



NEWSLETTER

MONITORING THE FUTURE - THE SENIOR CLASS OF 2020

DECEMBER 2020

We are sending this newsletter to give you a brief report on the Monitoring the Future study in which you took part last spring at school. As you may recall, the study is being conducted by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center.

This important study is designed to look at changing behaviors, attitudes and preferences of American youth. We believe that studying the way young people are like today will tell us a lot about the way the whole nation will be tomorrow.



THANK YOU!

Beginning with the class of 1975, about 17,000 seniors in over 125 high schools have participated in the Monitoring the Future study each year. Since 1991, the annual survey has included the views of about 17,000 8th graders and 17,000 10th graders. In addition, several thousand graduates continue to participate in the study each spring by filling out follow-up surveys.

The results of the study are used by policymakers at all levels of government to monitor progress toward some of the nation's health and education goals. Counselors, educators, other researchers, and the media also use the data from this study.

As you may recall, we collect the names and addresses of participants in 12th grade so that we can send newsletters about the study results and, in some cases, follow-up surveys. However, all identifying information is kept completely separate from the answers that each individual has provided. A special Grant of Confidentiality from the U.S. government guarantees our ability to keep all data completely confidential.



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Important Subject Areas Being Studied

Your responses to the Monitoring the Future questionnaires, along with those of your classmates, have provided us with helpful information on a great variety of topics, including:

- tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs
- health and happiness
- work and leisure
- education
- the environment
- politics
- social problems and social change
- major social institutions
- the military
- race relations

In order to keep the questionnaires short enough to complete in a class period, and yet cover a wide range of topics, six different questionnaire forms are used. You may see some topics in this newsletter that are not familiar to you, because they were not included in the questionnaire form you filled out.

Looking at Change

By sampling each high school class, and by following up a part of each sample after graduation, we can analyze four different kinds of change.

- 1) Change that happens from **one high school class year to another**. For example, we can learn how the most recent high school class is different from previous classes across a 30-year period.
- 2) Change that occurs **at the same time for all age groups**. For example, we can see whether a specific event, such as an energy crisis, affects everybody's opinions.
- 3) Change that occurs **as a result of growing older**. For example, we can learn whether people's attitudes change consistently during the years after high school.
- 4) Change that happens **as a result of different experiences that people have**—like getting married, working at a job, joining the military, or going to college or trade school.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Illegal Drugs

While **alcohol** is the most widely used drugs among students of all grade levels, its use has been in a long term decline. In 2020 students in all grades reported levels at or near historic lows over the life of the study

Cigarette smoking has also been in a long term decline over the past two decades, and in 2020 the level of cigarette use in the past 30 days were at or near historic lows.

Vaping Nicotine has increased dramatically over the past few years. For two years in a row nicotine vaping had the highest annual increases ever recorded for any substance in 45 years of this study. In 2020 levels of any past year nicotine vaping remained steady. More adolescents vape nicotine than use any other tobacco product, in every grade we surveyed (8th, 10th, and 12th). Further, we followed up 12th grade e-cigarette users and found that they were about four times more likely to initiate smoking one year after high school than their schoolmates who had not used e-cigarettes.

Overall **marijuana** use among teens by any mode (e.g. smoking, vaping, eating, etc.) has remained fairly stable since 2004. **Vaping marijuana** was asked for the first time in 2017. In 2018 and 2019, the percent of students who reported vaping in the past year more than doubled in each grade we surveyed. In 2020, the rapid increase in vaping marijuana halted and increased only slightly for 8th and 12th graders and decreased slightly for 10th graders. More than 25% of students who had used marijuana had vaped it.

Vaping of the JUUL brand of e-cigarettes declined substantially in 2020. However, JUUL was replaced by new brands that offered favorite flavors such as mint and mango. JUUL voluntarily removed such flavors in 2020, in part as a response to MTF findings that these flavors were very attractive to youth.

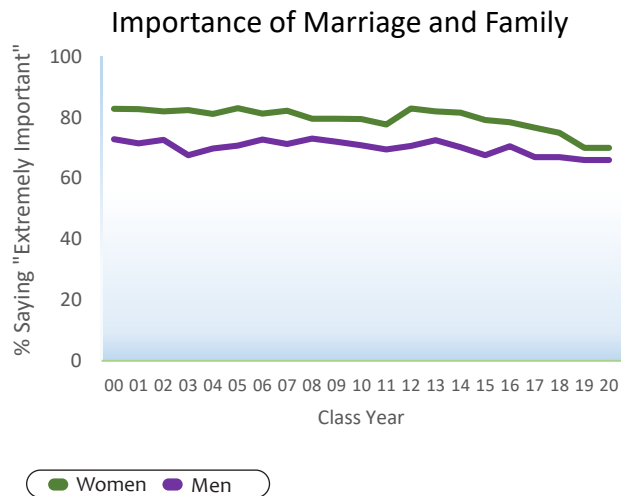
Since the mid-1990's most **illegal drug use** by 12th graders has declined to very low use. In 2020, we have found that the percentage among 8th graders reporting any illicit drug for lifetime increased slightly from the previous year. However, 10th and 12th graders have continued their slow decline since 2004.

Ecstasy use gained popularity with teens and young adults toward the end of the 1990s. After 2001, use of ecstasy fell appreciably as more people came to see its use as dangerous. In the last few years Ecstasy use is the lowest ever measured in the Monitoring the Future study.

Your Future Hopes

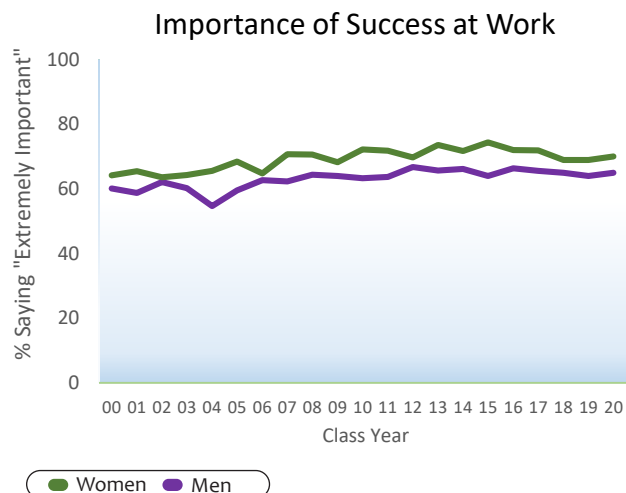
Marriage and family life, successful careers, large paychecks, recreational free time? Monitoring the Future asks high school seniors to rate the importance of these factors in their hopes and plans for the future.

The importance of a good marriage and family life



remains high but has decreased some over the last few years, especially for **women**. This means that **women** and **men** are now closer to each other's ratings than in the years before. Both **women** and **men** rate marriage and family life as more important than any of the other items.

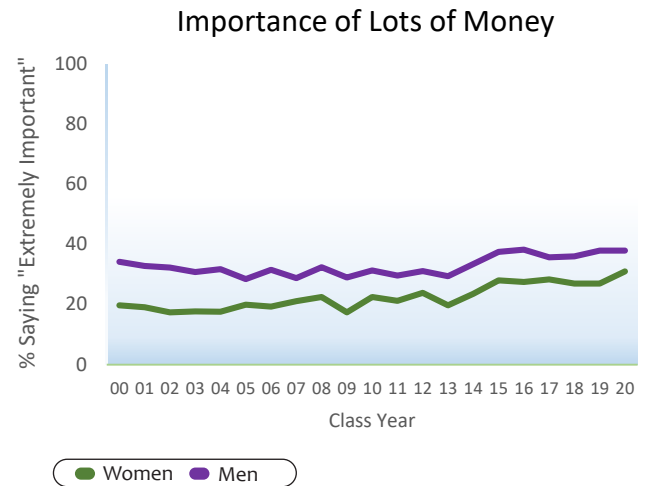
The percentage of seniors who say that success at work is extremely important has declined slightly over the past



ten years but is still a bit higher than it was two decades ago and is moving upwards again.

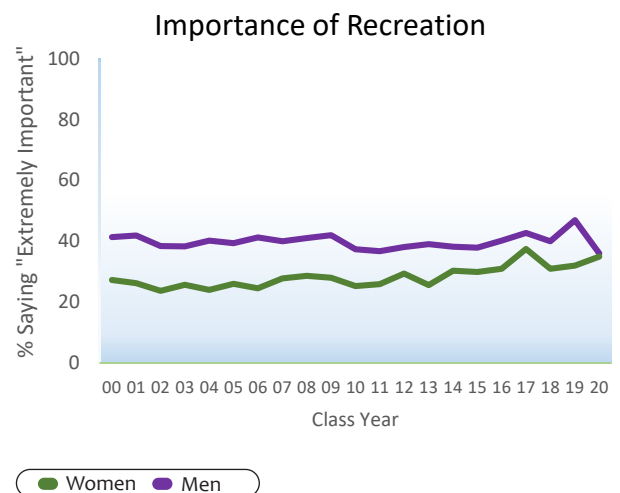
More **women** than **men** rate job success as extremely important. Interestingly, career success is much more important than financial success for both **men** and **women**. It seems that seniors want to do well in their occupations but are less concerned with becoming wealthy.

Recent graduates are more concerned with financial success than earlier graduates. Note that these levels run more parallel for **men** and **women** than the levels for other hopes and dreams. It would be interesting to



know what drives these similar ups and downs over the years. More **men** than **women** rate financial success as extremely important but **women** increased this year.

Time for recreation has not been extremely important for most seniors. Yet over the last four decades the proportion who rate recreational time as extremely important has increased by 9 percentage points among young **men** and 15 percentage points among young **women**.



Throughout the study, **men** have been more likely to place importance on recreation than have **women**, whereas more **women** have tended to rate marriage and family, and job success highly.



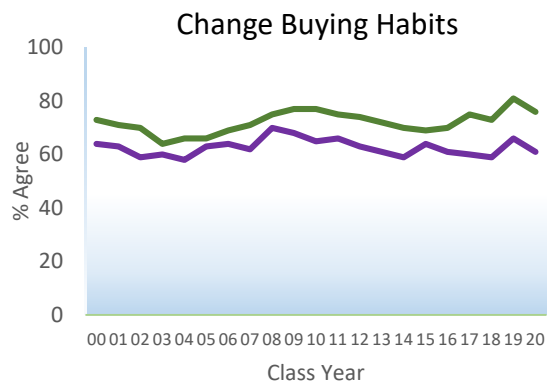
Environmental Issues - What Would You Do?

Monitoring the Future asked high school seniors about environmental problems and what steps they would be willing to take to help solve such problems. We asked how much participants agreed with these statements:

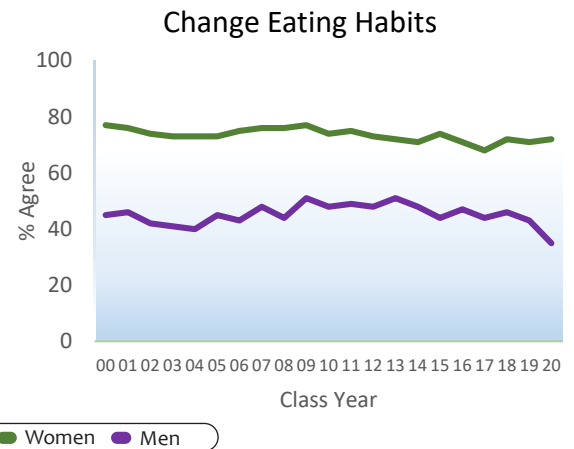
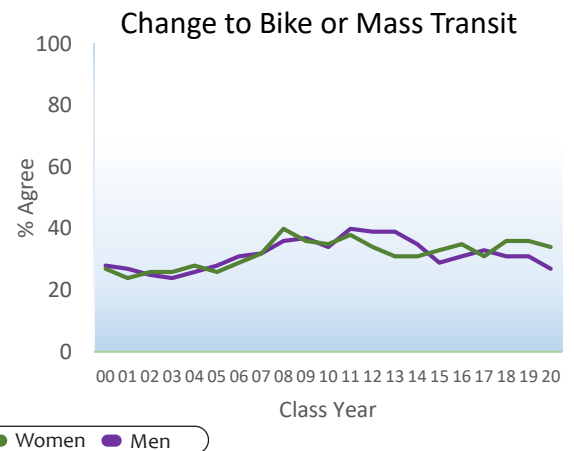
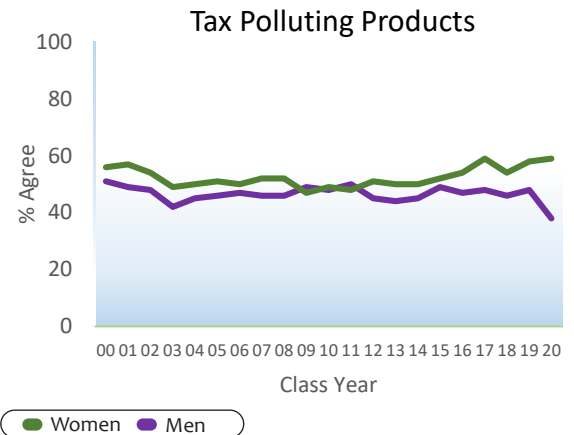
- “People will have to change their buying habits and way of life to correct our environmental problems.”
- “Government should place higher taxes on products which cause pollution in their manufacture or disposal, so that companies will be encouraged to find better ways to produce them.”
- “I would probably be willing to use a bicycle or mass transit (if available) rather than a car to get to work.”
- “I would be willing to eat less meat and more vegetables, if it would help provide food for starving people.”

Everyone makes personal choices that affect the environment. We wondered how willing people would be to take specific actions. For some, of course, riding a bike or taking public transportation is actually more convenient than using a car to get to work. But for many people, it would be an inconvenience.

While the majority of seniors still say they would change their lifestyle to help solve environmental problems, the percentage has decreased slightly this



year in all of the four categories and especially for men. Perhaps people are a little less willing to change or are less convinced that these changes are necessary or would be beneficial to the environment.



What is presented here is a very small sampling of the study's findings. The reports from the study are of interest to many people including educators, political leaders, and the general public. We will continue to inform these audiences about the results from the study in the years to come. Thank you again for being part of this study and helping to bring about a better understanding of teen perspectives and realities.