CHAPTER V
COMPUTERS - A NECESSARY EVIL ? AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

The data in Chapter III and Chapter IV highlight that respondents in our study had been accessing computers at multiple places irrespective of whether they possessed computers at home or not. In almost half the cases, respondents used cyberspace at multiple places without the knowledge of their parents, while others continued to use it despite the objections raised by their parents. It has also been brought out that with the introduction of computers and internet, adolescents’ relations with their family and peer group have been adversely affected.

The findings discussed in the preceding chapters put to question that computer is mainly an educative device that enhances knowledge and skills among the users. We have observed that many of our adolescent respondents spend a large part of their day on the machine, thus putting their health to grave risk. At the same time, they cut down time to be spent on other kinds of social interaction, to be online. At this juncture, one encounters the basic question as to whether computer is a blessing or a necessary evil, a trouble that needs to be avoided. It is a difficult question, which is likely to be responded differently by different actors, viz. adolescents, their parents, teachers, owners of cyber cafés and so on. Hence ethnographic accounts of all these actors have been obtained and analysed to reach at conclusions.

Like any other technology, computer too is both good and bad. It was initially accepted mainly as a means, a very effective means, in fact, for connecting oneself with the world, and the knowledge, which knew no boundaries. Particularly the internet came as a relatively inexpensive but quick means to communicate with the world over, besides for accessing the information on any subject one wanted to. So, to begin with, computers in general, and the internet in particular, were perceived primarily as a positive development, a revolutionary but welcome tool in the field of information technology that would ultimately equip the individuals with an ability to compete
globally. In nutshell, computer technology was hailed mainly all over the world as an extremely positive and desirable development, a blessing for the mankind. Also, computer and internet were considered almost an indispensable part of the education process, thus projected them as primarily educational tools.

Our empirical data however put all the above assumptions to question. While the utility of computer as an information tool can not be denied, to say that its access is largely meant for educative or informative purposes, is an exaggeration. Further, computer, particularly the internet, has outgrown its utility from merely a means to an end in itself, dictating not only the leisure behaviour but even the formation of relationships and interaction among the adolescents.

Prolonged sittings on the machine, accessing the internet away from the supervisory eyes of parents, looking for private spaces for using the specific websites, are all indications that the machine has acquired a considerable control over the adolescent users, who spend a sizable proportion of their valuable time, energy and money on the medium, certainly not for educative purposes, but for entertainment, fantasy and other socially relevant behaviour. In view of all these developments, it becomes pertinent to assess the pros and cons of computer usage especially for the adolescents, who happen to be at a crucial stage of their lives, being most impressionistic and vulnerable.

Sociologically speaking, it is not feasible to make any final judgements on whether computer is a blessing or a curse for the adolescent users. There are bound to be varied responses, not only between parents, teachers and adolescents but even within the adolescent users, depending upon how much and for what purpose they are using the machine. With this objective in mind, an attempt has been made in this chapter to seek the views of the young computer users, their parents and teachers, on the usability of computers, particularly the internet. These responses have been supplemented by the observations made by the researcher during field work.

The internet is seen as the dynamic mass media in this century. Its interactive nature has attracted people from all walks of life. Unlike its predecessor, i.e. TV, internet is a storehouse of knowledge providing access to
information. Lots of information can be derived from the internet ranging from communication to education, entertainment & business. A wide consensus prevails among parents and teachers that children need to become competent computer users in order to survive in today’s computerized society. Also, an increased market pressure has forced the adolescents to possess computer literacy skills and has made computers an inseparable part of their lives. This poses a dilemma. On the one hand, it is perceived as a necessary tool of communication in an electronic age where one cannot survive without its use. On the other hand, one is likely to receive all kinds of information from this source—whether good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, without any checks. Such issues raise questions about the effects of expanding role of computers in an adolescent’s life.

Just like other technological tools, computer too has both uses and abuses. While parents feel compelled to procure a computer for their growing children, in order to enable them to keep pace with the global world and information revolution, they continuously remain anxious regarding the unintended consequences the machine may have on their young ones. While there can be no final answer to whether computer is a blessing or a curse, it is meaningful at least to gauge the varying perceptions people may have towards it—young and old; teachers and students; parents and children, and so on. Apart from these perceptions, the researcher as an observer has attempted in this study, to examine how the computer has exercised varying effects on the adolescents and their social environment. This dimension has been taken up in detail in this chapter. A review of literature on the issue reveals contrasting propositions, labeling computer both as a blessing as well as a curse.

There are studies which highlight that computer has really been very helpful as a child’s learning tool. A study conducted by Subrahmanyan et al. (2000), mentioned that computer use at home is linked to slightly better academic performance and has no negative impact on children’s friendships. Conversely, there are other studies like that of Jane Healy (1998) who identified many potential dangers of children’s computer use, ranging from vision problems
to bad posture. But Healy’s main worry was that computers would adversely affect childhood learning experience and would also cut into play and physical activities that were important for emotional and cognitive development. Healy’s warning is “a child with lopsided experiences is likely to end up with a lopsided brain” (www.futureofchildren.org)

A pioneering study in this field conducted by Ellen A. Wartella (2000), highlighted that the increased level of interactivity possible through internet heightened both the potential for educational enrichment and exposure to harm. Walsh (2000) explored the benefits and drawbacks of the Internet in a child’s life. Her intention was to weigh the positive influences of computerization in daily life and project preventative drawbacks in socialization. It was not her intention to perpetuate a negative image of children and computers, but to remind users (and parents of users) that the Internet created even more ethical dilemmas than the television babysitter, because the Internet is a medium that does not necessarily guard users as to what kinds of information they are to receive as it cannot make any distinction between right and wrong.

Focusing upon the impact of computers use on physical and mental health of adolescents, Wallace (1999) discussed the "Internet addiction" syndrome, meaning people spending too much time on-line has made the individual lonely and depressed. Although the Internet can be a “time sink” as Wallace described it, yet this “addiction” seems more prominent among newcomers, especially to chatters (Mueller 2000).

According to another expert in child psychology, computer and TV have disrupted the outdoor activities of the kids, which need revival on an urgent basis. However, she mentioned that the positive side was that today’s child was more aware of the world around him and that technology had opened new vistas of learning for him (Choudhary 2005).

One group of researchers argued that the total amount of time children spent in front of a TV or computer screen at the expense of other activities, had put them at a risk for obesity (Subrahmanyam et al. 2000). It was once hoped that media would provide adolescents with a “window onto the world”. A report by
Media Awareness Study (2000) indicated that children growing up in the media develop patterns of media consumption which are entertainment oriented rather than information seeking. So, despite initial optimism about the digital generation, it is increasingly clear that the internet has been primarily used for entertainment, play and social communication; the information children seek through networked computer pertains to their leisure interest in music, sports, games and celebrity gossip, more than it does to homework assignments or health.

There are studies which have brought out that working at a computer screen greatly increases the risk of eyestrain, which further results in a disease named ‘computer vision syndrome’. It is a condition caused by prolonged computer use, characterized by eyestrain, blurred vision, headaches, dry or red eyes, neck and/or back ache and other muscular problems that stem from using a computer. It affects people irrespective of age and types of works. Studies have established that anyone who spends an average of 2 hrs. or more a day in front of computer is susceptible to computer vision syndrome (Shah 2005). There are many other factors which trigger computer related injuries like poor posture, prolonged repetitive or awkward hand movements, poor furniture etc.

One of the popular activities on computer and internet is games, and even these are not without harmful effects. The new generations of video games and electronic games have become more and more realistic, moving away from computer generated characters to real life action and actors (McGourty 1995). This trend toward realism might encourage greater identification with the characters and increased imitation of the behaviour of videogame models (Bandura 1986). There are certain characteristics of violent computer and video games that make powerful media experiences for children. Identification with aggressive characters, particularly in games allow children to not only choose their character but also their particular traits. Thus, these computer games are likely to make the player aggressive.

The amount of time and the types of activities that adolescents engage themselves into while using computers greatly influence their perception about whether computer technology has positive or negative effects on them.
The above mentioned studies on computer use underlined some of the harmful effects it had on children and can be summarized as follows:

- Various studies warn that prolonged use of computers may adversely affect the children’s health. Poor vision, obesity, and various muscular problems are a few physical ailments which stem from using a computer.
- Adolescents who spend more time online, communicating with strangers in chat rooms, have been found to experience greater decline in social involvement and increased loneliness and depression.
- Playing computer games—a popular activity, has been linked with increased aggression.
- Computer has disrupted outdoor activities of the children.

Other studies show, however, that computer use can have positive effects on children when used appropriately.

- Interesting and engaging educational software provides various opportunities to explore the world.
- Communicating through the Internet can enable children to keep in touch with friends and family, and to form online communities with others who share their interests.
- Children's use of computers is linked to slightly better academic performance.

Unfortunately, little effort has been made to examine how computer use has made adolescents behave differently with their peer group and other immediate socially meaningful relationships. There is a need to reach out to the hidden areas, for instance, what do computers mean to the adolescents and for what purposes they are primarily using them in private spaces.

Like all other technology, computer is also a wonderful machine that gives loads of information and makes life comfortable for the user. Whether it is a ‘bane’ or a ‘boon’ will largely depend on how we are using it -for what purpose? It
is imperative to see the purposes for which our adolescent respondents used the cyberspace. Did they use it for academic purposes, for entertainment, for fraudulent relationships or for sex related information? Conventionally, computer has generally been conceived as a source of intellect for the adolescents. What needs to be explored is, are the adolescents actually accessing computers for educational purposes only? What are their expectations from the computer and from the society in general? Secondly, how their perceptions vary from those of their parents, teachers and cyber owners. These issues have been examined in this chapter.

To begin with, computer use among the adolescents was associated with their academic needs. In order to see for what purpose/s they were accessing the machine, respondents were asked to indicate whether they ever missed their studies for the sake of using computers. Respondents' responses to this question have been presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1
Distribution of Respondents According to Whether They Ever Missed Their Studies for the Sake of Computers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missed</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 shows that 42 per cent of the respondents admitted that they had missed their studies for the sake of using computers. Among these, 23.5 per cent respondents missed their studies sometimes whereas 13 per cent had missed it once. The percentage of respondents who missed their studies frequently was 5.5 per cent and among these all were male respondents. One male respondent remarked that many a times he had missed his tuitions whereas one of the cyber users, who was a college student, mentioned that he usually missed his first class in the college as he used computers till late night and was unable to get up early in the morning.
On the whole, the data highlight that 50 per cent of the boys missed their studies for the sake of using computers as compared to 33 per cent of female respondents.

Having observed that less than half of the respondents missed their studies for the sake of using computers, it would be very interesting to know about their academic performance. Respondents were asked to indicate whether their academic performance had changed after the use of computers. Data in Table 5.2 indicate that 34.5 per cent respondents (including 28 per cent boys and 43 per cent girls), reported that ever after having used computers, there had been an improvement in their academics. Only 8.5 per cent felt that their performance had deteriorated after the use of computers and among them all were male respondents. 57 per cent respondents reported that computers had resulted into no change in their academic performance.

Table 5.2
Distribution of Respondents According To Their Changed Academic Performance after the Use of Computer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has improved</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has remained same</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has deteriorated</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, respondents whose performance deteriorated after using computers did not blame computers for their poor performance. It is worth mentioning that all the students opined that by using computers their knowledge had enhanced, but it has been observed in the above data that their academic results had not improved with the use of computers. This shows that the kinds of knowledge they increased had no association with their studies and academic performance in schools.
It is well known that many websites have been especially designed for children with educational or entertainment content. But the question is, do the children like to access the educational and informative web sites? Have they ever taken help of computers/internet for academic purposes?

Table 5.3 indicates that 58.5 per cent respondents had never taken any help of computers for their studies whereas 41.5 per cent respondents had taken help of computer/internet for making different projects. Most of the respondents took help of computers for making projects of Science and History. Other subjects for which respondents took help of internet included Physics, English, Economics, Maths, Physical Education and Geography. When the researcher asked the respondents to name the educational websites they used for making projects. Majority of the respondents named www.yahoo.com, www.google.com, www.altavista.com, www.msn.com, etc. Interestingly all these aforesaid sources were search engines and not the specific websites they used. This was quite surprising that respondents knew about the pornographic sites, sites of music, greetings, horoscopes, etc. but were not much aware of the educational sites (Table 5.3 A).

Researcher came across one class IV student in the cyber cafe who had come with his grand mother for finding some English book on the internet. Some of the parents and cyber users reported that the kind of holiday homework given to children in the summer vacation was not possible without Internet. In one of the schools of Chandigarh, a class III student had to collect information about the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Music/Movies</th>
<th>Pornographic</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Shopping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kidsbookshelf.com</td>
<td>top20free.com</td>
<td>desibaba.com</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mobygames.com">www.mobygames.com</a></td>
<td>pcworld.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pinelearning.com</td>
<td>indiana.com</td>
<td>worldsex.com</td>
<td>freechannel.com</td>
<td>bombaycosmetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>funbrain.com</td>
<td>ipl.org/div</td>
<td>tamilsex.com</td>
<td>games2download</td>
<td>aspecialgift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singularity.com</td>
<td>altavista.box</td>
<td>lolofry.com</td>
<td>microsoft.comgames</td>
<td>diwoz.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proz.com</td>
<td>entertainmentmovies</td>
<td>bigboobs.com</td>
<td>uk250.co.ur</td>
<td>freebeautytips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traffik.com</td>
<td>virtual.finland.fi</td>
<td>doodehwaali.com</td>
<td>winpcware.com</td>
<td>hairboutique.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surfnetkids.com</td>
<td>music-sites.net</td>
<td>xxx.com</td>
<td>starfall.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qzmail.com</td>
<td>music.indiana.edumusic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learngood.com</td>
<td>music.princeton</td>
<td>hoes.com</td>
<td>passtheshareware.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eduscapes.com</td>
<td>childrenmusicworkshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cinemareview</td>
<td>adult.netpond.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relic.com</td>
<td>onlybestsex.com</td>
<td>chatmag.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blizzard.com</td>
<td>linksforsex.com</td>
<td>allpersonals.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flashwebhost.com</td>
<td>dangerdave.com</td>
<td>yoogi.com</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>bbc.co.uk/drama</td>
<td>gaydemon.com</td>
<td>Yahoo.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wwe.com</td>
<td>badgirls.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seniority.co.uk</td>
<td>dreamgirls.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>filmqueensu.co</td>
<td>indiansexclub.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>indiana.edu</td>
<td>flirtforfree.com</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kottke.org</td>
<td>nudegirls.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>animationpost.co.uk</td>
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<tr>
<td>thematrixonline.station.song.com</td>
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</table>
water birds, their pictures and history whereas in another school a child had to collect information about the web pages. ‘For this kind of homework text books were not sufficient’, remarked one of the parents. So parents had to go to the cyber café where the information was available at the click of the mouse. Another parent remarked, that she accompanied her son in the cyber café when he was to collect information on water animals. In all the above mentioned cases, parents were unaware about the use of computers and the cyber owner helped them in finding the information.

Cyber owners disclosed that they had good clientele of school students during the summer vacations. ‘Generally, school students of primary classes were accompanied by their parents or elder siblings’ remarked one of the cyber owners. Thus, it was observed that majority of respondents were not using computer regularly for their studies, but used when they were asked to make some project by their school teachers.

Thus the discussion of the data so far has pointed out that respondents were not using computers for academic purposes, rather they used to miss their studies for the sake of using computers. However, interestingly, all the respondents felt that their knowledge had increased after the use of computers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Knowledge</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatting</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/ Movies</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New people</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
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This further raised questions that on which aspects did the respondents gain knowledge? Their reactions have been tabulated in Table 5.4.

Wide differences have been noticed between the responses of male and female respondents about the kinds of knowledge they felt had enhanced by using computers. More number of boys reported an enhancement in their knowledge about e-mail whereas more girls felt that they gained knowledge about chatting. The second area, where boys had shown an increase in their knowledge was sex whereas girls mentioned music/ movies. The third area mentioned by boys was general knowledge where they felt improvement in their knowledge whereas girls enhanced their knowledge in managing their e-mail accounts.

Two very interesting areas in which 41.5 per cent of respondents mentioned an increase in their knowledge, were i.e. improvement in the vocabulary and knowledge about new people. Respondents were of the view that chatting had helped them in knowing people of different cultures and backgrounds. Secondly, written communication had improved their vocabulary and short forms of writing text messages. Quite a few respondents were included in the miscellaneous category which includes knowledge about cars, bikes, profiles of heroes and heroines, downloading various programs, searching options of the foreign universities, books, sports, horoscopes, shopping, travel, tours, greetings, online games etc.

It has been observed that among girls, chatting has proved to be an area where they had acquired an expertise, followed by music, movies whereas among boys e-mail, sex and general awareness were the main areas in which they had gained a mastery.

Researcher observed more candidness among boys while talking about sex and pornographic sites whereas girls were relatively shy and did not admit openly that they had visited these sites. Boys named various pornographic sites, pictures and movies which were available free of cost on the internet viz. nudegirls.com, dreamgirls.com, indiansexclub, indiansexland, freesex, badgirls.com, flirt4free.com, lesbiansex movies, maturepornmovies, dildosex,
sexKatrinanaked, blackteensexmovies, blondebeautyinbathroom, suckingandfucking, lolofry.com, bigboobs.com, doodhwali.com, worldsex.com, desibaba.com etc. Other sites included espn.com, raga.com, indianlyrix.com, desitop.com, etc. Some of the respondents did not mention any of the websites and were of the view that there was no need to learn the names of the websites. Whatever information they needed, they typed it, and computer opened thousands of websites related with the topic. What was important according to them was ‘the search engines’ that they used for finding the information like yahoo, msn, altavista, google. ‘If one is to chat, he/she would prefer to open the search engine yahoo, if one is to look for some educational site then google is preferred’ remarked one respondent. Interestingly, male respondents named the pornographic sites which they watched but for other purposes they mentioned the search engines as most of the times they surfed the internet without any specific purpose in mind. Thus, it is inferred that the respondents had gained information mainly about e-mail, chatting, sex, music/ movies, etc. and used computers for entertainment rather than for academic purposes.

Having examined the purposes for which the respondents used computers, another area which needed attention was the health and outdoor activities of respondents. It was noticed in Table 5.5 that 42.5 per cent respondents (44 per cent boys and 40 per cent) perceived that using computer could terribly hit the outdoor activities whereas 57.5 per cent respondents (56 per cent boys and 60 per cent girls) did not feel so. Some of the respondents were of the view that it was a matter of ‘getting used to’ the computer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outdoor Activities</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adversely Affected</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Affected</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.6, further reveals the percentage of the respondents who felt that their activities had been hit. 25 per cent of the respondents (including 28 per cent boys and 21 per cent girls), admitted that prolonged use of computers had adversely affected their outdoor activities. 75 per cent of the respondents (including 72 per cent of boys and 79 per cent girls), did not find any change in their activities. Respondents said, ‘going for walk’, ‘tea group’, ‘playing and interaction with family’ had reduced. One respondent remarked, ‘if one was interested in playing, he could not play, as others were busy with computers’; ‘time of sleeping and studying had reduced’, ‘cricket and basket ball has been affected’, ‘going to temple in the evening was reduced’, ‘exercise’, ‘family excursions’ etc. were the other activities which the respondents felt had been curtailed.

Table 5.6
Distribution Of Respondents According To the Activities Hit by the Use Of Computer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents’ Activities</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, suffered</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not, suffered</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One female respondent remarked ‘boys do play outside but one hardly finds any girl playing in the grounds. So, computer is a good source of entertainment’. The data highlight that respondents were not much interested in the outdoor activities and games. The kinds of games they played included pool, billiards, table tennis, computer games etc. as revealed by our previous discussion.

Undoubtedly, computers are being used both for academics and entertainment purposes, but our adolescent respondents used it more for entertainment purposes and less for the educational.
It was noticed that many adolescents kept sitting on computer with great concentration until near exhaustion. They were hardly aware that such a prolonged activity without a break could cause many problems. Thus, with the inevitable presence of computers around us, and more time spent with it, various studies have shown that excessive use of computer has a derogatory effect on health. An attempt was therefore made to know whether respondents were aware that an excessive use of computers could lead to health problems.

Table 5.7 shows that out of the total respondents, 59.5 per cent felt that an excessive use of computer could lead to health problems whereas for 40.5 respondents, computers and health had no relation. On the other hand there were some respondents who said that they had an extra attachment over the screen which protected their eyes from the dangerous rays. “Initially one faces headache and pain in the eyes but when it becomes a habit there is no problem,” remarked a respondent. Some of the cyber users who were doing professional courses and used computers for the whole day mentioned that it had no effect on their health.

Table 5.7
Perceptions of the Respondents According To Whether The Excessive Use Of Computer Can Lead To Health Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having observed the respondents’ perceptions that the excessive use of computers could lead to health problems, respondents were further asked about the kinds of health problems they suffered due to the use of computers. In view of this aspect, Table 5.8 indicates that out of the total sample, 37.5 per cent were found to be suffering from one or the other health problem because of using computers. 22 per cent respondents mentioned pain in their arm, back, neck, head and eyes due to the use of computers whereas 13 per cent reported their
poor eye sight. Quite a few respondents mentioned that prolonged use of computer had resulted in irritation in the eyes and mental exhaustion.

Table 5.8
Kinds of Health Problems Respondents Suffered Due to the Use of Computers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of Problem</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor eye sight</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritation of eyes</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back/ neck/ head/ eyes pain/ arm fatigue</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental exhaustion</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No problem</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To conclude the ongoing discussion on the use of computers and its relation with respondents’ health and academics, it has become obvious that an excessive use of computers had curtailed the outdoor activities and had exercised serious effects on the health of the children. There were respondents who admitted that their outdoor activities and health had suffered due to the use of computers. This shows computers and the health of the adolescents were directly related. Some of the respondents used to miss their studies for the sake of using computers and in certain cases their academic performance has deteriorated after the use of computers, though they did not blame computers for their bad academic performance.

Thus, in reference to the present study it can be said that internet does have an educational value, and technology can save many educational problems especially for parents who feel helpless in making the projects for their children. It is seen that parents always want the best for their children. This has always included literacy and an appreciation for the finer things in life. If we want our child to excel in the school and in the job market in future, we have to encourage them to use computers and explore the internet. Perhaps for these benefits our
respondents’ parents provided and encouraged them to learn to operate computers. Do we really know how useful are computers for children? Let us understand this dimension of computers from the different perspectives, i.e. adolescents’, their parents, teachers’ and cyber owners’.

How Useful are Computers: Adolescents, their Parents, Teachers’ and Cyber Owners’ Perceptions.

An effort was then made to seek the perspectives of adolescents’ their parents, teachers’ and cyber owners on whether computer was a necessity or a trouble.

In the world of stunning technological change, no one can be sure what the future holds. In cyberspace, much as Baudrillard (1983) might say, we are no longer ‘people’, but messages on one another’s screens. Apart from e-mail, where users identify themselves, no one on the internet can be sure of who anyone else really is, whether they are males or females, or where they are located in the world. There is a famous cartoon about the internet, which has a dog sitting in front of computer. The caption reads: ‘the great thing about the internet is that no one knows that you are a dog.’ Such is the function of a computer that it has made human beings and animals as synonymous. On computer screens we are linked with each other through text messages. One really wonders, whether this machine is a necessity or a trouble.

Let us first discuss this point from respondents’ stand. 57.5 per cent (Table 5.9) respondents perceived computer as a necessity whereas 31.5 per cent of the respondents responded that computer was both a necessity and a trouble.

Only a few, i.e. 11 per cent respondents opined that computer was mainly a trouble. Interestingly, 61 per cent girl respondents found computers a necessity since according to them computer was a ‘pool of knowledge’, ‘good time pass’, ‘provides valuable information’, ‘great use in every field of life’, ‘helps in making new friends’, ‘it should be made compulsory in schools because today is the
world of scientific art’, etc. On the other hand, 55 per cent male respondents perceived computers as a necessity because it ‘symbolized development in the

Table 5.9
Computers a Necessity, a Trouble or Both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Necessity</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

technology’, ‘provides sex education’, ‘one can be a part of the world’, ‘life is like a boneless chicken without computer’, ‘to keep up with the modernization’, ‘helps in forming new relations’, ‘helps in bad times when no one is with you’, ‘a source of world wide interaction’, etc. The 31.5 per cent respondents who perceived it as a trouble commented that it was so because of its ‘effects on health’, ‘hits outdoor activities’, ‘pornographic content spoils the brain’, ‘chatting is all fraud and bluff’ etc.

Thus, adolescents perceived computers as both a necessity as well as a trouble.

We often compare and relate computers with television as both are the sources of entertainment. But computer is often defined against, and pitched as an improvement on the television set. While television programmes are entertaining in a stale, commercialized and violent way, computer software and the internet are perceived as educational, virtuous and new (Seiter 2003). The prevalence of television material on the web confirms the importance of computers in our everyday life. Television fans are a formidable presence on the internet especially in chat rooms, while chatting fans discuss their favourite programmes or television stars. According to the newspaper reportings, Aishwarya Rai is one of the most searched celebrities on the web across the
globe. Thus, the web is a jamboree of television material. Children use computer and watch television, the increased competition between the two has not affected either of the two. Just as television has entered into the lives of children, similarly computer has successfully made its niche too.

Respondents were asked to give their preference for computer and television and the data in Table 5.10 highlight that 49.5 per cent of the respondents preferred computer whereas 30.5 per cent of the respondents preferred both computer and television. 20 per cent of the respondents preferred television. More female respondents preferred computer than television as compared to male respondents. These findings correspond with the study conducted in 1995, *(the Georgia Tech World Wide Web Users Survey)* which reported that there has been a substantial increase in female web users between the ages of 16 and 20. Respondents preferred computer because of a variety of reasons like it ‘increases knowledge’, ‘contact with other people’, ‘information’, ‘games’, ‘chatting’, ‘helps in studying’, ‘upgrade version of television’, ‘two way flow of information’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘useful’, ‘runs according to one’s choice’, ‘waits for your command’, etc. One male respondent mentioned that he preferred computer as he has photographs of his girl friend on his PC.

The relatively high penetration rates of home computers often gives the false impression that everyone has a computer. While this may be true in more affluent societies, personal computer is still a luxury in a country like India, where
only a fraction of urban upper middle class can afford to have personal computers at home. The majority of homes may not have a PC, but only a television. Thus from the data it is inferred that with the emergence and vast usage of internet, television in any case is not losing its importance and audience. Earlier television was the main resort for passing time and entertainment but now with the coming in of internet and mushrooming of cyber cafes, people have started giving time to both the media.

We know that television plays a crucial role as a publicizer of the web and computer use. Television programmes are filled with references to computers and thus play a major role in educating the public about new media. Computer usage is often compared with that of television, but the similarities are superficial. Indeed, both media entail a visual screen and sound, but whereas television is essentially passive—viewers watch what is offered to them—"computer communication is interactive, presenting an exchange of information and array of social relationships" (Goodson et al. 2000:253).

Respondents stated various similarities between computer and television which included 'listen music on both', 'both have screen', 'both affect eyes', 'idiot box', 'provide entertainment', 'time pass', 'knowledge', 'addictive', 'informative', 'couch potato', 'connect with the whole world', 'wastage of time on both', 'both are electronic', 'both are knowledgeable', 'sources of leisure', 'educational resources', etc.

While commenting on the differences, respondents mentioned 'chatting on television is not possible', 'computer helps in studies', 'can't watch daily soap operas on the computer', 'can't send messages on television', 'television is good but computer is best', 'up gradation of knowledge through computer', 'can do many things on computer at a time', 'Computer gives wider choice and more options', 'knowledge of sex is available on the net', etc.

One of the respondents, while narrating the difference between computer and TV remarked, "whatever we watch on television, parents know about it but whatever we do on computers in the presence of parents they have no idea about it" The very fact that computer use is an individual activity thus has
successfully pulled adolescents out of the watchful eyes of parents; and that is why they find it not only necessary but indispensable in life.

Another difference between computer and television is that TV is taken as a factor to keep one at home, whereas computer has successfully brought the users out of the house and the cyber cafes. Cyber cafes have really been successful in pulling even those who already possessed computers at home. Secondly, staying at home does not mean close and intimate relationships with the family and peer group. It has been observed in the previous chapter that computer has affected the relations of an adolescent with his/her family and peer group irrespective of whether they used computer at home or outside. Many researches in the field of television have discussed the negative impact of TV on our social life e.g. watching TV has reduced social participation as it keeps people at home. The entry of the computer sets into home, on the other hand, has enhanced social participation in the form of online relationships. It has enhanced the online relationships but what about the offline social relations?

To know the effects of computers on the social relations researcher asked the respondents as to how they would react if they were working on computers and some guests arrived at their place. Table 5.11 reveals that 40.5 per cent of the respondents’ response would depend upon who the guest was.

Table 5.11
While Sitting On Computer, How Would the Respondents Respond To Guests?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep on working</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch off the computer</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends who was the guest</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the guest to the computer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
respondent remarked that if the guest was his girl friend he would immediately leave the computer and attend the guest. Another respondent said that if the guests were older than him, parents would attend them and if the guests were of his age then he would take the guests to the computer. So, the maximum respondents said that leaving the computer and attending the guests would depend upon who the guest was. 25.5 per cent of the respondents said that they would take the guest to the computer. One respondent remarked that taking the guest to the computer would help in enhancing the respondents' impression upon the guests. One respondent said that taking the guest to the computer would give her an opportunity to show her PC. 16.5 per cent of respondents said that they would switch off the computer and attend the guests. 30 per cent of the male respondents said that they would keep on working whereas only 2 girls supported this view. A few respondents mentioned that they would meet the guests and come back to the computer again.

Thus, leaving the computer and attending the guests was not a very favourable proposition with our respondents. Instead, they welcomed the guests who would sit with them on the computer. Therefore, an unconditional hospitality has almost become a thing of the past.

Looking at the tremendous dependence of adolescents on the internet, it is hard to imagine a day without it. I asked the respondents as to how they would react if internet went out of their reach for one day. Table 5.12 shows that only 9 per cent respondents felt that the day without internet would be normal for them. 27.5 per cent respondents would probably shift to T.V. whereas 20.5 per cent respondents would turn to computer games, music and films. Another 20.5 per cent respondents imagined that they would do some other work like study, sleep, painting, etc. 16 per cent respondents preferred to be with their friends when the internet would not be available. One respondent remarked, "for one day, it doesn't matter but if more than a day, I would not be able to keep in touch with my net friends". Another respondent remarked, "I would go crazy."
Table 5.12
If One Day Internet Is Out Of Order How Would the Respondents React

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal day</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with friends and gossip</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch over to T.V.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study/novels/newspaper/magazines, sleep, painting, etc.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD games/ listen to music, etc.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say sorry to chatting friends</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can not imagine a day without computer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the responses of the respondents it was observed that very few number of respondents would study and more respondents would opt for TV. Thus, this also shows that for our respondents TV was the alternative choice for computers. One female respondent responded that she would anxiously wait for the next day. It is significant to note that only a few respondents opined that the day without internet would be normal for them.

TV and computer both are not without effects. The major reason proposed for the decline in social participation ever since the advent of television is time displacement, that is the time people spend watching TV is the time they are not actively socially engaged. Various studies on television have time and again mentioned that excessive watching of television keeps children at home and leads to reduced physical activity. This further results in diminished physical health and psychological well being. Even computers have affected young adolescents psychologically as well as physically. Using the internet also involves physical inactivity and limited face to face social interaction, though it
involves social interaction and active interpersonal communication, induced by the internet.

Besides respondents and cyber users, researcher also interviewed a few parents, cyber owners and teachers. This helped the researcher in looking at the problem from different perspectives. Let us have a look how the respondents’ parents, teachers and cyber owners perceived computers?

**Perceptions of Respondents’ Parents**

It was observed in chapter IV that respondents did not tell their parents that they were accessing computers at multiple places. This was mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, parents raised different kinds of objections against using computers and secondly, respondents felt that there was no need to tell their parents that they were using computers at multiple places. It was also noticed that many of the respondents’ parents could not work on computers which made it easier for respondents to secretly operate the computer the way they liked to.

One of the parents (mother) remarked, ‘computer is 80 per cent bad and 20 per cent good’. She told the researcher that she could not use computers but was aware of the purposes for which the children used computers. She also felt that if parents imposed too many restrictions on the use of computers, children had mobile phones to compensate for that.

Another parent (father) remarked, ‘computers are very necessary for gaining knowledge, especially for children, as they make the learning easy.’

One of the mothers expressed that ever since they had bought a computer, her children had started spending more time at home. She said that earlier her children used to loiter around with the friends while she kept worried about their company but computers had solved her problem of being watchful all the time.

Parents in general disclosed that their children did not listen to them while they were working on computers. One of the mothers remarked that during summer holidays his son used to play games on computer for nearly 6 to 7 hours a day, which had a serious effect on his eyes. Some of the parents admitted that
they had seen their children using computer till late nights and now it had almost become a part of the lives of children. Most of these observations were made by parents who had bought computers for their wards at home.

A few of the parents expressed their worries about the effects of computers on the health of children. They were of the view that computer was adversely affecting the eye sight and the posture of the children.

One of the mothers said, 'my son daily takes money from me to visit cyber café'. She said that she possessed computers at home but did not have internet connection; her husband did not permit for the internet connection, as it would inflate the bill. Therefore, his son visited cyber café to access the internet.

One of the fathers remarked that his friend’s son took admission in one of the foreign universities in the MBA course with the help of computers and internet. He had bought a computer to his son so that he could also try his luck abroad.

A few of the respondents' parents gave different reasons to insist that it was both a necessity and a trouble as ‘the children fight with each other’, ‘listen to music’, ‘play games’, ‘do not study’, ‘sit for long hours’, ‘affects eyes’, ‘studies are not possible without internet’, etc.

After going through the parents' version it seems for them computers was more a blessing than a curse. More of our respondents’ parents were not computer literate but they were aware of the benefits of this machine. Interestingly, very few of the parents expressed concern over the purposes for which children used computers. This again pointed out the fact that parents had absolutely no knowledge that their children had expanded a social circle on the cyberspace or watched pornographic sites etc... For most of the parents computers was a necessary tool in providing information, which their children must learn to use.

**Cyber Owners’ Perceptions**

Cyber cafes provided an important dimension to the present study, as out of the total sample there were 84.5 per cent respondents who used to visit cyber
cafés. It was noticed that possessing a computer and an access to internet at home was not restricting the respondents' visits to cyber café. Secondly, the respondents who had internet at home were visiting cyber café daily while those who were not possessing computer were visiting cyber café on alternate days.

Respondents gave various reasons for using computers at cyber cafés like 'no internet connection on computer at home', 'inflated telephone bill', 'nice change', 'air conditioned ambience', 'privacy', 'big computer screen', 'furniture', 'cafeteria' etc.

Our discussion of Chapter III revealed that respondents were choosy about the cyber cafes. They were not only using the cyber cafes located near their houses or near their schools but also those located in different markets and interestingly they were using more than one cyber café depending upon their choice. It also came to the fore that it was not actually the internet services that attracted the young adolescents but the kind of people sitting around, the luxuries at hand, and so on, that made a place worth visiting.

Cyber owners disclosed that people of all the age groups visited their cyber cafés but adolescents were their main customers and used internet and computers mainly for entertainment purposes. According to one of the cyber owner, 'some parents leave their young children in the cyber cafe for playing games on computers and pick them after a given time'. There were some regular visitors of the cyber café who used to visit daily and spent 6-7 hours daily.

In case any cyber user needed help for operating computers and internet, cyber owners helped them. They also mentioned that both boys and girls visited cyber cafés in equal proportion. One of the cyber owners said that in his cyber café the number of girls users is more than the boys and the reason he mentioned for the same was that his mother was an incharge of the cyber café. Girls felt safe and at ease around an elderly woman.

Cyber owners felt that with the sudden surge in the number of cyber cafes, their profits had come down. Earlier they used to charge Rs 100 – Rs 60 per hour but now they were charging Rs 15 per hour. Their business had greatly affected due to the competition in the market.
Cyber owners mentioned that they had changed the whole interiors of the cyber café according to the demands of the users, by providing air conditioning, separate cabins, tinted glasses and even a bolt inside the door. It was observed that cyber cafes were purely governed by the commercial rules. It did not matter to them who their clients were, whether young or old. Researcher discovered that cyber cafes had displayed a notice/ list of rules containing "accessing of obscene/illegal sites is not allowed". However, this was just a formality to be shown to the police and public, as one of the cyber managers revealed that children watched all kinds of stuff. Cyber owners were seen offering various schemes to its customers so that their clients remained glued to them. In order to make more profits they did not allow more than one user on one computer.

Thus, cyber owners were found to be interested in making profits and hardly bothered about the possible harmful effects of computers and internet on the adolescents.

**Teachers’ Perceptions**

Teachers constituted another important sub sample of the study. Teachers considered computers as an, ‘information tool’, ‘a technology which is necessary to use in today’s life’, ‘One is not literate without possessing computer skills’, etc. Interestingly, computer teachers did not support the view that computers had any harmful effects on the health and academics of the students whereas other teachers mentioned that prolonged use of computers had affected the eye sight of the children. One of the teachers remarked, ‘it all depends how the child uses computers, if he/she is watching adult site, wasting time on games and chatting, it is bad but if he is gaining knowledge, it is good’. ‘Computers have made things easier for the children, they have stopped going to libraries. It is sad to note that children these days just cut, copy and paste the information from the web pages and make their projects’, remarked one of the University teachers.

Thus, cyber space means different things to different set of people. For cyber owners it was only a necessity, whereas teachers and parents perceived it as a both necessity and a trouble. The perceptions of cyber
owners varied from that of teachers and parents because their targets were different. Cyber owners were thinking only in terms of business and profits whereas teachers and parents were concerned about the children. Both teachers and parents wanted to make children computer literate but at the same time they were aware of the possible harm, this machine can do on the children.

It is pertinent to note here that both parents and teachers were mainly aware of the ‘ideal’ use of computer for children. During interviews, I could make out that they were not at all conscious of how these young children were visiting the pornographic sites most of the times. The vocabulary these adolescents used and websites they mentioned to me, were absolutely unknown to both teachers and parents. Given this situation, a soft attitude from their side towards computer use by their children is understandable.

**Internet: A Source Of New Relationships**

The above discussion presents computer as a machine that is likely to physically isolate the user, from his/her family, peer group and so on, making him fonder of the privacy he/she enjoys on the computer. Should that lead us to conclude that computers are therefore a death knell for social relationships? Let us not jump to conclusions. Instead, our findings highlight the mechanisms through which computers are pushing the users into novel relationships.

Much of the time spent online by our respondents involved a social activity though of an indirect kind. Online chatting and love at first chat had boosted the cyber relationships especially among adolescents. The abundance of available partners online and the exclusivity of cyberlove, the role of intimacy, emotional intensity, and commitment in online relationships have given birth to a new concept called ‘cyber love’ which has given a great challenge to conventional love. The search for Mr. and Ms. Right has taken a new twist in the internet era. Online computer dating services and personal advertisements posted to web sites have considerably greater reach than their counterparts in the local
newspapers. Interestingly, two people discover something special between them and start backchanneling-communicating by e-mail. Overtime, the relationship might escalate to phone calls, exchange of information and photographs, and eventually to real visits. In order to examine how many of our respondents were aware of such cyber relationships, we asked relevant questions.

Table 5.13
Distribution of Respondents According to their Awareness Of Cyber Marriages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Aware</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the respondents narrated how his uncle had married through chatting on the internet. 68.5 per cent (Table 5.13) of our respondents were aware of such marriages whereas 31.5 per cent of respondents did not have any idea about such a concept. Respondents had come to know about these marriages through friends and newspapers. More male respondents were aware of the concept of cyber marriages as compared to female respondents. Further, we asked them whether they approved of such relationships, especially the cyber marriages. Diverse responses were obtained. Interestingly, only 25 per cent (Table 5.14) of the respondents approved of such marriages whereas 43.5 per cent of respondents did not approve of such marriages through chatting. 31.5 percent of respondents did not give any specific answer as to whether they approved or disapproved of such cyber marriages.

Respondents who approved such marriages were of the view ‘Jab Miyan Biwi Razi to Kya Karega Kazi’ or ‘it is their life’ whereas those who disapproved said that ‘how could you marry a person you have met merely through chatting’ ‘Love is O.K., making friends is alright but not marriage’. One respondent remarked ‘it was a good and an easy way to exchange pictures and know about each other’ ‘mostly people lie on internet’, remarked another. ‘Chatting friend is OK but love relationship is foolishness and wastage of time, ‘family would not
Table 5.14
Distribution Of Respondents According to whether they Approve/Disapprove, Cyber Marriages ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

approve of this ‘parents know best, they would choose the most beautiful and simple girl for me’ was yet another response.

Apart from the chatting culminating into marital ties, computer has also been used as a match maker. There are web sites which offer a range of matrimonial options to the interested parties. Sometimes, chatting emerges through matrimonial advertisements. Internet has become a big and popular source of matrimonial advertisements. Websites like Bharat matrimony.com and Shaadi.com cover a wide range of proposals according to religion, language, caste, profession, etc. Besides, particulars related with socio economic status, photograph of the proposed match is also made available. Researcher analysed some of the weekly matrimonial advertisements published in the newspapers and then compared them with the matrimonial sites of the internet. It was observed that in some of the weekly newspaper matrimonial proposals it was mentioned ‘send your bio data to ---- e-mail’ whereas in the internet matrimonial proposals, one could register oneself free and was allotted an Identity number. These matrimonial proposals contained complete details of the concerned, his/her family, partner preferences, telephone numbers, picture, etc. Besides personal and family details, there was a provision to chat online with the person whose details matched with your choice. This shows that the newspaper advertisements are dependent on Internet and it has offered a vast range of choices local and globally which were not possible earlier. These advertisements on the one hand show one’s awareness and familiarity with the new technology and on the other
help in enhancing one’s social status in the society. The respondents reported that they visited matrimonial sites because the network of networks is so powerful that one could receive e-mails from the sites which one had never visited. In computer terminology these are called spams. So, it was out of curiosity that respondents opened these spams.

Not only cyber marriages are taking place but marriages are also taking place in the vicinity of the cybercafes. Imagine sitting in a cyber café in your bridal dress and saying ‘qabool hai’ to the monitor. This is what exactly happened at a cyber café in old Lucknow. This was famous online nikah which was carried out by a man in Saudi Arabia and a woman in Lucknow. The bride’s family had organized the ceremony at a cyber café (Spectrum 2005:3). They were not allowed to have a virtual look at each other. It was only after they were pronounced husband and wife that they were permitted to furtively steal a fleeting peep of each other. Therefore, in the contemporary times where everything is getting mechanized, marriage has also landed into the clutches of this new and overpowering technology. Unlike never before, the new and powerful technology made it possible that the physical presence of the bride and groom is not required at the time of their marriage ceremony. This is how technology is modernizing our old traditions and also performing a vital role in the making of human relations, to which sociologists call as “modernization of tradition”.

The success of any online relationship depends upon written language which is the internet’s basic requirement, similarly in cyberlove, text skills are more important than physical attractiveness. ‘While chatting if chatters do not use short forms and the regular chatters did not get response for 15 minutes, this shows that the other person was chatting for the first time’, remarked one of the respondents.

Respondents mentioned various acronyms like lol (laughing out loud) and rofl (rolling on the floor laughing), brb (be right back), asas (as soon as possible), and anything that can be abbreviated are used while chatting. This also includes common words like pls(please), cya (see you), ur (you are), and thx(thanks), as well as nicknames. Emoticons( emotional icons) and other linguistic forms that
convey emotions like smiley, sadness, excitement etc. are also widely used in chat rooms. With the help of emoticons, gestures are conveyed to the other person whom one is online. Thus, internet has become a big source of developing new relationships.

**Computers And Crime**

Although the advent of the computers has been a boon to students, lawyers, businessmen, doctors, teachers, yet it is also being transformed into a haven for criminals.

There have been various kinds of computer and internet related crimes. The most common amongst these is the use of viruses to corrupt and/or destroy data stored in computer systems. Technology serves to facilitate commercial activity but hackers and pornographers have always misused this facility. Huge amounts of pornographic material can be reproduced more quickly and cheaply on new media like hard disks, floppy disks and CD-Roms. Apart from still pictures and images, full motion video clips with sound and complete movies are also available. In fact, the latest trend seems to be towards interactive ‘live sex’ where people perform and according to requests by subscribers to the services. The end user can view all this on his or her monitor, save and transmit it or printout hard copies of images and texts. One of the respondents disclosed that usually people downloaded pornographic movies and pictures on their systems and then circulated these among friends.

A growing concern over the increasing cyberporn and the involvement of children is also due to the reported cases in the newspapers. In one of the cases, a student of IIT Kharagpur posted the sexually explicit two minute clip involving two students of Delhi Public School, New Delhi, for sale, on the website of portal bazee.com. Besides the net, this video clip showing an erotic encounter between two students had found its way through the mobile sets to the Chandigarh city as well. And shockingly, this was being used by some mobile dealers as a ‘gift’ to attract customers (The Chandigarh Tribune, February 11, 2005:1). According to the newspaper reportings traders earlier used to sell these VCDs to only regular
WITH COMPUTERS CAN CYBER CRIME BE FAR BEHIND?

Two Sec 22 shopkeepers held with porn CDs

Continued From page 1 said it was still

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customers, but now one just had to say ‘triple x’ and the movie would be right in front of him. According to one respondent adolescents watched pornographic content as it was an easy way to access sensuous visuals.

Besides pornography, there is a wide range of criminal activities present on the net. We asked our respondents whether they were aware of such cyber crimes.

Table 5.15
Distribution of Respondents According to their Awareness Of Cyber Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.15 shows the awareness of respondents about the cyber crime and the data indicate that more male respondents, i.e. 60 percent than female respondents (36 per cent) were aware of this technical crime. The kinds of crime the respondents were aware of included misuse of password, hacking of sites, virus, sexual abuse, pornographic content, sending wrong mails, illegal sites, destroying program, locking of site etc. The data show wide gender differences in the awareness of cyber crime.

The presence and kinds of crime in the cyberspace hint that the internet is not a safe place to visit and the young children should not be permitted to wander around. As a parent one would not leave the children unattended in the raw and seamy cyberspace but Interestingly, a few respondents expected that they ‘want total freedom and total privacy while accessing internet’, ‘privacy about sex education so that we can open sites of our kinds’, ‘we should be given freedom to see sex sites then we will be aware of doing sex, it is a necessity’, ‘no time limit should be there’, ‘parents are not supposed to ask anything from the children’, etc. Whereas a few respondents suggested that an access to obscene material
should be blocked, ‘internet should be used under parental guidance’, ‘fixed timings should be there’, etc.

Cyber crimes like pornography has really warned everyone to take care of the children. Christian Crumlish (1999:41) suggested that “the best way to stop the children from all the crimes is to explore the internet together with your children”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (in years)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is still a dilemma as to what is the right age for a child to be exposed to computers. 25 per cent respondents preferred 14-16 years is an ideal age, the children are mature, the boys start thinking about girls, said some of the respondents. ‘They are energetic and grab lot of information’ remarked other male respondents whereas 22 per cent of the respondents favoured 11-13 years. 20.5 percent of them said that below 10 was the right age to expose the children to the computer and 13.5 per cent respondents said no age limit should be there, ‘a child should be exposed to computer from the day he started going to school’, remarked one of the cyber users. This shows that for adolescent respondents, age of a child should not be considered as a barrier for the use of computers. The kinds of reasons stated by the respondents on the use of computers indicated that they wanted computers more for entertainment and for watching pornographic content rather than for educational purposes.
Computers and Sex

Looking at the great interest of the respondents in the pornography, Cyber sex became another area of considerable interest to explore. The reason for such an intense interest of adolescent respondents was because of their tender age. As Rheingold (1993) comments the single largest category of mud’ers (multiple user domain) are college students, aged seventeen to twenty three, and the particular uses they find for this technology is “identity play and sexual innvendo” which reflect the interests of this age group. One cyber user remarked ‘watching sex sites was a pleasurable and a beautiful experience.’

Watching of the pornographic content by the users highlights other kind of issues like a pioneering study by Howard et al., (1971) on the consequences of repeated, extensive consumption of pornography led to the conclusion that if consumption of such material were unrestricted, people would soon get bored with sexual depiction and presumably resort to alternative forms of entertainment. A study conducted by Zillman & Bryant (1986) supports the view that continued exposure to generally available, nonviolent pornography that exclusively featured heterosexual behavior among consenting adults aroused an interest in and created a taste for pornography that portrayed less commonly practiced sexual activities, including those involving the infliction of pain.

As we know pornography has become a booming business on the net and youngsters are the main audience of this content. Easy availability of porn CDs in the video parlours and ignorance of parents about the children’s access to porn sites at home have become a matter of great worry.

According to the cyber owners, ‘children entered these sites out of curiosity. most of the times friends were responsible for informing them about these sites and sometimes in the cyber cafes the earlier user leaves the site opened’. Maximum respondents said that they had not watched pornographic sites but their friends had, and some respondents described their first experience of watching these sites as, ‘while seeing the pornographic site for the first time, I got afraid, started looking here and there whether any one was looking at me, I tried to shut down the site, now it is normal’.
One of the respondents said that the information related to sex in a written form as well as in a pictorial form was available on the net and almost all the youngsters mainly went to cyber cafés for watching these sites as a complete privacy was available there. One of the cyber owners reported that it was not bad to see a sex related site, because this was a kind of education which must be provided to the young people. He said that in our society neither the schools nor the parents were playing any role in imparting sex education. So, cyber space was a safe space that enhanced one's knowledge about sex. ‘for sex education, equation is simple i.e. old Indian culture + zero sex education = huge population’, remarked one respondent.

One really wonders how one receives sex education in the closed cabins. Some of the cyber cafes have downloaded XXX rated films – and at the extreme, blue movies on their computer, which the youngsters see in the café as it gives a great business. According to the cyber owner, cyber cafes which allowed watching these movies and sites to the customers were making huge profits.

According to Green (2001), Cyber sex itself was experienced by some cyber sex-initiates as ‘liberating’. One reason why cyber sex might be particularly liberating for some participants is that it allows for the mutual exploration of ‘Kinky’ fantasies with minimal risk of physical harm compared with an equivalent experience in RL (especially with a stranger). Cyber sex offers an increasingly multi-sensory experience. Leaving aside the (rare and expensive) ‘pleasure suit’, web cam can communicate images of cyber sexual exhibitionist disposition.

Besides pornographic movies and literature, virtual porn is available in the form of computer games. It is the new dimension of XXX “the market for XXX computer games is flourishing in a hush-hush manner. Selling such CDs is lucrative as they go for upto five times the price of normal XXX rated movies,” revealed a trader at Palika Bazaar, Delhi (Yumnam 2005). Most of these games have storylines ranging from adventure to explicit porn. The protagonist is often female who fights villains in between sexual escapades.

Another current trend is ‘cartoon porn’ popularly known as ‘toon porn’ available in the compact discs, starring cartoon characters, which are attracting
the buyers as young as 10-12 years as reported by one of the news channels on television (Star News, April 28th 2005, in Sansani). In Delhi 1200 CDs were seized by the police. Delhi police officers were surprised to learn that the content of these seized CDs was revealed as sex starring cartoon characters. They said they had never come across such stuff termed as toon porn. One of the local newspapers of Chandigarh reported a news of toon porn which mentioned that toon porn CDs are more expensive than the regular stuff. It reported the interview of one of the owners of video parlour who said that despite the cops being on the lookout for the hardcore and reality porn movies CDs, they still manage to sell toon porn CDs because the demand was high. These toon pornographic CDs portray homosexuality, tentacle rape, bestiality and incest in graphic detail and are being sold with titillating titles like ‘cream lemon’, ‘my fair masseuse’ and ‘coded affairs’ (Times of Chandigarh, May 8, 2005:3).

Incidentally, shops sell these porn games and porn cartoons as if they are innocuous PC games for children. “Parents buy these CDs ignorant of the content,” revealed one of the traders of CDs (Yumnam 2005). Police raid the shops which sell porn CDs and DVDs but they do not target computer games. This clearly reveals that cyber cafes and video parlours are governed by the various market strategies; they do not see whether their client is an adult or child. For them their sole aim is to sell their products and make profits.

The classic anthropological study of this fear of boundaries is by Mary Douglas’s, Purity and Danger (1978). Douglas demonstrated that a number of cultures share taboos connected with the body and with matter entering or leaving societies (don’t eat in the street), along with-for example-a prohibition upon having sex, or defecating in public. Even the public breastfeeding of a baby can cause discomfort to some onlookers. Douglas shows that inappropriate public exposure at moments when the boundary of the body is breached often results in an existential panic in the viewer and the viewed. Thus, cyberspace is considered as the safe space where no one is watching you, one could watch any private moment just sitting in front of a small screen.
Gender Bending on Internet

Today’s cyber culture has provided teenagers loads of opportunities to experiment with gender relations which has far reaching results.

In chat rooms, a participant can expect two questions very early in the conversation: “how old are you? And “are you male or female”? On the internet, gender is more easily deciphered than age simply because so many people sign their messages, or use nicknames that suggest male or female. But many a times people do not reveal their true identity of gender.

Look at the following chat, which was narrated to the researcher by a cyberuser. Chat involved girl cyberuser i.e. narrator and an anonymous cyber chatter. Narrator disclosed that an anonymous cyberuser was a boy and when they started chatting he did not reveal his true gender identity. It was only during chatting that an anonymous cyber user mistakenly revealed that he was not a girl but a boy.

Girl:  
(age sex location please)  
Boy: 17 f chd, urs?  
(17 female chandigarh, yours)  
Girl:  me elder to u, but I hav younger frndz u can b 1  
(me elder to you, but i have younger friends, you can be one)  
........chat continues  
Boy said that he cannot wear as he would not look good

Cyber user disclosed that this is how people tell lies about their gender identities online.

Online chatting provides an initiative to develop love relationships. One respondent had a piece of advice for all the cyber users ‘if a person chats or starts chatting, he should be regular in it because that will make the friendship
more strong'. On asking about the number of chatting friends he had, the respondent remarked 'a lot, a lot, a lot' of chatting friends, local also and abroad also.

What kind of relationships are being formed through net? As there is no verification of their online persona, communicators are free to be anonymous. Even limited to text, communicators project a personality by using stereotypical qualities of personality, gender or ethnicity. A crucial one is the degree of anonymity, and this can vary dramatically, depending on where you are on the net and what you are doing. If you are replying to email from friends and colleagues or using the net for work related purposes, you would not be anonymous and you would no doubt sign your name. However, if you enter other kinds of entertainment oriented muds (multiple user domain) or one of the many internet based support groups, you might use a nick name instead and conceal your true identity. Research suggests that the degree of anonymity affects our behaviour in important ways and leads to disinhibition- a lowering of the normal social constraints on behavior. How do we conceptualize such relationships?

Some respondents termed the relations through chatting as all fraud. We make relations with unseen others, can we trust the truthfulness of those we never meet? Cyberspace has reinvigorated the position of Descartes, that the only thing of which one can be certain is private subjective experience. This leads to debates of what is real. Sissela bok (1989) argues that the relevant question is whether there is a preference for truth, as one understands it. Paula Tompkins (2003:35) said "I am not claiming that CMC (computer mediated communication) is inherently deceptive because of its technological form. Rather, my claim is that truthfulness & trustworthiness is possible but more difficult when all communication is computer mediated".

Web cam is another attachment with the computer by which one can see the photograph of the other person with whom the former is on-line. One cyber user narrated that she used web cam while chatting to her sister who was in Australia. With the help of web cam her sister in Australia had shown her house, her room, kitchen etc., and the day when the researcher interviewed the cyber
user, the sister of the cyber user showed her a new pair of sandals and tubs of ice cream through web cam. Another respondent remarked, “Chatting to Punjabis abroad, helps in knowing about their life in other countries”, “my chatting friend is my female cousin, who lives in Canada, we tell our feelings to each other”.

Of course, on the basis of above observations, one must not generalize that the technological advancement related to cyber world has gifted us social relationships. It has in fact brought in unthought-of incidents in its wake. While interviewing the cyber users, the researcher discovered a very shocking incident. One of the cyber users narrated an incident which involved him, his girl friend and their common friend. Three of them were having regular chatting sessions with each other. In one of the chatting sessions the friend of the narrator misused his (narrator's) e-mail ID and password to chat with his (narrator's) girl friend. During this chatting session he (common friend) misused the liberty and through webcam showed his private parts to the girl friend of the narrator. This led to the breakdown of their relationship. Thus, what is shocking is the vulnerability of cyber relationships since there is no sanctity, purity and element of trust which can make these relationships stand the test of real life situations. Thus, such cyber relations unlike the real life situations, tend to be illusory, fictitious and deceiving.

One of the respondents who had an online girl friend disclosed that he did not want to meet her. He found online relationship as quite satisfying as no one was aware about his relations with the girl friend and there was no pressure by the peer group also to pair with the right girls whose looks match with the ideal. Thus, the internet allows relations which are free from the peer restraints. Physical contact is (usually) impossible in a net relationship, young people may find that they are able to communicate with one another free from the social and peer pressures toward expressed sexuality. From the respondents' stand one significant method adopted by computer users is that they do not paste their own picture on the web pages. They strengthen their position in front of other users, by adopting new physical look, describing their looks in such a way as to appear...
more attractive to others. This not only fulfills the function of avoiding pain and rejection but also neutralizes some of the power aspects of the heterosexist system in which beautiful girls are given more attention and more social opportunities (Brown & Gilligan 1992). A study conducted by Clark (2003) highlights that the environment of teen chat rooms in many ways mirrors the social restraints teens experiences in "real life". For example, let us return to the consideration of the fact that girls change their appearance to achieve more social power. In this action, teen girls are not redefining standards of acceptability based on beauty but are using the net to actively construct what they believe is a more socially accepted version of themselves. Thus, one can infer that people are conscious of their looks not only in real life but in virtual life too.

The internet is so vast and growing so rapidly that each person’s experience with it can only be a tiny sample of the whole. This is one reason that it is so enchanting. One does not know what he/she will find at the click of the mouse and explore a new location and an 'unthought-of relationship'. Regarding internet there is a diversity of opinion about its value in our lives. Researcher has tried to present some of the cases which will give us a deeper insight into the problem.

Let us turn to a few Case Studies: Names mentioned in the cases are fictitious.

**Case Studies Portraying the Negative Side Of Computers And Internet**

**Case 1 (as narrated by a clinical psychologist)**

Rani (class 10th girl student) and Raju (class 8th boy student), cousins, belonged to urban upper middle class families. Their houses were adjacently located and they used to spend their leisure time together. Rani and Raju both indulged into a sexual relationship with each other. They were caught by their maid and on being reported, their parents scolded them. One of the families shifted their residence to get rid of this situation. Despite parental objections both Rani and Raju did not stop meeting each other. When nothing helped, they were
brought to the counselor by their parents. During the counseling sessions both the children revealed that they used to visit cyber café to explore the sex related sites. Both the children were not guilty of their relationship and were aware of the precautionary measures. They said they had procured the sex related information from the net and found that it was not dangerous. According to them their relationship was normal and had no long term commitments.

**Case 2 (as narrated by a clinical psychologist)**

Mr. and Mrs. X, both belonged to urban upper middle class. They had one son who was a doctor. Mrs. X was undergoing great stress and taken to the counselor by her son. Reason for Mrs. X's distress was pornographic content available on the net. Mrs. X disclosed to the counselor that they had a happy married life. Mr. X used to surf the internet and explored various porn sites in front of his wife. Mrs. X never objected to it. Slowly Mr. X started chatting and made friends. When the wife started objecting to it, Mr. X said that by chatting he is emotionally satisfying the persons (ladies). According to Mrs. X as her husband's interaction with the chatting friends increased he detached himself from her and stopped having any physical relationship. Mrs. X disclosed her suspicion that her husband had met chatting friends in person. This led to marital conflict between Mr. X and Mrs. X. Mr. X was also brought to the counselor and Mr. X disclosed that he would not leave his chatting friends. Mrs. X had no option but to compromise for the sake of his son. Now, according to the psychologist both Mr. and Mrs. X are living under the same roof but they do not have any physical relationship with each other.

**Case 3 (as narrated by a clinical psychologist)**

Mona, a 15 year old girl belonged to urban upper middle class family. She was the only child of her parents. She had always seen her parents indulging into conflict over one or the other issue. Mona felt neglected and had no company to express herself. She was possessing a computer at home and also had an internet connection. Mona made friends in the chatters community and gradually
got addicted to it. Due to the inflated telephone bill, her parents objected to her use of internet. She started visiting cyber cafes. Through chatting, she exchanged phone numbers with the chatting friends. Mona started calling them and was also receiving their calls. She got intensely involved with the chatting friends that once she came to know that one of her chatting friends had met with an accident, she got very upset. According to the councilor, Mona was again undergoing through a severe emotional imbalance as chatting friends did not respond the way she expected.

Case 4

One of the parents (mother), narrated an incident that her friend had always flaunted that she had two computers for her two children and were placed in their respective rooms. Once the narrator went to her friends’ place and asked about her friend’s children. The friend of the narrator replied that kids were in their respective rooms and busy in using computers. The narrator said that she first peeped into the boy’s room, he was seeing the pornographic site, and when she peeped her friend’s daughter’s room and found she was busy in chatting. She said that her friend’s daughter invited her to join in chatting but she refused. Since then the narrator decided that she would not provide separate computers to the children and would not keep it in their private rooms.

In each of the above mentioned cases, it has been noticed that computer had a negative effect on the children and on one’s social relations. By looking at these cases, it cannot be generalized that computer is a trouble. It does have a positive side too. A few cases mentioned below portray computers as a beneficial tool.

Case Studies Portraying the Positive Side Of Computers And Internet

Case 5

Rama, an 11 year old girl, belonged to middle class family. Rama was 4 years old when she first used the computer. Rama had a brilliant academic
record, she has also topped in science quiz and maths Olympiad at state level. After school hours she plays badminton for one and a half hour. After finishing her home work she passes her time with computer. She use computer for studying, playing games and for sending e-mails. Sometimes when she does not go to school, she sends an e-mail to her friend asking about the homework. In return her friends send her a detailed description about all the classes. She has a hobby of writing poetry. Rama and her school friends have fixed timings for the chatting. She also used internet for finding additional information related with certain topics for which information was not available in the prescribed text books. She has a vast collection of CD Roms, educational puzzles, encyclopaedia, brain teasers, vocabulary, spellofun etc. which were very useful in learning. According to her Aunt, they had kept computer in the center room of the house with which they keep an eye over the children.

Case 6

Ritu, a 3 year old girl belonged to an urban middle class family. According to Ritu’s mother she first used computer when she was one and a half years old. Her mother was a computer literate and bought many CDroms and CD’s to teach various nursery rhymes, vegetable names, identify colours, counting, fruits, alphabets etc. Ritu’s mother said that computer was very useful in teaching these various programmes to the children as these were very creative and interesting. Child sits in front of computer and listen and grasps very quickly by seeing the pictures. Ritu possessed atleast 30 CD’s and use computer for 2-3 hours daily. According to her mother she takes her two meals in front of computers only. Now her father has bought portable VCD player having 19” screen which she operates while sitting and lying on a bed.

Case 7

Krishi, a two and a half year old boy, belonged to an urban middle class family. Krishi could use computer very efficiently whereas her mother who was highly qualified was not computer savvy. Krishi was exposed to computers by his
father. According to Krishi’s mother, the reason for introducing him to computers was his grandmother’s health problem. Both the parents were busy in taking care of Krishi’s grandmother. Krish had no company and his father introduced him to computers. Now Krish could manage the computer well and can not go to school in the morning before using it. Krish possessed 20 CD’s of games and stories.

Certainly, each case is contextual, situational and had its own uniqueness but case study as one of the methods of research methodology, require that certain generalizations have to be drawn. All the above mentioned cases were taken from the urban areas and belonged to upper and middle classes. It is inferred from the case studies that computers is playing a positive role and a child’s learning tool where the parents are computer literate and monitoring the computer using habits of their children. On the other hand, where the parents have bought computers as a status symbol and provided private spaces to children, computers had turned out be negative. Thus, it can be concluded here that if the parents give their own company to the children and help them to use computers for educational purposes, it is definitely a necessity but if they do not monitor their children while using computers and leave them alone in the company of machine, it is a trouble.

Early theorists of cyber space have argued optimistically that the kinds of electronic communication made possible by internet technology can revolutionize in positive ways many aspects of our social, political and psychological worlds. Proponents such as Sherry Turkle (1997) claim that “on the internet... people (may) recast their identity in terms of multiple windows and parallel lives” It has been claimed for example that the internet ‘de-emphasizes hierarchical political associations, degrading gender roles and ethnic designations, and rigid categories of class relationships found in traditional visually based and geographical bound communities’ (Ebo 1998). Moreover, computer facilitated communication is promoted as empowering to the user and therefore potentially a technology that will help ‘democratize’ our society and the world. Such a view helps in selling computers to parents who are anxious about the impact on children of the older technology of television.
The Internet has become one of the most useful and helpful tools available to the people today. But like any other form of communication it has its pros and cons. The benefits that one can receive from this new medium are many and are mainly related to the content it provides. But the other side of the story is that even with the good things it provides, the Internet is still subject to all the problems society faces today – crimes, invasion of privacy, etc. In this chapter we presented the benefits and drawbacks to the Internet, along with some of the ethical implications these may have.

The Internet was initially intended as a network to interconnect different colleges, universities, government agencies and research centers. Today, it also includes commercial businesses, non-profit organizations, as well as individuals from all over the world, who feel they have something to say, sell or inform. The reason for this is because the main driving force behind the Internet is information. It is based on the principle that someone, somewhere has some information they want to be read, and that there is someone else interested in reading it. And because of the technology behind the Internet and the www all this wealth of information from around the globe is within the reach of many people. It is because of the sudden surge in popularity that we must sit down (or stand up – your choice) and look at the benefits, dangers and problems that this new medium presents to us. The purpose of writing this was to shed some light on the information that every Internet user should know before venturing out into that huge new world that is the Internet and the World Wide Web.

To conclude the ongoing discussion, I have come out with some of the possible positives and negatives of computers and internet based on the discussion of the data.

The Positive Side of the Internet:

The main benefit we stand to gain from the Internet is information. The Internet is full of information, i.e. from ‘the care and repair of your toilet’ to any ‘historical event’. Certainly it is the fact that the information is literally available at
the touch of a button without any fuzz and hassle. All this makes this new form of getting information very convenient and easy to use.

Unlike other libraries, the Internet is always ‘open’. It can be used anytime of the day or night, at three in the morning or any time in the afternoon. In addition, looking for information does not mean that one has to drop what he/she is doing nor does it mean that one has to leave the office or the house. More importantly, the Internet does not care if the user is black, white, yellow, child or an adult. It does not care whether the user is from India or from any other part of the world.

Our respondents used internet for gaining information on the topics which they did not find in their text books. They made contacts with the people and made a number of friends with the help of internet. A few of the respondents were able to keep a contact with their relatives living abroad. Respondents surfed the internet whenever they felt like and used it for number of purposes like downloading songs, screen savers, movies, pictures, information about foreign universities, various courses, seeing the horoscopes, sending greetings, shopping, etc.

Not only has this surge in popularity for the Internet created awareness among the people, it has helped in bringing computers into the mainstream. No longer are computers for the technically savvy people, as was the case earlier. Internet started to catch on, and started moving towards a more commercial environment, the intrigue that it sparked made people buy computers just to test this new ‘thing’ out. As more and more people joined, the intrigue grew, and so did the need for more cyber cafes which has really helped the adolescents to use the services at very affordable prices. Cyber cafes which provide services according to the tastes of a class have proved to be a safe place adolescents can visit any time.

The Negative Side Of The Internet:

Naturally, this is not a perfect world we live in. Not everything is perfect. Very quickly we can see that one of the most noticeable problems with the
Internet could be the same thing that gives it its purpose, i.e. information. There is so much of information on the Internet that looking for something can become quite tedious. One can spend several hours surfing through different web sites before finding precisely what we are looking for. This was exactly our respondents were doing. They were surfing the net for long hours without any specific work to do and this was one of the reasons that respondents were unable to give the names of the sites as they did not look for a particular site. They provided the names of the search engines.

This situation stems from the fact that there is no set standard on how to organize or categorize the information found here. Additionally, whenever we search the Internet we most commonly use what are called search engines. These specialized computers automatically search the Internet for what we tell them to search for. These commonly give hundreds of results on the item we have asked for. Internet helped the respondents and did not allow them to depend upon their memory to learn the names of the websites.

Another new type of crime that has originated since the Internet 'boom' has been illegal entry into other computers system – otherwise known as 'hacking' and 'cracking'. This type of crime has also become very common and could result in great problems worldwide. Our respondents were aware of the computer related crimes of hacking and some of the male respondents mentioned that their friends had hacked the sites. Hacking and fraud are just the tip of the iceberg for the Internet. Adolescent respondents accessing the Internet, for pornography was still another area brought out in the study. Our respondents used to download, and send the pornographic pictures to their friends. "Children have many tactics to see the blocked sites", remarked one respondent. "When the parents are away, just get the XXX CD and download it on your PC", remarked another respondent. The craze for seeing the pornographic content is because of the easy and free availability of the same.

Unfortunately there is not much, the law can do in this case. Most of these web sites are based in US or UK or other countries like Russia or Ethiopia where the laws are not strict. In India, advertising and transmitting pornography and
other obscene materials in the electronic form is against the law. But since, these web sites are not based in India; there is not much that the law can do. Most of these websites are operational from other countries and because of the handicap of jurisdiction, the laws are not applicable to them. So, it is high time that the law takes notice of adult content on internet. The cyber laws in India need serious change in the wake of MMS cases and rising pornographic material (Deladia Priyanka, Times of Chandigarh, September 17, 2005:3).

Under Sections 66 and 67 of Information Technology Act, 2000, a person who indulged into hacking, publishing and transmitting of obscene materials on the internet can be charged. The details of Section 66, Section 67 and punishment under these sections are as follows:

Section 66 of Information Technology Act states that “whoever with the intent to cause or knowing that he is likely to cause wrongful loss or damage to the public or any person destroys or deletes or alters any information residing in a computer resource or diminishes its value or utility or affects it injuriously by any means commits hacking.

2) whoever commits hacking shall be punished with imprisonment up to three years, or with fine, which may extend up to two lakh rupees, or with both” (Bare Act of Information Technology Act 2000:26,27).

Section 67 of the Act states that “whoever publishes or transmits or causes to be published in the electronic form, any material which is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect is such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, shall be punished on first conviction with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years and with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees and in the event of a second or subsequent conviction with imprisonment of either description fro a term which may extend to ten years and also with fine which may extend to two lakh rupees” (Bare Act of Information Technology Act 2000:27).
Cyber laws indeed have the provision against cyber crime but they do not distinguish various age groups, among the defaulters, especially the young adolescents. Our respondents belonged to 14-19 years of age group and according to Section 66 and 67 of Information Technology Act, 2000, they had been indulging into all those activities on internet which are punishable under this Act and thus fall under the purview of the said acts.

In view of a high incidence of misuse of pornographic material and its circulation by the adolescent computer users, it is suggested that appropriate legal measures must be taken to counter this menace.

From a moral point of view, the degree of freedom to do whatever one wishes to do is much greater in cyberspace, as there are no moral norms. Actually what fascinates the youth in computers is that these do not distinguish between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’; between ‘moral and ‘immoral’; and this pulls the adolescents towards the machine. In our society, the word ‘sex’ is publicly avoided. The growing trend of the pornography is also partly due to the ‘unanswered’ questions related with sex. A child normally has two sources which can answer all his questions, i.e. either parents or teachers. When both the sources avoid such talks, then children turn to other sources, i.e. pornographic content provided by print or electronic media, peer group, etc. Instead of gaining any knowledge about sex they start finding fascination in watching the pornographic sites. Further, cyber cafes add fuel to the fire by providing private spaces to the children for accessing such sites.

Another area which was valued by the adolescents respondents was the online affairs. Could we propose that online affairs have sufficiently replaced the offline relationships? The alternative world provided by cyberspace is essentially an ideal private world in which each person controls the information that is revealed. In this world, the full identity of the person is not revealed, and the two people are physically remote from each other.

Chicago tradition of Sociology, i.e. Symbolic Interactionism focused upon the ways in which meanings emerge through interaction. Interactionist perspective highlights the ways in which human beings are distinctly 'symbol
manipulating animals’. It is through symbols that they, alone of all the animals are capable of producing culture and transmitting a complex history. In our daily life which is offline, face to face communication relies on many sources which include various symbols of information in addition to the verbal one: facial expressions, voice, posture, hands, gaze, focus and so on. These symbols can convey the meaning only when there is a face to face interaction as it also helps in influencing each other’s actions. Such sources provide crucial signals for communicating our emotions and understanding the other person’s attitudes whereas online communication relies on fewer sources and is often based merely on written messages. The lack of visual content seems to be a particularly significant deficiency. Our eyes are of central importance in revealing our emotional attitudes. Sometimes, one look in the eyes conveys more profound information than many words. Can the online communications which are text based and iconic, convey the emotional state of the sender?

How would the symbolic interactionists react to this situation where symbols are being developed but out of an interaction that is indirect, imaginary and face to face and real. But, still it appears to these young ones as more real than the reality itself.

The relationships which are based on emotional icons are bound to be hollow. Certain cyber relations like cyber love, cyber sex, cyber flirting etc., are all either based on false identities and text based. It has been observed that writing skills are the major means for forming relations in the cyberspace. We know that interpersonal attraction of adolescents is alive and well on the internet. However, what is the nature of these relationships? Are they shallow, erratic and short-lived? Do they really touch the hearts of those involved? How do we conceptualize these relationships where children disclose too much, too early, ending up idealizing and fantasizing in unrealistic ways. The role playing, deceptions and gender swapping make the internet a hazardous tool for developing relationships for adolescents who are moving from childhood to adulthood.
Thus, various features of the on-line environment could create problems for the young adolescents. For example, the absence of the rich nonverbal cues that guide us well in face-to-face encounters are absent, so the "cold" nature of on-line communication can lead to problems. Further, many on-line activities are asynchronous, that is, my turn and now your turn, rather than simultaneous as with face-to-face. As a result, on-line activities are vulnerable to a number of issues having to do with using stereotypes to provide some of the missing detail and structure in situations that approach anonymity. The loss of gender information seems especially troublesome. Because of this loss of nonverbal cues, the on-line activities preserve, and perhaps amplify, a number of well-known social psychological problems.

The various responses mentioned above suggest that cyber space includes many disturbing, troubling, horrific and exploitative images, photographs and videos. These can sometimes make the Internet a dangerous place to be – a source of psychological threat. Troubling content on the Internet can be disturbing because it is a window upon aspects of humanity- one’s own humanity sensually concealed in daily life. Apart from pornography, the Internet includes expressions of hate, rage and fear and images of death, disease, genocide and torture. Also, disturbing is the unsettling knowledge that this techno cultural content provides and on top of it, the absorption of this content by the users.

We have in this chapter, analysed both the faces of the Internet: the good and the positive, the dangerous and the negative, especially with reference to adolescents.

To conclude, findings in this chapter project computer as a necessary evil, which is difficult, rather impossible to avoid. In fact, in case of the adolescents, computer can be equated with the internet- that too for chatting and surfing. Our in-depth interactions with adolescents, their parents, teacher and cyber owners indicate that while there is a greater awareness regarding the positive side of computers- the idealized one; its negative side lies 'hidden', in an acute level of privacy, which is increasingly being associated with computer use. A huge generation gap has been created by this machine, where the two generations
hardly understand the vocabulary, language symbols and meanings used by each other. More research studies on these 'hidden' dimensions of computer use are required.