A SUBJECTIVE STUDY
OF FUTURE COMPUTER IMPACT

Dick Waak
Assistant Professor
Department of Youth Development
University of Wisconsin - Extension
Buffalo County

December 18, 1984

Published by
Department of Youth Development

UW-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming including Title IX requirements.
SITUATION
Youth are being exposed to computers in school. Adults are becoming involved with computers in the work place. Television, newspapers, magazines and radio remind us of the need for computers in our home.

This barrage of computer information, promoting and exposure creates a question about the future of computers and their use in the home. With this in mind, a UWEX mid-career development grant was applied for and received in December, 1983. This study grant was to focus on the home computer market and share information on findings.

The study is being reported in two papers. The titles are "A Subjective Study of Future Computer Impact" and, "A Review of Home/Family Computer Related Magazines".

This paper deals with future computer impact.

OBJECTIVES

1) To increase understanding of how computers may impact on family life.

2) To examine the future of computers in the home.

METHODS

In mid-April, 1984, the agent visited Family Living Education and Youth Development Staff at U.W. Madison. Faculty interviewed were:

Beverly Henderson, Extension Specialist, Consumer Economics
Mary Mennes, Extension Specialist, Food Science
Jim Buessing, Extension Specialist, Housing and Interior Space
Margaret Nelson, Extension Specialist, Family Resource Management
JoAnn Gruber-Hagen, 4-H Program Coordinator
Patricia Day, Extension Specialist, Consumer Health Education

Extension faculty were interviewed in seven specific areas as outlined under conclusions. Interviews were analyzed for areas of agreement.
CONCLUSIONS

1. How do families use computers now and in the future?

Responses: It was indicated that family use was probably limited at present. There were game applications, some family record keeping, recipe files and other activities. Thoughts for the future soared. They included:

- Interactive learning programs to teach subject matter, i.e. veterinary science, human and animal nutrition, etc.

- A menu merge program, so that a homemaker could come home at night, feed into the computer what staples were left in the house, and get back several menus, with recipes, utilizing food available in the house.

- A home computer is coming soon that is so powerful, a person could store the mailing addresses for every person in the United States.

2. What are the possible applications for youth or family learning?

Responses: Home computers are still in their infancy. So far, most uses are business uses transferred to the home setting.

3. Do you feel that computers will bring families together or pull them apart?

Responses: Computers will probably have no greater effect on the family than technological innovations like television. There was a concern that some youth might tend to make the computer their friend because of its appeal. Family structuring would be important if that became a problem. The problem would probably be no greater than any other avocation that might be engaged in to the exclusion of all other activities.
4. Do you see the computer as a professional tool sometimes used at home, or will it be a different type of tool to enhance family living? i.e. fun...financial planning...games...personal planning...career guidelines...educational enhancement.

Responses: Home computers are still in their infancy. They hold great promise for a number of uses. How they will be used will depend on how purchasers utilize them and what software becomes available for home uses. Currently, most computers in the home probably tend to be professional tools used at home. Word processing was an easy first choice of uses among those surveyed.

5. What price might computers have to drop to, to make them common household items, or is price not a factor?

Responses: Price is a factor. The general feeling is that when the purchase price of the unit got above $1,500 or $2,000, it would be competing with cars for available purchase dollars. At a lower figure it would be in competition with furniture, stereos, television sets, etc.

6. Will the computer in the home be a fad?

Responses: No one is certain that it isn't a fad. The feeling is that as computers become more common in the workplace, more families will have computers in the home. The trend for employers to provide computers to employees to work on at home was also cited as an indication more households will have computers as part of their furniture.

7. What negative impacts on families, and on youth, do you see if home computers become more popular?
Responses: Little concern was cited. Family structuring of computer usage might be necessary. Generally the feeling was that computers will be part of many people's lives in the workplace and at home. Society will adjust, as it has to auto travel, air travel, radio and television.

Not specifically asked, but included in many conversations, is the role that computers will serve as we move into the information age. The ability to store, retrieve, transmit, and manipulate information and numbers is phenomenal. As fast as home computers are, it is now technically possible to increase their speed by two or four times.

**IMPLICATIONS**

1. Computers have potential for household use for financial management, and for learning.

2. More families will purchase personal computers for home use as hardware costs drop, software becomes more available, and household finances permit.

3. UWEX has an important role in helping families sort out the myriad of information relative to purchases of home computers.

4. UWEX has a future role in aiding families to live compatibly and productively with their home computer.