



# *Alfred P. Sloan Center*

## *Newsletter*

*At the University of Chicago*  
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## Count Me In...

For those of you participating in the Alfred P. Sloan Center Working Families study, consider yourself counted. In February 1999, the Sloan Center began interviewing and collecting information from families (some of whom participated in a previous University of Chicago study) living in several sites across the country. The Sloan Center is currently executing two phases of research: one is a study of families with teenage children and the other a study of families with kindergartners. With the exception of a handful of interviews still being completed this summer, data collection ended around the time schools closed (June, 1999) and will resume this fall. The Sloan Center office staff has kept on task during the summer by organizing the data we have gathered, coding our participant's responses, and entering that coded data into a large database.

The Alfred P. Sloan study is geographically diverse. Our families live in several locations, including Massachusetts, Michigan, Illinois, California, and Florida. Jet-setting Sloan Center interviewers have collected 359 audio tapes of interviews, amounting to approximately 512 hours of recorded data. And because we measure everything, we can also tell you that we have 159,037 feet of actual tape—the equivalent of 30.12 miles.

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*We have 159,037  
feet of interview  
tape!*

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That's enough tape to stretch from our research office in Hyde Park to the Chicago Loop and back, and still have some left over! Of course we wouldn't do that; we plan to keep our tapes intact.

You may be interested to know that our parent participants' vocations seem to run the gamut. We have parents who are pilots, aerobics instructors, neurologists, stay-at-home moms and dads, ministers, teachers, Department of Child and Family Services counselors, lawyers, artists, etc. Our teenagers' interests vary as well. Our interviewers have found that teen participants are extremely thoughtful and have a lot to say about what is going on in their lives. The teens in our study also stay very active; we have talked with teens who are musicians, journalists, photographers, computer programmers, web page designers, active

social service providers, members of all kinds of sports teams, and National Honor Society members. Kindergarten participants have included dancers, soccer players, budding artists, piano players, violinists, baseball players, karate enthusiasts...the list goes on. And there's more to notice than different hobbies. We hope that you'll review the preliminary information in this newsletter and find it as interesting as we do. Thanks again for participating in the Alfred P. Sloan Working Families Study! ♦

# Preliminary Findings

## *Time Use and Happiness at Home, School, and Work*

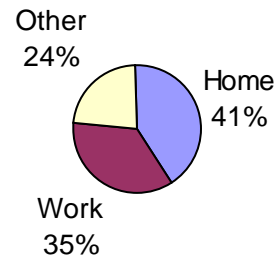
Many of the participants in our study have expressed interest in learning about our findings. This newsletter presents a great opportunity for us to share some of what we've learned with all of you (the people who made it possible). One of the most distinctive elements of our study involved the use of watches and the time diaries, and we thought you might be interested in what we learned from the data collection. As you may recall, we use the time diaries to learn about how families spend their time, what types of activity parents and children engage in together, and how family members feel as they move through their days. To generate the figures that we present below, we combined the time diary responses of the hundreds of parents and children who participated in our study. Figure 1 shows the locations in which the fathers, mothers, and teenagers in our study spent their time. While fathers and children spent approximately the same amount of time at home and at work or school, mothers spent comparatively less time at work, and more time at home. Keep in mind however, that several of the mothers in our study were employed part-time, or did not work for pay at all.

Figure 2 presents the average level of happiness reported by mothers, fathers, and teenage children in three different locations. In general moms, dads, and teens were most happy in public settings, and this pattern is most dramatic for teenagers. Both fathers and teens are happier at home than they are at work or school, but mothers report roughly equivalent levels of happiness in

those two settings. Further, moms report higher levels of happiness at home and work compared to dads and teenagers.

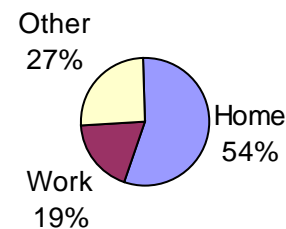
**Figure 1a.**

**Where Fathers in the Study Spend Their Time**



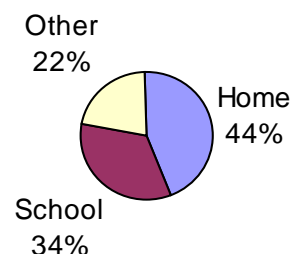
**Figure 1b.**

**Where Mothers in the Study Spend Their Time**



**Figure 1c.**

**Where Teenagers in the Study Spend Their Time**



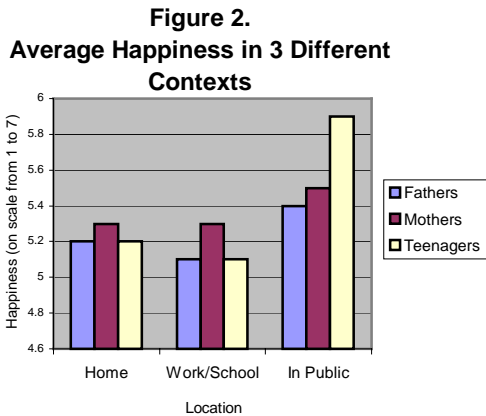
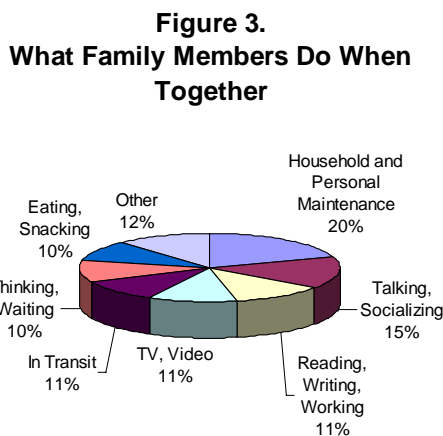


Figure 3 shows the types of activities family members typically do when together. Topping the list is household and personal maintenance, followed by talking and socializing.



Keep in mind that these figures are reporting average time use and happiness for all participants in the study, and the way a particular individual spends his or her time can vary strikingly from the sample average. So that you can see how your information differs from the sample averages, we are sending all participating families individualized reports that compare their family's results with the results of the entire sample. Please look for your family's personalized report in this mailing.

We hope that you find these preliminary results interesting, and that you have a sense of the many analyses we will be able to perform on the information you gave us. We look forward to sharing more substantive findings with you in the future. ♦

## Voices from the Field

### *Interviewers' Reflections on Interviewing*

For the last six months, the Sloan Center's 28 project interviewers have been living life on the fly. We've been traveling all over the country to interview parents, teens, and kindergartners across a whole range of lifestyles and communities. This summer, we've had the opportunity to reflect on our field work experiences and now we'd like to share some of our thoughts with you. For all of us, conducting the interviews was an educational and exciting experience.

➤ *No matter what an individual's race, class, or gender, s/he still struggles with the same issues as any other working parent. For example, whether you are financially stable or not, you still have to...juggle your time with family to accommodate your job or another responsibility.*

Gloria Williams  
Ph.D. Candidate  
History

➤ *Family is not just a biological process, it's a **support & social system.***

Virginia Su  
M.D. Candidate  
School of Medicine

➤ *More than anything else, what I have gained by being a Sloan Center interviewer is the ability to recognize and respect the vast differences of opinion and style on how families “make it work.”*

*Matthew Pruitt*  
Fourth Year Student  
Undergraduate College

➤ *Coming from a small family, I have only been able to imagine what family situations are in other families; however, being able to meet and talk with parents, teens, and tots, I feel a little more in touch and a little less isolated...I also better appreciate what my parents went through being full-time working parents.*

*Ali Swanson*  
Field Coordinator  
Young Child Component

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*“We’re really  
getting a deeper  
understanding...”*

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The information we gathered from our interviews will be used to complement the data gathered through the daybooks and surveys. They’re kind of like the “essay assignment” for this study, illuminating what is unique in each family’s experience. The themes we’re most interested in exploring are ones many people take for granted: The various types of work people do; how family members view other families; how children view their parents’ jobs; how parents make decisions to start a family; what family members’ work and school days are like; how family members communicate with one another; what family relationships are like; what parents think of their child’s/children’s education; what each family’s values are; and so on. We have gathered a lot of very important

and detailed information which reveals that in this hectic day and age, most families are struggling to make sure that family isn’t sacrificed for work.

➤ *The most positive experience [for me] has been getting the opportunity to hear more about what the father’s perspective is in [the] family. The things fathers do to balance work and family life, what changes they’ve made in their work lives so as not to lose sight of their responsibilities as a parent...we’re really getting a deeper understanding of what a father’s involvement is like.*

*Rachael Sheldrick*  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Psychology

➤ *Despite the turbulence of adolescence, I’ve learned that there are many families in which teens and parents still connect, communicate, and understand each other.*

*Shaunti Knauth*  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Education

➤ *Many mothers mentioned...that they did not need to make career sacrifices for their young children, instead using options such as in-home child care to ensure that their kindergartner’s needs were met. While their children were often the focus, mothers also clearly valued their work lives, either for the financial contributions their work made or for the intrinsic enjoyment gained from their jobs.*

*Emma Adam*  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Sloan Center

➤ *I’ve learned the extent to which a person’s schedule is shaped around the activities of his or her children. It can be difficult to accept that the routine of being a parent requires near continuous supervision*

*while present, and thought while absent. The parents I interviewed were proud of their commitment to their children, and eager to describe the balance between work and family.*

*Steven Houbeck*  
Fourth Year Student  
Undergraduate College

Throughout the coming school year, we will again be sending out interviewers to hear what parents, teens, and young children have to say. As before, we will be listening carefully for the many different ways families have of “making it work.” ♦

## Looking Ahead

Our tape recorders are tuned up, our watches are in working order, and we’re ready to hit the field again! With the start of the school year, we’ll begin the second phase of data collection, contacting new families in your area. We’ll continue collecting data until we have reached our goal of 300 families with adolescent children and 200 families with kindergarten-age children. We expect to be finished collecting data sometime this winter.

In the meantime, we’re conducting more refined analyses of the data we collected last spring from your family and others. We are sending you information about your family and plan to make presentations about our study in your community. We’re looking forward to sharing our work with the wider research community as well. There are already plans to discuss our research at three academic conferences in the spring of 2000. Thanks for your cooperation!

Jennifer Schmidt, Ph.D.  
Director of Research

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