

*Home, it's been said, is where the heart is. But for many Americans today, it's also become the place to run a business, be entertained, go to school, and shop. Are we becoming a stay-at-home society? Well, not entirely. But today's technologies and programs — the Internet, the Home Shopping Network and broadcast telecourses— are making it easier to communicate with the outside world, buy products and take classes from the comfort and convenience of our living rooms. In this issue of FOCUS, we look at people who have chosen to teach their children, run their business and pursue their college degrees under their own roots, which brings a new meaning to the saying, "There's no place like home."*

# On the Home Front

**By Edle Jeffers**

**L**earn, work, shop, work out — all at home. Never before has there been so much focus on what we can do without venturing beyond our living rooms. Endless choices of ways to spend our time, money and energy seem to have driven us ... well, back home.

In 1990, the New York City-based marketing research firm of Yankelovich, Skelly and White Inc. anticipated this renewed focus on home and family. Calling it "new traditionalism," the firm said the trend reflects a return to traditional values that grow out of a yearning for stability and a desire to balance commitments to self and family with those of work. The new traditionalist profile also encompasses a rediscovery of "traditional" female roles (i.e., wife, mother, homemaker) and a new focus on children in society. The new traditionalist places a heavy emphasis on the home as a haven.

BSU psychology professor Eric Landrum thinks we've been driven home by our desire for independence and freedom. "When you're at home," he says, "you have all the freedom you can possibly have." Landrum says when at home you can exercise some control over your own little piece of the world.



"The normal, typical approach to these areas of our lives is we don't have much freedom or independence. We're told when to be at our job, what school our children are going to go to, how to be social beings. We're slowly making the transition where you have more choices, and people like that."

According to Landrum, technology is a huge factor in this transition. "Across all the areas, one thing that is making [staying at home] possible is technology. Technology has made it easier to earn a living, entertain, learn — 'cocoon,' if you will — at home."

Pat Dorman, a BSU sociologist, agrees that technology plays a major role in the emphasis on home. She points out that because of technology, we are able to shop, work, play, learn and even socialize at home.

"The growth of cable TV enables people to watch a show, dial an 800 number and order something with their credit card, and have it delivered to their door," says Dorman. "You can have a home entertainment center, or you can hook up your PC and surf the Internet.

"And with computer technology, you don't have to worry about going to the library and checking out a book and discussing issues with people. You can get on the Internet and go to the Library of Congress or access the university library from home. You can do a variety of things at home that you couldn't do five years ago."

Working at home has enormous appeal to many 8-to-5ers. Dorman thinks that employers do their employees a great service when they recognize the feasibility of working at home. "One of the positive things that businesses recognized is that with the technology, you really don't need to be present with your head showing in the office for eight or nine hours in order to get your job done," she says. "With technology, [you are able to do things] alone, because you've got everything right there."

Landrum agrees: "It's a complex world that we live in and everybody wants everything. You want it all. One way you can have more of it is to work at home. Independence and freedom runs through all of those [home] topics," he says.

Some parents want the independence and freedom to educate their children according to their priorities and values. They want to give them an education superior to what they believe is offered by the public schools.

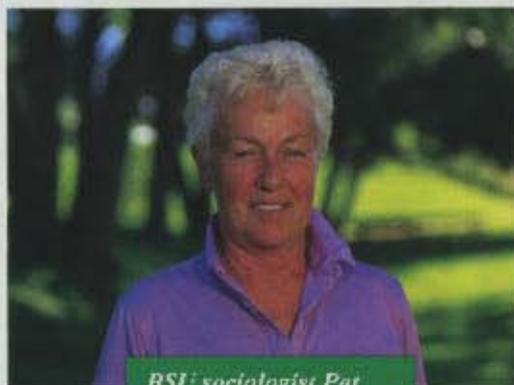
Dorman believes home schooling has taken off because people are dissatisfied with the job the public education system is doing. "Part of the trend in home schooling is because of the disaffection for public schools," she says. "And part of it is some people think they can teach more fully the values they hold at home, which may not be happening at school."

And Boise-area adults who are pursuing higher education can have the convenience of learning at home through televised classes offered by BSU on Boise public television station KAID. Students can earn college credit through watching TV, reading, completing assignments and tests and attending a few on-campus discussion sessions.

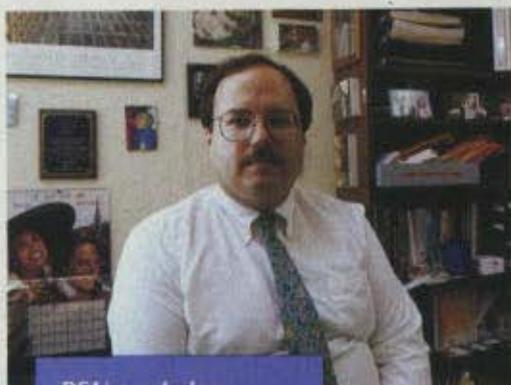
The new traditionalist also has a deep desire for

home to be a safe haven and protective cocoon for the family. Landrum says that this cocooning is a response to the world around us. "Another reason for this emphasis on cocooning is that there seems to be a palpable decay in morals, values and ethics," he says. "There seems to be proportionally more murders, homicides, teen pregnancy. Maybe cocooning is one way to address these changes in society. You don't have much control over everybody else out there, but you do have control over your own little world."

This "little world" — a home — is high on the list of priorities for women surveyed by *Good Housekeeping*. Seven in 10 said that owning a home is an integral part of the American dream. How does this differ from the American dream of the '80s? "The American home gives you a foundation from which to build," says Landrum. "Maybe the goal of the '90s is for the home to become the center of family life. If you buy into the cliché that the goal of the '80s was to accumulate wealth, we start finding out that that's not very satisfactory."



*BSU sociologist Pat Dorman says technology expands our options for playing, shopping and learning.*



*BSU psychology professor Eric Landrum says technology gives us freedom.*

The '90s focus on the home has added up to even more choices for women. "If a woman wants to be in the workplace, that's fine. If she wants to stay at home, that's fine, too," says Landrum. "It represents the ultimate freedom of choice — I can work at home, educate at home, and if I don't want to, I can go out into the workplace."

More men may desire the same freedom of choice in the future. "Here's the male side of the issue," explains Landrum. "I have a 4-year-old daughter and a 12-week-old son. There are times I'd like to switch places with my wife, and her with me. If I worked at home, I'd miss fewer of those developmental changes in my children's lives. There are concerns too for men when it comes to being out of the home."

Although this return to the home is an attractive lifestyle for many, Dorman warns about negative implications of cocooning. "There seems to be a trend in society right now — we really haven't explored this enough — where people are doing a lot more things alone than they used to."

She believes that a decline in a sense of community may have forced people inward. "The precursor to this was the decline in community and the general sense that people don't reach out as much as they used to in their neighborhoods. That may be because we're too busy, or don't care to neighbor or are afraid to neighbor, or because the neighborhood is not conducive to neighborliness."

Society's preoccupation with television also contributes to less community activity, Dorman says. "Basically, the affection we have for TV — which is a passive activity — cuts down on interaction between people." She adds that our mobility as a society also contributes to the negative side of cocooning.

Good trend or bad, Landrum thinks that this "home is my haven" attitude is part of a cycle. "There's an ebb and flow. There

[are] advantages to both. You can only take each for so long. You want more money, you want more social status, you want to talk to people other than 3-year-olds, so you seek the outside."

"After a while you have the benefits of being outside, so you want to go back home. Maybe it's that we want what we can't have. But what's new is the technology that allows you to do more at home." □