A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Given the changes in our economy and the increasing importance of science and technology for our competitiveness on the global market, both the U.S. government and the U.S. business community are now emphasizing the importance of a strong work force in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). As part of this emphasis, policy makers and scholars want to better understand why certain individuals go into STEM careers.

The National Science Foundation awarded us a grant to study this question by re-contacting the participants from our Childhood and Beyond Study. You were a participant in this study. Thus, this grant gives us the opportunity to follow up with you! We are interested in learning about you as an individual and what you have done over the past twelve years since we last spoke to you.

In this study, we hope to find out a number of things based on the questionnaires we will send to you - things such as what types of jobs have you held since you left high school? How much do you like your current job? We also want to know how the activities and interests you had as children and youth have influenced the types of jobs, careers, and more general interests you now have. Additionally, we would like to know why some people return to school for more education and what barriers and opportunities you may have faced since high school in achieving the goals you had at that time. Finally, we want to know how your goals have changed and why. Interestingly, very little research has looked at these kinds of issues. It would be wonderful if we could translate your successes and coping strategies as adults into advice for the next generation.

Your participation in the Childhood and Beyond study has been instrumental in reforming educational policy and has made significant contributions in our understanding how academic subjects such as math, science, sports and music can impact children’s and adolescents’ development. We hope that we can continue informing educational policies with your help. We are excited for this opportunity to reconnect with you and learn about the person you have become.

Included in this newsletter are results from surveys that you had completed at least 12 years ago. We hope that you enjoy reading about things that you said back then. Thank you so much for all your help and participation, we are deeply grateful for you being a part of this study since your elementary school years! You can get more information about what we discovered from this study on our web site.

Sincerely,

Jacquelynne S. Eccles, Ph.D.
Project Director

Check Out Our Website!
http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/garp/
What I Want to be When I Grow Up

In 1998, most of you were beginning college or at least thinking about going to college. We asked you what you wanted to major in at college and what kind of career you wanted to have. You gave us many different answers. Naturally, many of you didn’t know what you wanted to become at that time, but very interesting sex differences were evident among those of you who did have specific career plans. Not surprisingly, a higher percentage of males wanted to become engineers than females, whereas a higher percentage of females wanted to go into education.

In the upcoming survey, we want to know if you attained your desired degree, major, and occupation. If you did, what helped you? If you changed majors or went into a different career, why? What obstacles did you face in obtaining your goals? These questions are very important in understanding who you became as adults.

National Data Trends

Given that you had provided us with your preferred college majors, we decided to see how your responses compared to current national data. Interestingly, the trends we found in your responses were quite similar to those in found in national data that was collected in 2009!

Nationally, far more young men still are interested in engineering majors than young women. Similarly, young women are more interested in going into either biological sciences or social and behavioral sciences than young men.
What My Parents Told Me

From our earlier studies, we also know your decisions were affected by your parents, their gendered beliefs, and the activities they encouraged you to be involved in. We want to know if those earlier experiences continued to shape your career choices, which is part of why we wanted to contact you again!

As we all know, parents give us advice about what might make us successful in the future. In 1998, we asked what types of advice you got from your parents about careers and relationships. Interestingly, many of you told us that your parents told you to do your best or to get a good job. Many of you also indicated that your parents told you to go to college and choose a career carefully.

At the same time, we asked what kind of relationship advice you had received from your parents. Many of you reported that your parents had told you to be safe (18%) and take it slow (24%). Your parents also told you not to let others treat you badly and that there were “lots of fish in the sea”.

We wonder if the advice your parents gave you actually influenced your career and relationship choices over the last 12 years, and if this is also true for the advice you said you got from your high friends. We would like to know how much influence you think various people had over your work and relationship choices in the past and right now. We would also like to know how you think these individuals influenced you for good or bad.
Gender, Math/Science and You

The U.S. economy is increasingly relying on math, science, and technology-related fields. Unfortunately, the number of young women pursuing careers in these fields is still low. To try to understand this sex difference, we asked you questions about your academic interests and activities during elementary and secondary school.

The boys in your generation were more likely to express an interest in math and physical science than the girls quite early in elementary school and these sex differences became even more marked during high school. Not surprisingly, the males took slightly more math and physical science courses in high school. Interestingly, the boys felt they were more competent in math than the girls even though the girls always gotten better grades in math than the boys. Most importantly, however, boys felt more competent in math than in English and girls felt more competent in English than in math, even though the girls did equally well in both subjects. Over time, girls’ confidence in the English abilities led to declines in their confidence in their math abilities even though their math grades did not decline.

What role did your parents play in your decision to choose math or science careers?

Believe it or not, your parents’ attitudes and behaviors about gender roles actually had a large impact on your math and science achievement! Through many studies, we found that even if girls feel competent and perform well in math, they are less likely than boys to find it interesting and their parents are less likely to support math-friendly environments for them. We found that the middle school years are particularly important in shaping your math and science-related identity. This is important because if parents can value girls’ competence in these topics, girls will be more likely to pursue them as they get older.

In a recent study by Judith Harackiewicz and her colleagues at the University of Wisconsin, parents who were provided extensive information about careers in STEM, particularly for females, successfully encouraged their children to take more STEM courses. So it is possible to help parents give more comprehensive career guidance in the STEM fields for both their daughters and their sons.

Goals & Aspirations for the Future

Back in 1998, we asked you what were your hopes and goals for the future. You gave us a wide variety of hopes. More females reported wanting to go to college than males. This is right on track with the fact that females now outnumber males in college attendance. You were part of that major generational change in both the USA and other nations. Girls than boys talked about wanting to get married and have children; in contrast, more boys than girls talked about going on to get a graduate or advanced degree. Surprisingly, a higher number of females reported wanting a job and a secure job than males. Interestingly, men and women were equally likely to report wanting lots of material things.

As we move forward, we are interested to see if you have attained the goals that you set for yourselves as a teenager in the last 12 years. If you have, we’d like to know what might have helped you achieve those goals and if you have not, we’d like to hear about what types of things got in your way. We also want to know if you have changed your goals since high school and why?

People You Looked up to in 1998

Who Were Close to You

Your Mom
Your Dad
Grandparents
Teachers/Coaches
If I Had a Million Dollars....

What would you do if someone gave you a million dollars? Would you buy a house? Would you try to travel the world? Would you try your hand at investing in the stock market? Well, back in 1998 you had clear ideas of what you would do if given a million dollars.

According to your responses, we found 8 categories that reflected the ways you would spend a million dollars. Around 47% said that you would either buy a house or some form of transportation. 16% of you said you would invest the money while another 14% preferred to get a college education. Interestingly, 10% and 6% said that you would give money to charity and family respectively, but only 3% selected to pay off bills. Lastly, 4% wanted to shop or buy everything. Although we won’t be asking the same question this time around, we are still interested in seeing how your values have changed over time.

Confidence in Ability

Have you ever wondered if you could be the best at any particular activity? In the first through fourth grade, we asked what you would do to become the best at certain academic subjects. 75% said that you would practice more. 14% said you could better at academic subjects if you paid more attention in class. These findings are quite important given recent research that suggests how important it is to believe you can get better by working harder. People who have confidence in their ability to get better at any particular activity choose activities that are more challenging, persevere at them when they are having difficulty, and actually

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perform better in the long run.

WHERE IS EVERYONE NOW?

The vast majority of you, now in your early thirties, have stayed in Michigan; only a little over a quarter of you have moved out of state. We used a secure online database to find new addresses for most participants. Some of the most popular states you have moved to include Illinois, Florida, Texas, and California (Fig. 1.2). Thank you so much for your continued participation in this study from all around the country!

How did you find me?
You and your parents filled out your contact information on the original CAB surveys, as well as the contact information of somebody who might know where you were if you moved. Recently, through the use of a secure online database that contains information such as the post office’s change of address forms, we were able to use this information to find new addresses for most CAB participants. Your old and new contact information is stored following strict confidentiality standards at our University of Michigan office, and only a few researchers ever have access to it.

Famous People you looked up to in 1998
- Michael Jordan
- Grant Hill
- Steve Yzerman
- Madonna
- Julia Roberts

MOVING??

Please contact us at reesesurvey@gmail.com or call us at 1-888-764-8060
FAQs

What has been the impact of the study so far?
Over the years, the information you have provided has formed the basis for recommendations to school districts, health provider organizations, and other policymaking bodies at the local, state, and national level. For example, the results from this study helped convinced policy makers and youth program officials of the need for high quality, easily accessible after school programs for youth.

Your responses as teenagers also showed that you were healthy, optimistic, and committed to your families and communities, contradicting the negative stereotypes of teenagers in the media. You have also helped the education community learn much more about the ways that motivation and other academic beliefs grow and change throughout the school years.

With your help, we will now be able to start to study how your experiences during school and your experiences as adults. For example, we will be able to form recommendations to help future students see a clear path from their goals as teenagers towards an eventual career, and to determine which school practices are helpful or harmful in this process. We hope to hear from you soon!

Where can I read about the results?
Ever since the CAB study started (including the years when you didn’t hear from us!), researchers at the University of Michigan and around the country have been continuously analyzing your responses to better understand the experiences of students in our school system. To date, the CAB study has led to more than three dozen scientific publications as well as a similar number of presentations at scholarly conferences. Each of these reports has focused on a different topic. To read summaries of selected CAB articles or to see a full list of publications, please visit http://rcgd.isr.umich.edu/garp/index.htm.

How long is the study going to last?
The National Science Foundation grants that currently fund the study will last until 2015, but we plan to obtain funding to continue after that time as well. Your participation has helped to create a rare resource, since few studies are able to collect data over so many years. Therefore, your support going forward will enhance the value of the project even further, as well as its impact on the research and policy communities.

Are you sure you want me to continue in the study?
Absolutely, yes! The CAB study is already rare because not many projects are able to follow students all the way from elementary through high school. The opportunity to learn more about your experiences as adults, with the ability to compare your current and previous responses, makes this project even more unique. Every single response is extremely valuable, and helps us discover and advocate for ways to improve our country’s schools and communities.

Thanks for all your Participation over the years!