difference relates with respect to computer households making \$75,000 a year or more. While they make up 18% of computer households that are not online, they comprise 32% of the homes that are connected to the Web. Other differences are not nearly as large, however.

While income and education differences between the two are noteworthy, they don't seem to be big or consistent enough to explain why some computer households are online and others are not. Considering that 12% of the online parents and 8% of those not online at home refused to reveal their income bracket, the differences between the two groups may not even be as large as their answers suggest. Later we will see that parents' income and education are not, in fact, major predictors of whether or not a computer household is online. Before doing that, however, we will examine what both groups of parents say and do about themselves, their kids and the online world.

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<sup>1</sup> The margin of error for reported percentages based on the entire sample of 1102 is approximately plus or minus 3 percentage points. For reported percentages based on parents with Web connections at home, the margin of error is plus or minus 4 points. For reported percentages based on parents with no Web connections at home, the margin of error is plus or minus 5 points. For reported percentages comparing online and offline parents, the margin of error is plus or minus 6 points. The margin of error is higher for smaller subgroups within the sample.

Table 1: Parents With Children Aged 8-17 and Computers at Home

	Online at Home (N=676)	Not Online (N=426)
	%	%
<b>SEX</b>		
Male	47	46
Female	53	54
<b>AGE</b>		
20-29	4	3
30-44	60	66
45-59	33	28
60 or older	2	2
<b>RACE</b>		
White	86	81
African American	5	8
White Hispanic	5	6
Black Hispanic	1	1
Asian	1	1
Native American	1	1
Other	2	2
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>		
Married	86	84
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>		
Employed	88	87
“Not employed” homemaker	8	7
“Not employed” student	1	1
Retired	1	3*
Disabled	1	1
Unemployed	1	1
<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN, AGED 8-17</b>		
One	47	3
Two	37	36
Three	11	15*
Four or more	5	6

\* indicates that the row difference is statistically significant. When numbers add up to more than 100%, it is because of rounding error.

Table 2: Last Education Degree and Household Income of Parents With Children Aged 8-17 and Computers at Home

	Online at Home (N=676) %	Not Online at Home (N=426) %
<b>LAST EDUCATION DEGREE</b>		
Grade school or less	—	1 *
Some high school	4	7
High school graduate	25	34 *
Some college	27	29
College graduate	26	19 *
Post graduate	18	10 *
<b>YEARLY INCOME</b>		
Less than \$30,000	8	14 *
\$30,000 - \$49,999	23	29 *
\$50,000 - \$74,999	25	31 *
\$75,000 or more	32	18 *
No answer	12	8

\* indicates that the row difference between online and not online is statistically significant.

## PARENTS AND THE ONLINE WORLD

An overwhelming majority of “online” and “offline” parents have used computers. 45% in each group consider themselves “intermediate” users, with a somewhat greater percentage of online parents saying they are experts and a somewhat greater percentage of offline parents admitting to beginner status.

The difference between the two groups is much greater when it comes to the ability to navigate the Web. While 96% of the online parents said they had “ever gone online,” only a bit over half of the offline parents said that. And while only 27% of the online parents called themselves beginners, 42% of the offline parents *who have gone online at all* dubbed themselves beginners. This means that 68% of all the offline parents have either never used the Web or consider themselves neophytes with the Internet.

On average, online parents have had the Web at home 1.8 years. They are likely to use the Web at home fairly frequently. 23% said they use it every day, with 30% saying they use it every other day or every few days. Their use of the Web outside the home tends to revolve around work. 60% of online parents said they used the Internet at work “during the past month,” but only 20% said they used it anywhere else outside the home (for example, at the library or a friend’s house).

Offline parents’ relative dearth of Web experience shows up not only in their inability to access it at home but also in their comparatively low use of the Web at work or elsewhere outside the home. Only 32% used the Web at work “during the past month,” and only 16% said they used it anywhere else. Moreover, while 41% of parents with Web connections at home said they used the Web at work at least every few days, only 19% of parents with no Web connections at home reported using the Web at work at least every few days.

Despite their major differences in uses of the Web, there were remarkable similarities between online and offline parents in their attitudes about the Web and in their supervision of children regarding the Web. To understand the similarities, we have to understand that online and offline parents were really made up of different groups of parents with dramatically different attitudes toward the Internet. In fact, each group of online parents has a corresponding group of offline parents that is more similar to it than the other online groups. To see how this works, we look at the views of parents in each segment.

## THE VIEWS OF PARENTS FROM ONLINE HOMES

We presented all the parents in our survey with 21 statements about the Internet and children. For each, we asked them whether they agreed strongly, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, disagreed or disagreed strongly. The statements included 8 favorable assertions about the Web, 8 unfavorable assertions about the Web and 5 opinions about the Internet's practical utility for their households. An example of a favorable assertion is "Online my children discover fascinating things they never heard of before." An unfavorable assertion is "I am concerned that my child might view sexually explicit images on the Web." A comment about the Internet's practical utility is "My computer is not powerful enough to handle the Internet well."

We used a computer technique called cluster analysis to discover if all online parents fit one profile in their answers to these statements or if there is diversity among them regarding their attitudes toward the Web. The technique determines whether there are patterns among respondents' in the extent to which certain statements deviate strongly from the average reply ("the mean"), based on a scale in which "agree strongly" is 5 and "disagree strongly" is 1. When the deviation from the mean of responses to a particular statement is strongly positive, it means that the people in the group agreed or agreed strongly with the statement more than most of the people in the sample. When the deviation from the mean of responses to a particular statement is strongly *negative*, it means that the people in the group disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement more than most of the people in the sample.

As Chart 1 shows, we found three groups of online parents with startling differences in the six statements that deviate most from the mean. We label the groups **online worriers**, **disenchanted** and **gung ho parents**. Table 3 notes their agreement to the statements in terms of percentages. Here are their major characteristics:

Chart 1: Groups of Online Parents Based on Their Views of the Web



\* This is the mean (average) of responses to the statement by the entire online sample. See text.

**TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF ONLINE PARENTS WHO AGREE “STRONGLY” OR “SOMEWHAT” WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT THE INTERNET (N=676)**

	Total %	Online Worrier %	Disenchanted %	Gung Ho %
Access to the Internet helps my children with their schoolwork.	84	92	53 *	93
Online, my children discover fascinating useful things they never heard of before.	81	87	58 *	88
I am concerned that children give out personal information about themselves when visiting Web sites or chat rooms.	77	88	87	60 *
I am concerned that my child/children might view sexually explicit images on the Internet.	76	86	87	59 *
Children who do not have Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who do have Internet access.	68	79	22 *	83
Going online to often might lead children to become isolated from other people.	60	88 *	60 *	33 *
The Internet can help my children learn about diversity and tolerance.	60	65	28 *	72
People worry too much that adults will take advantage of children on the Internet.	57	56	56	59
Families who spend a lot of time online talk to each other less than they otherwise would.	48	77 *	47 *	21 *
My children's exposure to the Internet might interfere with the values and beliefs I want to teach them.	42	72 *	44 *	11 *
Children who spend too much time on the Internet develop anti-social behavior.	40	66 *	37 *	16 *
The Internet is a safe place for my children to spend time.	40	39 *	13 *	56 *
The Internet can bring my children closer to community groups and churches.	37	39 *	9 *	50 *
Having Internet access at home is really for children whose parents know a lot about computers.	34	49 *	27	22
It is expensive to subscribe to an Internet service.	29	37	36	17 *
I have better things to do with my money than spend it going online.	28	34 *	52 *	8 *
My family can get access to the Internet from other places so we do not really need it at home.	23	30 *	32	6 *
I often worry that I won't be able to explore the web with my children as well as other parents do.	21	37 *	10	11
I do not mind when advertisers invite my children to web sites to tell them about their products.	21	20 *	9 *	29 *
My children are not interested in having an Internet connection at home.	15	18 *	27 *	6
My computer is not powerful enough to handle the Internet well.	15	20 *	13	10

\* means that the percentage is significantly different statistically from the percentages of the two other parent groups in the row.

## ■ Online Worriers (39% of Online Parents)

These parents are more concerned than those in the other two groups about the effects the Internet might have on their children and their families. Online worriers show above average agreement with the following statements that deal with issues of *values* and *social isolation*

- 72% agree that children's exposure to the Internet may interfere with family values and beliefs.
- More than three out of four (77%) agree that families that spend a lot of time online talk to each other less than they otherwise would.
- 88% agree that going online might lead to the child's isolation.
- Two-thirds (66%) agree it could lead to anti-social behavior by the child.

But these concerns are balanced by a belief in the benefits of connecting to an online service.

These people—60% of whom have had an Internet connection at home for a year or more—are also convinced that there is real value for their kids to having access from home:

- Nearly eight in 10 (79%) agree that children without Internet access are disadvantaged.
- More than 9 in 10 (92%) agree access helps children with their homework; 58% agree *strongly* with this statement.
- 87% agree children can learn fascinating and useful things online.

So these parents are highly conflicted. They feel strongly enough about the Internet's inherent importance to their children to go and stay online. But they also express a higher-than-average level of concern that the Internet may interfere with family values, and they worry that their children might expose themselves to the isolating and anti-social side of the Web.

## ■ Disenchanted (22% of Online Parents)

While online worriers are convinced of both the happy and scary elements of the Web, disenchanted parents are not at all sure of the Internet's value for their kids. Unlike the other two groups with Web experience, disenchanted parents reject the common wisdom that access to the World Wide Web is a near-necessity for students to succeed today.

- 67% disagree that children who do not have access to the Internet are disadvantaged. This makes these parents near polar opposites of the other two groups of parents in online homes. 81% of other online parents *agree* that kids without access are disadvantaged.
- Just over half of these parents (53%) do agree that access helps kids with their homework, but the number is low compared to the other two online groups, where there is overwhelming (over 90%) agreement with the statement. Disenchanted parents are also much more likely than other online parents to reject the notion that kids learn useful and fascinating things on the Internet.
- In addition, unlike the others, these parents disagree that the Internet helps with bringing children closer to community groups or that it can help children learn about diversity and tolerance.



- Disenchanted parents are even more despairing than the online worriers when it comes to seeing the World Wide Web as a safe haven for exploration. 77% disagree somewhat or strongly that the Internet is a safe place for kids, compared to 54% of the worriers and 30% of the gung ho's who gave that answer. In fact, more than twice as many disenchanted parents than gung ho's and worriers disagree strongly that the Web is safe.

This group's skepticism about benefits that the Web offers to their children is reflected in the parents' attitudes toward the costs involved as well. Even though their income level is comparable to that of the other online groups, disenchanted parents are much less likely to feel that the cost of an online subscription is money well spent. A minority (44%) of these parents agree that it's expensive to subscribe to an Internet service, yet a majority (52%) of this group still says they have better things to do with their money. By contrast, a substantially smaller percentage of the online worriers and gung ho parents—34% and 8%, respectively—say they have better things to do with their money.

Clearly this group is not sold on the inherent value of the Internet experience for their children. The pattern of answers suggests that disenchanted parents keep the Web more because they think it has become a requirement for up-to-date families in the late twentieth century than because they think it will bring great benefit.

### ■ Gung Ho Parents (39% of Online Parents)

Online worriers and disenchanted parents together comprise 61% of those with Web connections at home. Gung ho parents, who are highly positive about the Web, comprise the other 39%. What places these people in a separate group is not their strong belief in the Internet's positive effects; online worriers respond that way, too. Rather, gung ho parents stand out because in large numbers they reject nearly all statements about the Internet's alleged negative effects.

- 78% disagree that their children's exposure to the Internet might interfere with the values and belief they want to teach their kids. That contrasts with 18% of the worriers and 46% of the disenchanted parents who disagree.
- 68% disagree that going online takes away from family time—in direct opposition to the 77% of the online worriers who *agree* with this statement. 58% disagree that surfing the Web will isolate children, and 69% reject the idea that it could lead to anti-social behavior.
- Gung ho's are not wealthier than other online parents. Yet, in contrast to the disenchanted parents, 83% disagree that they have better things to do with their money; 52% disagree *strongly*, confirming their stand that the Internet offers value to children.

Gung Ho parents have had an online connection longer than other online parents. (51% have been connected from home for two years or more, compared to only a third of either of the other two groups.) They are more likely themselves to go online every day from work, and somewhat more likely to rate themselves as advanced or expert users. These parents seem to have assimilated the Internet into their homes as a benign, beneficial new technology.

## Parent Supervision Regarding the Internet

We found that the different parent groups' beliefs about the Internet's influence associated with statistically significant differences in their actions. Online worriers were consistently more likely than the others to supervise their children—and to exercise the strictest supervision. Disenchanted parents were next, with gung-ho parents coming last. None of these groups' actions was so unusual, however, as to alter our basic conclusions about how online parents supervise their children regarding the Internet. Consequently, in the interest of brevity and clarity we focus in this section collectively on the respondents with Web connections at home.

In devising the survey, we recognized that parents' approaches to their children regarding the Web might depend on the age and/or sex of a particular child. Early in the interview we asked parents for the name, sex and age of their 8-to-17-year-old with the most recent birthday. A large number of the questions about child activities and parent supervision related specifically to that youngster.

47% of the children named were girls and 52% were boys (1% of the respondents refused to tell us). 49% of the children spanned ages 8 to 12, and 51% fell into the 13 through 17 category. The average age was 13.2.

As it turns out, the child's sex does not play a statistically significant role in parents' answers. Age sometimes does. In parents' reports, younger and older children differed statistically when it came to whether or not they ever went online; 93% of the older children have done it, while a smaller (but still very large) 81% of the younger ones have gone on the Web. Looking at parents' reports of the children who did go online from home, there were no age-related statistical differences in usage. 76% of them went online during the past month, 50% went online more than 10 days during that time, and 12% did it every day.

As for going online *out* of home, 36% of the parents of younger children said their kids had done it "during the past month," while 48% of the parents of older children reported that they had used the Web outside the home. Table 4A indicates that school was the most popular location, with friends' houses second and the public library third. Table 4B reveals that doing homework and e-mail were the most common tasks for the older kids, while playing games came first for younger ones, with homework second.

Note that more than half of the parents of kids in each age category mentioned conducting research and doing homework as the most common activities. Parents of both age groups clearly see school-related pursuits as central to their kids' online lives. Sociability—email and chat rooms—also take center stage, with 29% of the parents of younger children and 53% of the parents of older children mentioning it. "Buying things," creating a Web site, and listening to music received few mentions among the two most popular activities on line.

Most parents are quite sure they keep up with their children's Web activities, both in and out of home. As Table 5 shows, the percentage of confident parents did change with the child's age and whether the online computer was at home or out-of-home. Both groups of parents were more likely to feel confident of their knowledge if the Web activities were in- rather than out- of the home. And parents of the younger children were more likely than parents of older ones to believe they know where their kids go in the virtual world.

**Table 4A: From Where Has the Child With the Most Recent Birthday Gone Online Outside of Home?\***

(Asked of parents with online connections at home who say that the child has gone online outside of home in the past month)\*\*

	<b>Age 8-12 (N=115)</b>	<b>Age 13-17 (N=173)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
School	76	83
Public Library	14	12
At a Job	1	3
A Friend's/Relative's House	20	28
Local College/College Libraries		
Community Services/Museum	2	-
Church	-	-
Other Mentions	2	-
Don't Remember	1	1

\*\* None of the row differences is statistically significant. Numbers don't add to 100% because multiple answers were acceptable.

**Table 4B: What Two Activities Does the Child With the Most Recent Birthday Most Do Online?**

(Asked of parent with online connections at home who says the child goes online at home)

	<b>(N=259)</b>	<b>(N=332)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Do Homework	27	38 *
Conduct Research	26	22
Send and Receive E-Mail	18	28
Play Games or Puzzles	32	14
Participate in Chat Rooms	11	25 *
Surf to Discover Things		
He/She Never Heard of Before	12	12
Read Online Magazines or Newspapers	6	5
Create a Web Site About Her/Himself or Hobby	5	4
Listen to Music	2	6 *
Visiting Museums or Cultural Sites	2	2
Buy Things	1	3
Participate in Community or Religious Groups	-	1
Conduct Business	-	-
Other Mentions	6	3
Don't Know	7	3

\* indicates that the row difference is statistically significant. Numbers don't add to 100% because multiple answers were acceptable.

But, as Table 5 also indicates, the sense by most parents that they understand their children goes beyond their assertions about their Web habits. Most parents also state that they talk to their children frequently or sometimes about their online activities, and most say they trust their kids to do the right thing on the Web. What's more, when asked whether they argue with their child about their Internet use, a huge percentage said no.

An obvious question arises: If so many of these parents are knowledgeable, trusting, communicative and non-combative with their kids, why are so many of them worried about the Web and their children? The answer seems to be that while parents trust their children, they do not trust the Web. Perhaps from news stories (see Part II of this report), perhaps from discussions with other parents, perhaps from personal experience, they have come to believe that a substantial part of the Internet has the potential of invading children's privacy while preying on them sexually and commercially.

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**Table 5: Parents Confidence in, Trust in and Discussions with Children about Being Online**  
(Asked of online parents regarding the child with most recent birthday)

	<b>Age 8-12 (N=319)</b>	<b>Age 13-17 (N=357)</b>
	%	%
<b>CONFIDENCE ABOUT CHILD'S ONLINE ACTIVITIES OUT OF HOME</b>		
Very confident	75	55*
Somewhat confident	19	33*
<b>CONFIDENCE ABOUT CHILD'S ONLINE ACTIVITIES AT HOME</b>		
Very confident	86	69*
Somewhat confident	8	26*
<b>CHILD TALKS TO PARENT ABOUT ONLINE ACTIVITIES</b>		
Frequently	54	46*
Sometimes	23	37*
<b>TRUST OF CHILD'S ONLINE BEHAVIOR</b>		
Complete	58	61
Some	31	34

\* indicates that the row difference is statistically significant.

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Table 6 indicates the extent to which the parents set rules for their specific child's navigation of cyberspace. A consistently higher percentage of parents noted rules for younger children than older ones. Most parents of both groups said they have rules regarding particular sites to visit, the time of day for going online, the amount of time spent online, and what the child can do online. Parents of the young children are more likely than parents of the older kids to require the child to have an adult around when going online. Going online only for schoolwork is a rule that the great majority of parents of both age groups reject, perhaps because they consider it too constraining for their children.

**Table 6: Types of Rules Parents Set for a Child When the Child Goes Online**

(Asked of parent regarding child with most recent birthday who goes online at home)

	<b>Age 8-12 (N=259)</b>	<b>Age 13-17 (N=332)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
The sites (child) visits online	84	71 *
The time of day or night he/she is allowed to go online	84	68 *
The kind of activities the child performs online	78	70 *
The amount of time spent online	63	55
Going online only with an adult, be it from home or outside of home	73	29 *
Being online only at home	49	35 *
Only going online if it is relevant for schoolwork	30	21 *

\* indicates that the row difference is statistically significant. Numbers don't add to 100% because multiple answers were allowed.

Table 7 indicates the extent to which the parents use certain methods “to protect their children from negative influences of the Internet.” We asked the respondents to think of all their children when they gave answers, so the age of the specific child that some questions asked about does not apply here. Overwhelmingly, parents told us that they do set rules and that they “keep an eye on what the child is doing” when he/she is online. We found, however, that parents are much less likely to say they get involved in restrictive regulations that require direct intervention in their kids’ Internet use. Perhaps because of ignorance, they are also unlikely to use computer technology to control their children’s Web-surfing behavior. Still, a substantial minority of the online parents—31%—did say they use a Net Nanny-type program that guards children’s access to sites.

**Table 7: Methods Parents in Online Households Use to Protect Their Children from Negative Influences on the Internet**

(Asked of online parents)

	<b>Age 8-12 (N=319)</b>	<b>Age 13-17 (N=357)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Set rules that the child needs to follow when being online.	86	80
Keep an eye on what that child is doing when he/she is online.	88	73
Do not allow the child to go online except with a parent present.	67	29 *
Use protective software such as Net Nanny that guards children’s access to sites.	35	27 *
Deny children online access at home.	24	17

\* indicates that the row difference is significant. Numbers don't add to 100% because multiple answers were allowed.

## THE VIEWS OF PARENTS FROM HOMES NOT ONLINE

Parents from computer households without the Web worry about their kids' use of the Web outside the home. 43% of parents of younger children said their children go to the Web outside the home. This is the same percentage as online parents. When it came to older youngsters (ages 13-17), the percentage of offline parents saying their kids use the Net outside home is actually higher than the reports by online parents—61% to 48%.

As a comparison between Tables 4 and 8 indicates, the reports by parents of where their children go online are quite similar. We did not ask parents without the Web what their children most like to do online. That is unfortunate because, as a comparison between Tables 5 and 9 shows, offline parents are similar to online parents in their confidence that they know what their children are doing on the Net outside the home. And, as with online parents, the sense by most of these parents that they understand their children goes beyond assertions that they know the kids' Web habits. Most offline parents also state that they talk to their children frequently or sometimes about their online activities, and most say they trust their kids to do the right thing on the Web. What's more, when asked whether they argue with their child about their Internet use, virtually all said no.

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**Table 8: From Where Has the Child with the Most Recent Birthday Gone Online Outside of Home?**

(Asked of parents who do not have online connections at home and who say the child has gone online outside of home in the past month)\*

	<b>Age 8-12 (N=96)</b>	<b>Age 13-17 (N=122)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
School	72	75
Public Library	15	20
At a Job	7	6
A Friend's/Relative's House	18	27
Local College/College Libraries/Community Services/Museum	2	1
Church	-	1
Don't Remember	-	-
Other Mentions	-	-

\* None of the row differences is statistically significant. Numbers don't add to 100% because multiple answers were acceptable.

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**Table 9: Parents Confidence in, Trust in and Discussions with Children About Being Online**

(Asked about child with most recent birthday of parents whose households do not have online connections)

	<b>Age 8-12</b> %	<b>Age 13-17</b> %
<b>CONFIDENCE ABOUT CHILD'S ONLINE ACTIVITIES OUT OF HOME**</b>		
	(N=226)	(N=200)
Very confident	69	56*
Somewhat confident	22	32*
<b>CHILD TALKS TO PARENT ABOUT ONLINE ACTIVITIES***</b>		
	(N=96)	(N=122)
Very confident	48	47
Somewhat confident	25	31
<b>TRUST OF CHILD'S ONLINE BEHAVIOR***</b>		
	(N=96)	(N=122)
Complete	54	61
Some	39	37

\* Indicates that the row difference is statistically significant.

\*\* Asked of all offline parents.

\*\*\* Asked of parents with child who goes on the Web outside the home.

We asked parents without a Web link at home whether they think the child with the most recent birthday would be likely to use a home connection if the household had one. 88% answered yes, and only 6% said they would prohibit the child from doing so. We then asked the other 94% about rules they might have for those children. Summarized in Table 10, their answers very much parallel those of parents with the Web at home. That is, the offline parents would embrace rules that limit the time kids spend online, the times of day they go online and the kinds of activities they do online. The major difference between two groups relates to the percentages of parents that accept these guidelines. A higher proportion of offline than online parents imagines a Web household where the rules are very tough.

**Table 10: Types of Rules Parents Would Set For a Child If the Child Could Go Online at Home**

(Asked about the child with the most recent birthday of parents who do not have online connection at home but would allow the child Internet access if they had a home connection)

	<b>Age 8-12 (N=212)</b>	<b>Age 13-17 (N=194)</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
The amount of time spent online	96	94
The kind of activities the child performs online	95	95
The sites (child) visits online	96	93
The time of day or night she/he is allowed to go online (for example, after homework is done)	94	91
Going online only with an adult be it from home or outside of home	87	65 *
Being online only at home	57	41 *
Going online only if it is relevant for schoolwork	44	41

\* indicates that the row difference is statistically significant. Numbers don't add to 100% because multiple answers were allowed.

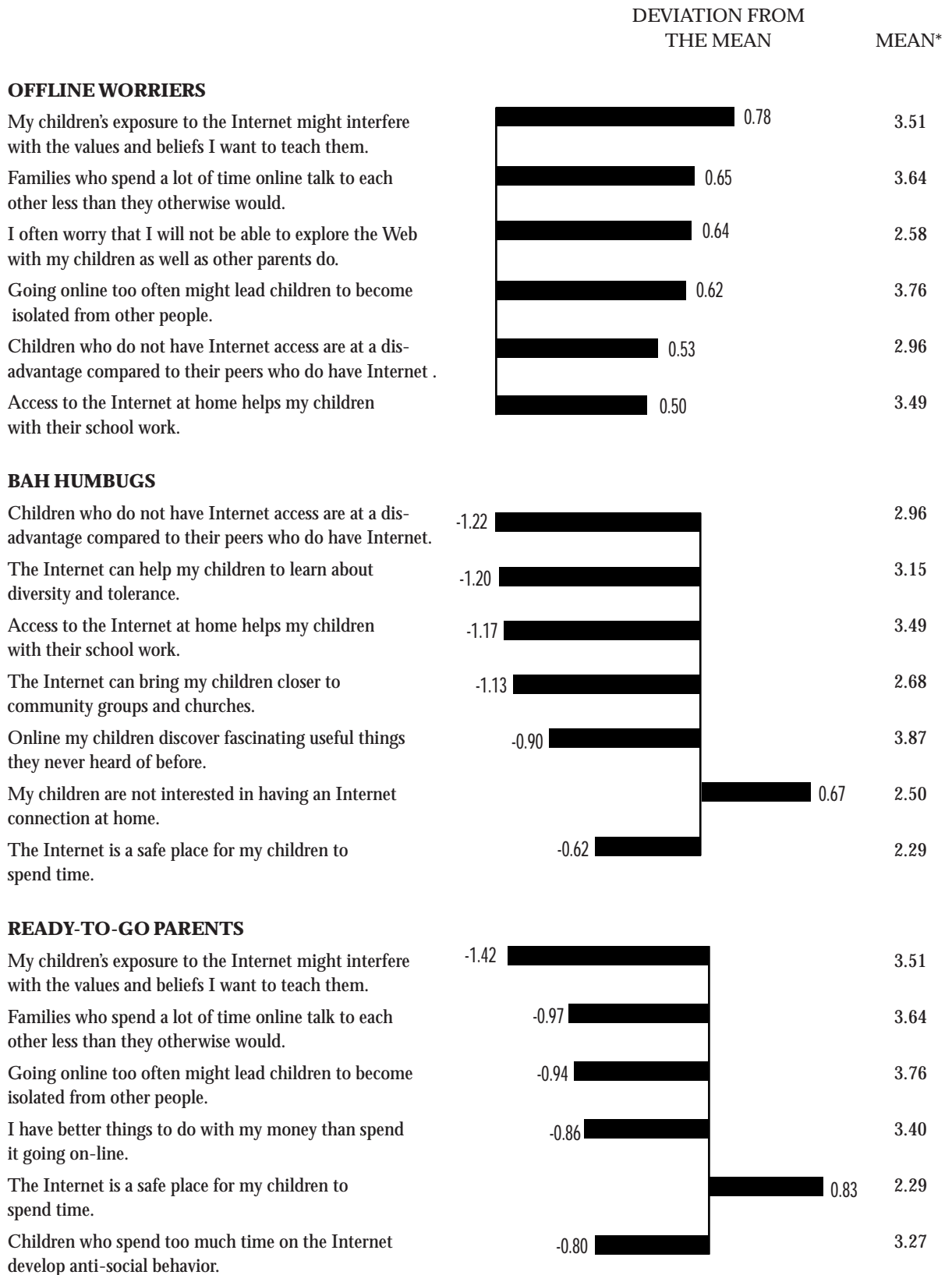
### **The Beliefs of Parents Without Home Connections**

When it comes to expressed beliefs about the Web, a higher percentage of parents without the Web at home are pessimistic compared to those with the Web at home. Offline parents are also less likely to agree strongly (as opposed to agreeing “somewhat”) regarding the good points of the Web, and they are more likely to disagree strongly (as opposed to disagreeing “somewhat”) regarding the bad aspects of the Web.

However, as with the online parents, our cluster analysis found three dramatically different groups among the offline parents. As a comparison between Charts 1 and 2 shows, each group has a corresponding group of online parents that is similar in beliefs about the Internet and the family. Table 11 shows that responses to the 21 statements varied dramatically depending on the segment to which parents belong. Further, as comparisons between Charts 1 and 2 and Tables 3 and 11 reveal, offline parents had a higher probability of agreeing with parents of their corresponding online group than with offline parents of other groups.



Chart 2: Groups of Parents Not Online Based on Their Views of the Web



\* This is the mean (average) of responses to the statement by the entire offline sample. See text.

TABLE 11: PERCENTAGE OF OFFLINE PARENTS WHO AGREE  
 "STRONGLY" OR "SOMEWHAT" WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT THE INTERNET  
 (N=426)

	Total %	Offline Worrier %	Bah Humbug %	Ready To Go %
I am concerned that my child/children might view sexually explicit images on the Internet.	82	<b>95*</b>	83*	63*
I am concerned that children give out personal information about themselves when visiting web sites or chat rooms.	81	92*	79*	<b>71*</b>
Going online too often might lead children to become isolated from other people.	70	<b>91*</b>	68*	44*
Online, my children discover fascinating, useful things they never heard of before.	65	<b>76</b>	<b>39*</b>	<b>79</b>
My children's exposure to the Internet might interfere with the values and beliefs I want to teach them.	60	<b>88*</b>	<b>68*</b>	13*
People worry too much that adults will take advantage of children on the Internet.	59	<b>66</b>	51*	60
Families who spend a lot of time online talk to each other less than they otherwise would.	59	79*	60*	<b>30*</b>
My family can get access to the Internet from other places so we do not really need it at home.	58	<b>55</b>	<b>71*</b>	49
I have better things to do with my money than spend it going online.	54	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>30*</b>
Access to the Internet helps my children with their schoolwork.	53	<b>65</b>	<b>22*</b>	68
The Internet can help my children to learn about diversity and tolerance.	47	58	<b>13*</b>	68
Children who spend too much time on the Internet develop anti-social behavior.	45	59*	46*	24*
Children who do not have Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who do have Internet access.	43	<b>60</b>	<b>7*</b>	56*
It is expensive to subscribe to an Internet service.	39	43	44	<b>29*</b>
Having Internet access at home is really for children whose parents know a lot about computers.	38	55*	31*	21*
The Internet can bring my children closer to community groups and churches.	32	37*	4*	54*
My children are not interested in having an Internet connection at home.	31	<b>30*</b>	45*	<b>19*</b>
My computer is not powerful enough to handle the Internet well.	29	31	22	34
I often worry that I won't be able to explore the web with my children as well as other parents do.	29	<b>49*</b>	11*	19*
The Internet is a safe place for my children to spend time.	26	<b>21*</b>	9*	51*
I do not mind when advertisers invite my children to Web sites to tell them about their products.	19	21	10*	27

\* means that the percentage is significantly different statistically from the percentages of the two other parent segments in the row. Bold numbers signify that the percentage is significantly different statistically from the percentage of the corresponding segment of online parents in Table 3.

Here are the offline groups and their major characteristics:

### ■ **Offline Worriers (41% of Offline Parents)**

Comparing Charts 1 and 2, we find that online and offline worriers share four of the six statements that most signal the personality of their groups. The statements reflect a bundle of concerns about the Web.

- 88% of the offline worriers (and 72% of the online worriers) agree that children's exposure to the Internet might negatively impact family values and beliefs.
- 79% of the offline worriers (and 77% of the online worriers) agree the Internet will steal family time.
- More than nine in 10 (91%) of the offline worriers (88% of the online ones) agree that the Web might isolate a child.
- 49% of the offline worriers (and 37% of the online ones) fear they won't be able to explore the Web with their children as well as other parents do.

At the same time, the offline worriers, like their online counterparts, do have positive things to say about the Web. Among the statements most deviating from the mean answers is the belief that children who do not have Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who do not have the Internet. 60% agreed strongly or somewhat with that sentiment, and 65% agreed strongly or somewhat that Internet access helps their children with their school work.

### ■ **Bah Humbugs (30% of Offline Parents)**

Like the online disenchanted parents, this group does not accept the hype about the wonders of the Web. Bah humbugs reject both that the Net is a necessary tool for school and they reject the idea that people coming together online is going to make this a better world. As with the worriers, what bah humbugs say that most deviates from the mean is remarkably similar to their online counterparts.

- 79% of these offline skeptics (and 66% of the online ones) disagree that children that do not have Internet access are disadvantaged in comparison to their peers.
- 75% of the bah humbugs (and 74% of the disenchanted) disagree that it will bring their kids closer to community or church. Both groups also disagree more strongly than the other parent segments that the Web is a safe for kids and that on it children can discover fascinating, useful things.
- 63% of the bah humbugs (and 50% of their online counterparts) disagree that the Net is a tool for teaching about diversity and tolerance—while disagreement of the other offline and online clusters is closer to 20% and 10%, respectively.
- Only 22% of the bah humbugs accept the notion that “access to the Internet helps my children with their school work,” compared to about 66% of other groups of offline parents. (54% of the disenchanted agree, but their proportion is still much lower than the approximately 90% of other online parents who acknowledge the Web's help with homework.)

On one of its six most characteristic statements, bah humbug's skepticism takes a somewhat different turn from the disenchanting parents. Even as they are paying for the Web, 21% of the disenchanting parents agreed strongly that "I have better things to do with my money than spend it on the Web." While 39% of the bah humbugs agreed strongly with the statement, that is not very different from the proportion of offline worriers who expressed the sentiment. Rather, what makes the bah humbugs stand out among the offline parents is their strong agreement that "my children are not really interested in having an Internet connection at home." 27% of them agree strongly with the proposition compared to 12% of the offline worriers and 7% of the third offline group—the one we call ready-to-go parents.

### ■ Ready-To-Go Parents (29% of Offline Parents)

We named this segment of offline parents ready-to-go's because the beliefs they expressed reflect a strong favorable attitude toward having the Web in the home. In fact, the statements that most distinguished it from the two other offline groups create a profile that is uncannily similar to the gung ho group of online parents.

A comparison between Chart 1 and 2 shows that the gung ho's and ready-to-go's share every one of the six top-ranked statements, and in almost the same order. Like the gung ho group, ready-to-go parents don't accept the common wisdom that the Internet might hurt their kids or families, and they don't begrudge the money it costs to subscribe.

- Only 13% of ready-to-go parents (and only 11% of gung -ho parents) agree that exposure to the Internet might interfere with their family values and beliefs.
- A relatively small 44% of ready-to-go's (and 33% of gung-ho's) believe going online too often might lead children to become isolated from other people—compared to 91% of offline worriers, 88% of online worriers, and over 60% of both groups of skeptics.
- 54% of ready-to-go's agree that the Internet can bring children closer to community and churches—far higher than any other offline group and second only to the gung ho group in the proportion that takes this position.
- 51% of ready-to-go's say that the virtual world is safe. Here the proportion is far higher than any other offline or online group, except for the 56% of gung ho parents who feel that way.
- 61% *disagree* strongly or somewhat that they have better things than the Web on which to spend money. The proportion is more than three times higher than the percentages of other offline groups that answered that way. It is smaller than the 84% of gung-ho's who disagreed, an indication that while a solid majority believes that a home Internet experience offers real value, a large number of them is still mulling it over.

Nevertheless, the similarity in attitudes between the gung ho and ready-to-go parents is remarkable, and it begs asking why many of these people (at least the aforementioned 61%) aren't connected already. In fact, the similarities between the other two online and offline groups also leads one to wonder what factors drive some parents in computer households to connect their families to cyberspace while others do not.

## FACTORS PREDICTING WHETHER HOUSEHOLDS WITH COMPUTERS HAVE THE INTERNET

To answer, we turn to the results of our discriminant analysis. It sought to determine the factors that predict whether or not households with computers have online access at home. We did not find their household income, education, computer ability, their spouse's education or any other demographic variables to be major predictors of online connections when the family already has a computer.

Instead, the discriminant analysis found that the best predictors were 5 variables that describe the parent's experience with the Web outside the home and reflect their beliefs about the practical necessity of the Web in the home. Together, the following variables predict 38% of the variance—a substantial amount with these sorts of data.

### ■ **Factor 1: “Have you [the parent] personally ever gone online?”**

The online and offline groups tended to give very different answers to this question. 96% of the parents with online connections at home told us that they have gone on line somewhere. By contrast, only 54% of the parents with no online connections at home said they have ever used the Internet.

As seen in Table 12, this variable is the highest predictor of the set. It suggests that parents' lack of experience with the Web *outside* the home is the most important single factor differentiating a computer household without the Web from one with it. Unfortunately, we didn't ask the parents with home Web connections whether they had used it consistently outside the home before they had decided to introduce it domestically. That makes it impossible to definitively suggest a causal interpretation that relates experience outside the home to Web links inside.

Table 12: Variables Correlating Most With Having an Online Connection at Home

Variable	Correlation*
Have you ever personally gone online, that is, used the Internet, the World Wide Web, and/or e-mail	.697
My family can get access to the Internet from other places so we do not really need it at home	-.593
I have better things to do with my money than spend it going online.	-.436
Access to the Internet at home helps children with their school work.	.347
Children who do not have Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who do not have Internet access.	.325

\* These are pooled within-groups (online, not online) correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions. Variables are ordered by absolute size of correlation with function.

The variables together account for 38% of the variance of having or not having an online connection at home. Each correlation listed is a measure of how well the variable associates with the statistical function that explains 38% of the total variability between the two groups. The first statement, then, is the strongest variable in a discriminant function that is predicting 38% of the total variability between the two groups.

A negative correlation means that the answer was inversely related to having an online connection. So, for example, people who agree with the statement “My family can get access to the Internet from other places so we do not really need it at home” are less likely to have online connections at home than are people who disagree with it.

We do have evidence from questions we asked that a much higher percentage of online than offline parents use the Web at work. While 62% of online parents went online at work “in the past month,” only 34% of the offline parents said they did that. Moreover, while one out of every three online parents said they connect to the Web on the job every day or every other day, only one of seven offline parents said that. While still not causal, these findings lend support to our suggestion that it is the parent’s *lack* of experience using the Internet outside the home that associates with a household’s not being online.

The next four key predictors of online and offline households relate squarely to the way online and offline parents weigh the Internet pragmatically in their families’ lives.

■ **Factor 2: “My family can get access to the Internet from other places so we do not really need it at home.”**

58% of parents in offline household agree strongly or agree with this statement. Only 23% of online parents do. What we have here are fundamentally different perspectives about the practical necessity of bringing the Web into the home. Offline parents are aware that the Web is available for their children in other places. In fact, half of these parents say they know their child has gotten on the Internet in school, friends’ homes, and public libraries. These data suggest that parents in computer homes without the Web see occasional use as sufficient and prefer not to bring it home.

■ **Factor 3: “I have better things to do with my money than go online”**

54% of offline parents say they have better things to do with their money than spend it going online. That’s versus 60% of online parents who disagree that there are better uses for those online subscription fees.

This response adds a second practical dimension to the calculus of decisions that online and offline parents make. The issue here does not seem to be one of basic affordability. Although parents in online households are somewhat more likely than those offline to have incomes above \$75,000 a year, the socioeconomic positions of both groups of computer owners are not that different. The key phrase here is “better things.” In the scheme of things, the Internet simply does not seem worth the price for offline parents.

■ **Factor 4: “Access to the Internet at home helps children with their schoolwork.”**

■ **Factor 5: “Children who do not have Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who do have Internet access.”**

These two final factors highlight an additional part of the Internet equation that many offline and online parents consider—the specific utility for their children. Like the third factor, these stand out not so much because offline parents overwhelmingly disagreed with them. Rather, they popped up as predictors because *online* parents seemed so overwhelmingly to accept them while offline parents were much less united.

84% of online parents agreed that “access to the Internet at home helps children with their schoolwork”; of those, 57% agreed strongly. Contrast that with the 53% of offline parents who agreed with this statement and the 24% who agreed *strongly*. Similarly, more than two-thirds (68%) of online parents agreed that “children who do not have Internet access are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who do have Internet access.” Offline parents are split; 43% agree, 43% disagree.

The different responses to these statements reinforce the suggestion that parents assess the practical value of the Internet experience for their family in making the decision about whether or not to be online. Strong doubts about the Web play a key background role in this, but don’t predict the outcome. That is because, as we have seen, both online and offline parents carry similar fears and cynicism about the Web’s role in their children’s lives.

In the face of concerns about the Web and kids, parents conduct a cost benefit analysis that weighs the benefits they perceive against their assessment of what their families would lose by not having it. Our data begin to suggest that it is the parent’s lack of experience using the Internet outside the home that may make them more likely to downplay its utility in the face of worries about children and the Internet. By contrast, worried parents who have had repeated Web experience at work, in friends’ homes or at public libraries may decide that despite their fears an online connection is on balance useful for their family.

But why do disenchanted parents continue their home links? Inertia may be one reason. It may be, too, that they may see the technology as a new kind of social leveler. That is, they may feel that while it isn't what it's cracked up to be, the Internet nevertheless is necessary if they and their children are to keep up with The Joneses.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The overview at the start of this report raises a number of policy issues that flow out of our findings. Here it may be useful to bring up three research directions that we are pursuing in order to fill holes in our understanding of way families deal with the new Internet realities.

- **Parents' experiences with the Web:** The present study highlights the importance of experience and pragmatic assessments by parents regarding the utility of the Web. In view of this finding, we are trying to learn more about parents' experiences around the Web outside the home. Is it the case, as we expect, that people whose households are online tend to have experience with the Web at work before getting it at home? How much of the decision to get the Web at home relates to *parents'* needs as opposed to those of their children? And why do disenchanted parents keep the online connection at home?
- **What children do and say:** One of the startling findings of this study is how confident parents are that they know what their kids are doing online, at home and out. Well, is their confidence justified? What do youngsters tell us about their Web habits, and how does that compare to what their parents tell us? Compared to online worriers and disenchanted parents, are gung ho parents more or less likely to predict what their kids say? What do the similarities and differences tell us about tensions and misunderstandings between the generations—and about trends in Internet usage?

In this connection, we must recognize that a strong majority of both “offline” and “online” parents are worried or skeptical about the Web's influence on their children. Does this skepticism and concern influence the ways their children act toward the Web? Are children with these parents likely to go to sites that are different from children whose parents are gung ho about the Web—and are the kids likely to get less enjoyment out of it? If so, teachers, librarians and even Web site producers might take the parents' different attitudes into account when helping kids with the Web.

- **The Web and family lifestyles:** How does the Web fit into the entire intricate pattern of family activities? Do family members see it seen as leisure, work, or a combination of the two? How are the rules that parents said they are setting down actually being implemented? Do parents with different beliefs about the Web's consequences act differently when it comes to laying down and enforcing rules? Do the children of gung ho, online-worrier and disenchanted parents adopt their parents' perspectives on the Web? Do they act differently toward the Web as a result of it?

There is much to puzzle out, and the answers are likely to change over time. We look forward to expanding on this research in the months to come.

## PART 2: THE VIEW FROM THE PRESS

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## OVERVIEW

*“Your children need the Internet. But, if they do go online, be terrified.”*

This is the message that the American press presents to parents, according to the Annenberg Public Policy Center’s examination of all the articles in twelve major newspapers that mentioned the Internet and the family, parents or children from October 15, 1997 to October 15, 1998.

We did find examples of articles that tried to help families assess the problems and potential of the new Web world in a reasoned way. Overall, though, the Web presented the Internet as a Jekyll-and-Hyde phenomenon over which parents are left to take control with little community backup.

- Sex crimes regarding children and the Web were featured in one of every four articles. The most common crime topics were sexual predators and child pornographers.
- Disturbing issues relating to the Web and the family showed up in two of every three articles surveyed. The problems portrayed were rather narrow—mostly sex crimes, pornography, and privacy invasion.
- Benefits of the Web for the family came up in half the total articles, but there was little overlap with the negative pieces. The dangerous world of the Internet and the friendly, useful picture of cyberspace showed up in different articles and were unrelated to each other.
- When articles quoted people about the Internet and the family, many more sources stressed the dangers of the Web than its benefits. Government officials and law enforcement officers spoke most frequently, and most negatively, about the Web’s influence on children and the family. Educators were mostly positive, but they showed up only rarely.
- Because of the focus on crime, reporters looked often to the government and criminal justice system for remedies. The solutions they represented were typically either piecemeal (for example, arresting an individual child-pornography suspect) or muddled and tentative (such as court-voided legislation to protect children from Web indecencies).
- Journalists placed the burden of dealing most immediately with Web problems on parents. Articles suggested a wide range of actions for them—monitoring their children’s Web activities, going online with their kids, looking for good Web sites, using filters to block bad ones. Unfortunately, the articles did not depict teachers, librarians or neighborhood groups as resources for support. At the everyday level, the press showed parents facing a useful but scary Web virtually alone.

The press' portrayal of the Internet is particularly significant because it directly reflects the results of the national survey presented in Part 1. As we saw, the great majority of American parents with computers in the home is conflicted about the Web. Parents feel it's necessary but they fear it.

Most likely, this split view gets constructed in the press because of journalists' need to fill separate news holes—those dealing with news as conflict and those dealing with “news you can use.” Journalists separately pick up and amplify conflict-based and “news-you-can-use” topics regarding the Web. News consumers are alarmed by and interested in the concerns that the press portrays. Journalists, noting this, give them more of what becomes the conventional wisdom about the Internet through this process.

Are there alternatives?

- Instead of merely piling on instances of crimes on the Web, the press can investigate the prevalence of these crimes to give the public some perspective on the matter.
- Instead of placing so much emphasis on problems of a violent or sexual nature, the press can also highlight issues of equity, race, class and commercialism on a national and global basis. There is a world of socially critical issues regarding the Internet that journalists are hardly covering.
- Instead of focusing overwhelmingly on government officials and the police for institutional solutions to Web problems, the press can investigate whether and how teachers, parents, children, librarians, and community groups are working together to manage both the problems and opportunities of the Web.

The Internet is here to stay. So is the family. At this formative stage in the family's relationship with the Internet, it is critical for journalists to help parents and children evaluate the new world in ways that help them best make sense of their lives and their society.

## THE STUDY AND THE METHOD

Our investigation was a content analysis of articles in twelve daily U.S. newspapers from October 15, 1997 through October 15, 1998. Listed in Table 13, six of the papers are among the nation's ten largest in circulation, and the other six rank between fortieth and fiftieth in circulation. In locating articles for the analysis, we decided that for our purpose a "family" was at least one parent with at least one school-age child. We then conducted a search on the Lexis/Nexis database for every article in those papers during the year that (1) mentioned the Internet, AOL, Web, or online and (2) included the words family, families, child, children, parent, parents, youth or teens. The search yielded 668 relevant articles.

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Table 13: The Newspapers in the Study

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
USA Today	30	4.5
New York Times	73	10.9
Los Angeles Times	162	24.3
Washington Post	85	12.7
Chicago Tribune	53	7.9
San Francisco Chronicle		
Fort Worth Star-Telegram	58	8.7
Louisville Courier-Journal	29	4.3
Seattle Times	68	10.2
Omaha World-Herald	23	3.4
Indianapolis Star	25	3.7
Richmond Times-Dispatch	32	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>668</b>	<b>100</b>

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We designed a questionnaire to answer two broad questions about the articles:

- 1 What issues do the papers raise about the Internet and the family?
- 2 What kinds of people speak about the Internet and the family in the articles, and what do they say?

Our questionnaire explored these questions in several ways. Regarding the issues, we asked about where the papers placed the articles, what topics the articles raised, whether the topics centered on problems or benefits of the Web for the family, whether the articles discussed attempts at solutions

to the problems, and more. Regarding the people in the articles, we noted their occupations, the organizations for which they worked, what they said about the Web, whether it was a problem or a benefit, whether they had solutions for the problems, and more.

We divided the entire set of 668 articles among eight University of Pennsylvania students whom we had trained to use the questionnaire and tested for reliability. They read and coded the articles according to the questionnaire. We entered the resulting data into a computer for analysis.

## THE TOPICS IN THE ARTICLES

As Table 14 notes, when articles mentioned the Internet and the family, the overwhelming majority—97.2%—did so in terms of the problems and/or benefits of the Web. About two-thirds of the pieces described problems and about half related the Web's benefits. These discussions were quite separate, however. As Table 14 notes, only 16% of the pieces mixed problems and benefits.

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Table 14: Were Benefits or Problems Discussed in the Articles? (N=668)

	%
Benefits only	33.2
Problems only	47.8
Mixed problems and benefits	16.0
Neither benefit nor problem	2.8

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Discussions of benefits in the articles were so subtly varied that we found they could not be coded reliably into particular categories. Consequently, we divided the benefits into two broad categories, those that relate to social effects of the Web and those that relate to the Web's psychological effects. We defined social effects as those that impact on activities between people; using email to keep in touch with relatives is an example. We defined psychological effects as those that impact on the *mental* activities of people; a Web site that helps a child read or improves the knowledge of family members are instances of psychological effects.

Table 15 presents the benefits. The numbers add up to more than 100% because coders reliably found up to two benefits in the 331 articles that noted a benefit. The table indicates that the Web's utility was noted much more often in relation to children than in relation to the family as a whole. Psychological utility received more mentions than social utility.

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Table 15: The Benefits Mentioned in the Articles (N=331)\*

	%
Psychological effects on children	55
Social effects on children	33
Social effects on the family	25
Psychological effects on the family	15
Other	5

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\* The numbers exceed 100% because some articles mentioned more than one benefit. See text.

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Unlike the broad and scattered discussion of the Internet's benefits, discussion of the Web's problems centered on a small number of rather specific dangers. Table 16 presents the problems. Again, the numbers add up to more than 100% because we found that the coders could reliably record up to two problems in the 429 articles that noted one or more of them. A number of startling points emerge in the table.

First, sex and sex crimes relating to the Web and children received much attention, making up 53% of all the problems. Second, a large number of articles discussed Web sites that are improper for children because they promote activities that children should not be doing, like drinking, smoking, and drugs. Third, articles were so fixated on outside influences preying on children for purposes of sex, improper activities and privacy invasion that all other issues mentioned regarding the Internet and the family appeared in only 5% of the articles. These other issues included parents' management of children's Internet time; supervision of Internet use at home and school; commercialism and the Web; the Web and parents' careers; hate groups on the Web; income divisions between Web haves and have-nots; and negative social and psychological implications of the Web for the family. Considerations of race and the Web—problems, benefits, or just facts—were mentioned only seven times in our entire sample.

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**Table 16: The Problems Mentioned in the Articles (N= 429)\***

	%
Web site material that is improper for children	29
Adults preying on children through the Web	21
Pornography	18
Privacy issues	17
Child pornography	14
Difficulty supervising kids at home	9
General dangers of the Web	7
Not having the Internet	4
All other categories (see text)	5

\* The numbers add up to more than 100% because some articles mentioned more than one problem. See text.

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## THE PEOPLE QUOTED IN THE ARTICLES

We asked how many people journalists quoted about problems and benefits of the Web, who they were and what they said. Going through the 668 articles in our sample, we found 663 people whose comments the articles cited. Of all the sources quoted, educators, journalists, and business people were the most positive in portraying the Web's relationship to the family. About 60% of the time that these individuals appeared in articles, they mentioned potential benefits of the Internet. But their positive views didn't appear very much. As Table 17 indicates, educators and journalists together made up fewer than 13% of the people who were quoted.

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Table 17: Occupations of the People Mentioned in the Articles (N=663)

	%
Government	20
Criminal justice system	18
Business	17
Education	7
Advocacy organizations	7
Journalists	5
Other	10
Occupation not mentioned	16

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Business people made up 17% of the sources, and they viewed the Web favorably 40% of the time. They mixed positive and negative comments about the Web's effects on the family 11% of the time. They were wholly negative 43% of the time.

In fact, the great majority of the people whom the articles cited about the Web tended to emphasize negative views of the Internet's effect on the family. Three fourths of them noted problems on the Web while only one fourth mentioned benefits. Moreover, half of the problems focused on sex—pedophilia, child pornography and pornography.

The emphasis on problems, and most particularly on sex crimes, is reflected in the occupations of people whose comments reporters cited most often in the articles. As Table 17 indicates, government and criminal justice sources (for example, police, prosecutors, and defense attorneys) made up 20% and 18% of the sources, respectively. Government and criminal justice sources also portray the Web in the most negative manner of all occupations. Their comments were unfavorable 90% of the time. Representatives of advocacy organizations were also highly negative, though they weren't nearly as common. They saw the Web's influence favorably only 3% of the time.

## SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS

Articles that noted problems about the Web and the family described attempts to solve them 85% of the time. Table 18 presents the kinds of individuals and organizations involved in those attempts and the percentage of articles in which they appeared. It indicates that government, parents, business, and the criminal justice system (police, the criminal courts) figured most prominently in trying to find a way out of the frightening issues posed for parents and children by the Web. The articles mentioned the individuals or organizations by themselves a bit more than half (55%) of the time. In a bit less than half (45%) of the articles, solutions involved more than one type of actor. Parents and business and parents and government were most common.

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Table 18: Actors that Articles Note As Involved in Possible Solutions To Web Problems (N= 366)

	%
Parents	34
Government	36
Business	25
Criminal justice system	23
Teachers	2
Librarians	8
Advocacy/community group members	3
Children	2
Others	2

\* The numbers exceed 100% because some articles noted more than one actor.

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Reporters' attention to parents along with business or government in discussing answers to Web crime, pornography and privacy invasions should not be taken to mean that they showed parents working with executives and elected officials. To the contrary, the press depicted each party in its own domain. The Federal government was making laws to try to stop the scourges. Businesses were developing Web filtering software that parents could purchase. Police and the criminal courts were arresting and incarcerating pedophiliacs and child pornographers.

But the press presented the activities of these institutions as piecemeal, tentative or muddled. Arresting and convicting individual child molesters would not accomplish much if (as the articles implied) many more could be lurking in cyberspace. Using filtering software would not be helpful if (as articles related) they often blocked children from useful areas of the Web. And government actions regarding explicit sexuality and the invasion of privacy often were depicted as protracted

inaction as Constitutional free speech issues and concerns of business marketers slowed law-makers.

The upshot was that the press placed the burden of dealing most immediately with Web problems on parents. Some articles showed devastated parents interacting with police and the courts over their harmed children. Other articles suggested a wide range of actions to counter the dangers of the Web—monitoring their children's Web activities, going online with their kids, looking for good Web sites, and using filters to block bad ones. Unfortunately, the articles typically depicted themselves as the only avenues of support. They did not portray the local community—teachers, librarians and neighborhood groups—as resources. At the everyday level, the press showed parents facing a useful but scary Web virtually alone.

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