



**ENGLISH 204
FINAL EXAMINATION
SUMMER 2002-2003**

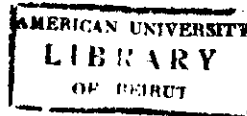
Time Allowed: 2 ½ Hours

DIRECTIONS: Texts A & B both discuss net use and depression. Critique Text A, synthesizing information from B to support your thesis.

TEXT A:

**Study Says Net Use, Depression May Be Linked
by
Amy Harmon**

1. In the first concentrated study of the social and psychological effects of Internet use at home, researchers at Carnegie Mellon University have found that people who spend even a few hours a week online experience more depression and loneliness than those who use the computer network less frequently.
2. The participants who were lonelier and more depressed at the start of the two-year study, as determined by a standard questionnaire, were not more likely to use the Internet. Instead, Internet use itself appeared to lessen psychological well-being, the researchers said.
3. The results of the \$1.5 million project are contrary to the expectations of the social scientists who designed it and many of the organizations that financed it. The backers include technological companies such as Intel Corp., Hewlett Packard, AT&T Research and Apple Computer, as well as the National Science Foundation.
4. "We were shocked by the findings, because they are counterintuitive to what we know about how socially the Internet is being used," said Robert Kraut, a social psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon's Human Computer Interaction Institute. "We are not talking here about the extremes. These were normal adults and their families, and on average, for those who used the Internet most, things got worse."
5. The Internet has been praised as superior to television and other "passive" media because it allows users to choose the kind of information they want to receive, and, often, to respond actively through e-mail exchanges, chat rooms or electronic bulletin board postings.



6. Research on the effects of watching television indicates that it tends to reduce social involvement. But the new study, "HomeNet," suggests that the interactive medium may be no more socially healthful than the older mass media. It also raises troubling questions about the nature of "virtual" communication and the disembodied relationships that are often formed in the vacuum of cyberspace.
7. Study participants used inherently social features such as e-mail and Internet chat rooms more than they used passive information gathering such as reading or watching videos. But they reported a decline in interaction with relatives and a reduction in their circles of friends that directly corresponded to how much time they spent online.
8. At the beginning and end of the two-year study, the subjects were asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "I felt everything I did was an effort" and "I enjoyed life" and "I can find companionship when I want it." They were also asked to estimate how many minutes each day they spent with each member of their family and to quantify their social circle. Many of those questions are standard in psychological health assessments.
9. For the duration of the study, the subjects' use of the Internet was recorded. Depression and loneliness were measured independently, and each subject was rated on a subjective scale. In measuring depression, the responses were plotted on a scale of 0 to 3, with 0 being the least depressed and 3 being the most depressed. Loneliness was plotted on a scale of 1 to 5.
10. By the end of the study, the researchers found that one hour a week on the Internet led to an average increase of .03, or 1 percent, on the depression scale, a loss of 2.7 members of the subject's social circle, which averaged 66 people, and an increase of .02, or four-tenths of 1 percent, on the loneliness scale.
11. The subjects exhibited wide variations in all three measured effects. The net effects are not large, but they are statistically significant in demonstrating deterioration of social and psychological life, Kraut said.
12. Based on the data, the researchers hypothesize that relationships maintained over long distances without face-to-face contact ultimately do not provide the kind of support and reciprocity that typically contribute to psychological security and happiness, such as being available to baby-sit in a pinch for a friend, or to grab a cup of coffee and talk.
13. "Our hypothesis is there are more cases where you're building shallow relationships, leading to an overall decline in feeling of connection to other people," Kraut said....

14. Because the study participants were not randomly selected, it is unclear how the findings apply to the general population. It is also conceivable that some unmeasured factor caused simultaneous increases in use of the Internet and decline in normal levels of social involvement. Moreover, the effect of Internet use varied depending on an individual's life patterns and type of use. Researchers said that people who were isolated because of their geography or work shifts might have benefited socially from Internet use.
15. Even so, several social scientists familiar with the study vouched for its credibility and predicted that the findings will touch off a national debate over how public policy regarding the Internet should evolve and how the technology might be shaped to yield more beneficial effects.
16. "They did an extremely careful scientific study, and it's not a result that's easily ignored," said Tora Bikson, a senior scientist at Rand, the research institution. Based partly on previous studies that focused on how local communities such as Santa Monica, Calif., used computer networks to enhance civic participation, Rand has recommended that the federal government provide e-mail access to all Americans.
17. "It's not clear what the underlying psychological explanation is," Bikson said of the study. "Is it because people give up day-to-day contact and then find themselves depressed? Or are they exposed to the broader world of Internet and then wonder, 'What am I doing here in Pittsburgh?' Maybe your comparison standard changes. I'd like to see this replicated on a larger scale. Then I'd really worry."

Taken from Arguing in Communities



TEXT B:

Study: Net Use Doesn't Increase Depression, After All

by

Marilyn Elias

1. Using the Internet at home doesn't make people more depressed and lonely after all.
2. A new, longer follow-up from a study that linked Web use to poor mental health—heavily publicized three years ago—shows that most bad effects have disappeared.
3. “Either the Internet has changed, or people have learned to use it more constructively, or both,” says the study leader, psychologist Robert Kraut of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.
4. The earlier findings were doubted by some scientists, who criticized the lack of control group and failure to randomly select participants, steps that would have ruled out causes other than the Net for the depression.
5. But Kraut stands by his earlier report, which tracked adults and teens in 93 households for their first 12 to 18 months online. His key finding: The more time people spent on the Net, the more lonely and depressed they became.
6. The follow-up looked at participants two or three years after first going online. Using the Internet no longer could be linked to depression or loneliness, but it continued to correlate with greater stress.
7. Kraut thinks the Net has become a more social place since the study began in 1995. More families and friends use e-mail or instant messaging, and support groups have flourished. “People may be stressed because it's just another thing on their to-do list,” he says.
8. Extroverts may benefit more than introverts from going online, Kraut adds. He has a new study looking at how online activity affected 446 people. One year after the study began:
 - For extroverts, Net use was tied to better mood, less loneliness and higher self-esteem.
 - For introverts, the more time online, the lonelier and more unhappy they became. Compared with extroverts, they used the Net more for entertainment and less for social contact.



9. The findings on introverts are "counterintuitive," says Jeffrey Cole, director of the UCLA Center for Communication Policy. "Introverts can be more comfortable online because nobody's judging them. It gives you a cover," he says.
10. His recent survey of 2,000 U.S. households found that Net use increased social contact. It also found that online users watched 28% less TV than those who weren't online.
11. The findings on introverts aren't surprising, says Vanderbilt University psychologist Donna Hoffman, an expert on e-commerce. People are "going to use computers in a predictable way, based on the kind of person they are."
12. The Net "is a neutral tool," says San Diego psychologist Marlene Maheu, "neither bad nor good."
13. Often, new Internet users are online a lot. "Just like when you first get your driver's license as a teenager, you want to drive around constantly. But the novelty wears off, and then it's not an obsession."

Taken from *USA Today*