

John P. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey **Busyness as Usual**

The wish to live as intensely as possible has subjected humans to the same dilemma as the water flea, which lives 108 days at 8 degrees Centigrade, but only twenty-six days at 28 degrees, when its heartbeat is almost four times faster, though in either case its heart beats 15 million times in all. Technology has been a rapid heartbeat, compressing housework, travel, entertainment, squeezing more and more into the allotted span. Nobody expected that it would create the feeling that life moves too fast.

—THEODORE ZELDIN (1994)

BOOKS AND ARTICLES ABOUT THE ACCELERATION OF DAILY LIFE ARE themselves accelerating. From Burns's *BusyBodies* (1990) to Schor's *Overworked American* (1991), O'Hara's *Working Harder Isn't Working* (1993), Hochschild's *Time Bind* (1997), Andrews' *Circle of Simplicity* (1997), Davis and Meyers' *Blur* (1998), Gleick's *Faster* (1999), Robinson's *Work to Live* (2003), Jacobs and Gerson's *Time Divide* (2004), Epstein and Kalleberg's *Fighting for Time*, Warner's *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, and Honore's *In Praise of Slowness* (2004), more and more social observers have published their concerns over a pace of American life that appears out of control. Rosa (2003) has provided a theoretical basis for expecting the inevitability of these trends in the writings of major sociologists, including Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Sorkin. As de Tocqueville observed more than 150 years ago, "The American is always in a hurry."

Economists have also weighed in on these issues of time compression, perhaps starting with Linder (1970), who, in his insightful treatise *The Harried Leisure Class*, may have been the first economist to predict the frantic pace of modern life and leisure. As specialized work led to higher rates of productivity, the increased level of products and services had to be consumed. Hence the process of consuming must be sped up—by consuming more rapidly, by consuming higher quality versions of a product or service, or by simultaneous consumption in which one consumed more than one thing at a time. Such an acceleration of consumption led to an acceleration of the pace of life and a harried leisure class.

Much of what Linder discussed with regard to time scarcity was *perceived* scarcity. Work time and leisure existed in a theoretical equilibrium, he argued, in terms of outputs. Increases in the productivity of work destroyed this equilibrium. The outputs from leisure then had to be increased to restore the balance. This was done by combining leisure activity with a higher volume of goods in the ways mentioned earlier, thus commodifying leisure and bringing its outputs into parity with the increased outputs of work. This new situation led to a general perceived scarcity of time in modern life.

Interestingly, Linder's conclusions were not that people would work longer—a common misinterpretation of his work—but rather that they would attempt to increase the yield on a unit of time in all areas of life—minimizing activities such as singing or political debate, which could not easily have their yield on time spent increased. The value of efficiency and increased productivity, carried to extremes, he argued, produced a kind of decadence in which the goal of economic growth is never questioned.

More recently, economists Hamermesh and Lee (2003) have played down the seriousness of concerns over a speeded up lifestyle, characterizing it in large part as “yuppie kvetch.” Analyzing time stress data from five Western countries, they concluded that “complaints about busy lifestyles and lack of time are generally a feature of well-off couples who have a lot of income and not enough time to spend it.” Not that higher-

income couples are making irrational decisions; they are simply facing the inevitable constraints on their ability to enjoy their wealth.

This article reviews various of these philosophical issues in the context of US national survey data concerning trends in the time pressures and stress in the activities of Americans over the last approximately 30 years. It focuses both on the measurable amounts of free time Americans have and on the specific activities carried out in that free time. It also reviews survey data on Americans' perceptions of and attitudes toward time and stress. It brings together data from different survey sources that often show conflicting trends and conclusions.

Some changes in time pressure and busyness since 1965 may be expected due to the increased presence of newer technologies that consumers now have in their homes. Not only did more households contain dishwashers or microwave ovens, but these appliances now featured more options and conveniences. There was a parallel growth in home entertainment systems—CD players, VCRs, larger screen TVs, and the like. Cellular phones allowed people to be “on call” and reachable, anytime, anyplace. Another significant change was the increased diffusion and use of home computers—at first used to streamline household accounting and to play more sophisticated computer games, but more recently allowing people to communicate inexpensively through e-mail and to surf the world wide web (Robinson and Kestnbaum, 1999).

In general, however, while American and other people in Western countries may feel busier and more rushed (as shown below), most of their actual time use seems relatively unaffected by new technology—at least as reflected in people's 24-hour time diaries.

As in earlier diary surveys using different modes of data collection, moreover, impressive convergences can be seen in the various sets of diary data—which are usually within sampling error of each other. In other words, the data generally point in the same direction, usually indicating an America with somewhat less work and more free time than in the 1960s. This was also the occasion of the first US time-diary survey, using the unique methodology reviewed next.

TIME-DIARY METHODOLOGY

The main American source of the time-use data in this article is the 24-hour recall time-diary data, as reported by national probability surveys of respondents in the "active population" (aged 18 to 64). In these diary accounts, collected in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995, respondents provide complete and sequential daily accounts of what they did on a particular day (usually "yesterday"). Respondents in these surveys described the exact time they went to bed, when they got up and started a new day, and all that they did until midnight of that day. Because they represent complete accounts of daily activity, diary data collected from cross-section samples allow one to estimate how much societal time is spent on the complete range of human behavior—from work and free time to travel and time spent at home.

A time-diary report is fundamentally different from the task of making longer-term time "estimates," the source of most data on more specific detailed free time activities (as reported later in this article). The diary-keeper's task instead is to recall only a single day's activities in sequence, employing a reporting approach that probably reflects the way the day was structured chronologically for the respondent and the way most people store their activities in memory. Diary respondents simply describe in their own words the (usually previous) day's activities as best they can recall them sequentially (Robinson and Godbey, 1999, chap. 4).

The final diary figures have been shown to have high reliability, with similar results whether the diary was conducted by phone, in person, or returned through the mail; done for the day before (yesterday) or the day after (tomorrow) the contact interview; done in different seasons of the year; or done in different parts of the country. Studies of diary validity include matches of diary times with times estimated from "beeper studies," "random hour" accounts, spouse activity reports, video-recorded observations, and "shadow studies," in which respondents are followed by an observer (Robinson and Godbey, 1999, chap. 4).

Trend summary: Table 1 shows 30-year trends in the main four categories of time use. In brief, these 1965-1995 data comparisons in

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF TRENDS IN WEEKLY TIME USE, 1965-1995

	MEN	WOMEN
Work (employed only)	Down 5 hrs.	Down 0.5 hrs.
Work (all men/all women)	Down 9.5 hrs.	Up 6 hrs.
Family care	Up 4.5 hrs.	Down 12.5 hrs.
Housework	Up 4.5 hrs.	Down 11 hrs.
Childcare	Same	Down 1.5 hrs.
Shopping	Same	Same
Personal care	Down 2.5 hrs.	Down 1 hr.
Sleep	Same	Up 2 hrs.
Eat	Down 2 hrs.	Down 1 hr.
Groom	Down 0.5 hr	Down 2 hrs.
Total free time	Up 7.5 hrs.	Up 7.5 hrs.
Television	Up 6 hrs.	Up 6.5 hrs.
Reading/stereo	Down 1 hr	Down .5 hrs.
Social capital	Down 1.5 hrs.	Down 1.5 hrs.
Recreation	Up 4 hrs.	Up 3 hrs.

From figures provided in Robinson and Godbey (1999) for those ages 18-64.

table 1 tell much the same story as earlier diary trend studies. Diary hours of paid work were notably lower than in 1965, while women were doing less housework and men more housework.

These declines in "productive activity" provided the American public with increased free time, aided and abetted by the increased free time made possible by decreased marital and parental responsibilities (but separate from them as well). Unlike earlier gains in free time, the most recent gains are not completely dominated by television. Indeed, the increased hours Americans reported in fitness, education, and home communication activities were a healthy sign in that not only were they now more active, but that they were engaging in activities that they themselves reported as more enjoyable than TV. Nevertheless, TV hours did continue to increase and television remained the focus of virtually half of our free time activity. The decline in social capital activities was another trend that must be of concern, particularly since there was clearly more free time that could be devoted to such activity.

Thus, counter to “time-famine” arguments, the table 1 recapitulation of the major trends between 1965 and 1995 shows the more than 7-hour gains in weekly free time that both men and women enjoyed since 1965. Men’s increase came mainly from about 10 hours a week less paid work, while women’s increase came from almost 12 hours less unpaid work. In men’s case, decreased paid work came from two sources: more men retiring earlier (particularly those aged 55-64) and 5 hours less weekly work for those men who remained in the labor force. Together, these totaled nearly 10 hours less paid work for all men aged 18-64. Men had also reduced their eating and grooming time almost 3 hours since 1965. On the other hand, they had taken on almost 5 more hours of housework during that period, leading to a net gain of more than 7 hours (that is, from 10 hours of less work plus 2.5 hours of grooming minus 5 hours of increased housework).

Since a higher percentage of women were now working than in 1965, their overall paid work hours increased 6 hours because of increased labor force participation (from 44 percent of women 18-64 in 1965 to 65 percent in 1995). Their sleep times had also gone up 2 to 3 hours a week, but that had been offset by decreased meal and grooming time. It was mainly their 12+ hours of decreased family care, then, that provided the opportunity to enjoy their increase of 7+ hours of free time. (That is, 13 hours less housework/family care and 1 hour less personal care to offset the 6-hour increase in paid work).

Nonetheless, when it comes to free time and its varied uses, the patterns and trends were much the same for both men and women. The largest increases in the use of nearly 8 hours of greater free time for both had been in TV time—6+ hours a week more viewing since 1965. More recently, there have been gains in more active recreational pursuits, particularly fitness activities, which tripled from 1 to 3 hours a week. Offsetting these increases were declines in two types of free time activities: other media (particularly newspapers) and social capital (especially visiting and socializing, although these showed some resurgence in the 1990s).

The trends in table 1 are not unique to the United States. Time-diary research carried out with residents of Western nations also averaged 30

to more than 40 hours of week of free time (Bittman, 1998; Gershuny, 2000). In European countries, the range in free time was from 31.5 to 45.5 hours per week, with the numbers higher in Norway and Finland and lower in France and Germany (Eurostat, 2003). For example, Rydenstam (2002) found that free time among the Swedish working age population averaged between 35 and 38 1/2 hours per week in 2000-2001.

ESTIMATED ACTIVITY TIME DATA SETS

Other survey organizations have been collecting time-*estimate* data over the last 30 years to track changes in free time and other activity. Those with the most commendable methodologies include: 1.) the General Social Survey (GSS) from the University of Chicago (which has covered the broadest range of activities since 1972); 2.) the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), conducted by the US Census Bureau for the National Endowment for the Arts since 1982; and 3.) the Fitness Surveys conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) since 1985. All have high response rates (between 70 and 90 percent of those selected into the sample), exactly replicated questions, and large sample sizes. Their major advantage over time diaries is that the detailed activities they cover occur very infrequently in daily diary studies, such as playing golf or going to a jazz concert. The scope and focus of these estimate questions are outlined in table 2, along with the main direction of trends. Table 2 first shows the time-diary trends, then the GSS trends, and finally in the last column, the data from SPPA, NCHS and other sources, such as Bureau of Labor Statistics data on work hours and Nielsen data on TV hours.

The disadvantage of these time estimates is that they must rely on survey questions that are subject to more severe memory recall problems and potentials for social desirability in respondent reporting. Chase and Godbey (1983), for instance, asked members of specific swimming and tennis clubs to estimate how many times they had used that club during the last 12 months; when their estimates were then checked against the club's sign-in records, almost half of the respondents overestimated their actual occasions of participation

TABLE 2: LONG-TERM TRENDS IN DIARY VERSUS ESTIMATE DATA SOURCES

	Diary	GSS Estimate	Other Estimate Surveys
	1965-1995	1972-2002	1965-2004
Non-Free-time Acts:			
Paid work	-	+ (1972-2002)	0 (BLS, 1965-2004)
Family care	-	NA	0 (NSFH, 1987-95)
Personal care	-	NA	NA
Free-time Activities:			
TV	++	0 (1972-2002)	+ (Nielsen, 1965-2004)
Radio	-	0 (1978-83)	NA
Read newspapers	-	-	- (Pew, 1960s-2003)
Read books, mags	0	NA	NA
Socializing	-	0 (1972-2002)	NA
Church	0	- (1972-2002)	NA
Other organizations	-	NA	- (Putnam, 1970s-2000)
Social events, etc.	0	NA	NA
Fitness	++	NA	0 {-,+} (NCHS, 1985-2002)
Hobbies	0 {-,+}	NA	NA
Arts	0	0 (1993-2002)	0 (NEA, 1982-2002)
Sex	NA	0 (1989-2002)	NA
TOTAL FREE TIME	++	NA	NA

++ Notable increase + Increase 0 No Change - Decrease
 -Notable decrease NA—No data Available

by more than 100 percent. Moreover, estimate questions systematically generate work-hour figures that are notably higher than those reported in time diaries (Robinson and Godbey, 1999). It does need to be noted, however, that there does seem to be a “monotonic” relation between estimate and diary figures, in that respondents who estimate longer workweeks or television hours do report more such

time in their diaries than those reporting shorter hours (Robinson and Godbey, 1999).

1.) *GSS Activity Questions*: The broadest variety of questions and the most frequent (yearly) readings come from the GSS. Counter to the arguments in Putnam (2000) about declining social capital, only two of the four GSS questions on sociability show declines: contacts with neighbors and attending bars (and the latter's decline stopped about 1985). There was no decline in get-togethers with relatives, and an actual *increase* in seeing friends—almost enough to offset the decline in seeing neighbors. These findings are consistent with the diary findings of relatively little decline in visiting and socializing.

There was a slight decline in attending church services across time, not unlike our diary findings (although Presser and Stinson [1998] show notable declines across the years in the *percentage* attending religious services, rather than overall time spent). The unique GSS data on sex frequency also show essentially no change over the last 13 years, further evidence counter to Putnam's argument, if sex were considered a social capital activity.

The GSS estimates for TV hours are relatively constant across time (as they are in the SPPA data below) and that is quite counter to the diary findings of steadily increased viewing across time—especially between 1965 and 1975. The GSS declines in newspaper reading, on the other hand, are consistent with the major declines in diary newspaper reading—which is the major free time activity showing diary time decline. (Diary data on other reading—of books, magazines and the like—show much less or no decline.)

Outside of their constant estimated TV viewing hours, then, the GSS figures largely corroborate the diary free-time trends reported in table 1. However, they also show a slight increase in paid work hours, which is opposite to the slight decline found in the much larger surveys conducted in the BLS series below.

2) *SPPA*: The SPPA surveys, conducted about every five years since 1982, involve large samples and cover a variety of free time activities—but mainly with an arts and culture focus. While these are activities

highly correlated with respondent education level—and while levels of education have risen steadily over time, there is a slight drop in respondent annual estimates of attending arts and culture events, particularly for visits to historic parks and arts and crafts festivals (and less so for attending live music and theatre performances). The one optimistic exception appears for increased visits to the visual art in museums and galleries.

The same mix of trends is found for being an active arts/cultural participant or performer, particularly in the regular and pronounced decline for the arts and crafts activities of pottery and needlework. Declines also extend to participation through the mass media, especially for music and theatrical performances on television, which might be surprising given the increased usage and development of new forms of video, such as VCRs and DVD players. The declines are found not just in attendance at musical arts events, but in people's attitudes toward different types of music, particularly country-western, easy listening, and ethnic and folk music (but not jazz or classical music). Finally, the SPPA survey shows serious declines since 1982 in such nonarts activities as home improvements, attending sports events, playing sports, and gardening that are slightly offset by minor increases in exercising and volunteer work.

3) *NCHS*: Like the SPPA, the Healthy People 2010 surveys of the National Center for Health Statistics are conducted about every five years with samples in excess of 12,000 aged 18 and older. Included in their surveys are questions about participation in more than 20 different physical activities in the previous two weeks that are mainly related to fitness. These studies show less decline in fitness activities than suggested by the SPPA. Nonetheless, there do appear to be small but steady declines in aerobics, tennis, bowling, swimming and handball-racquetball-squash (offset to some extent by small increases in jogging, golf, biking, basketball, soccer, and weight lifting). There did not appear much change in the major NCHS fitness activity of walking for exercise. Nor has there been much change in a new overall NCHS question on vigorous activity participation, which was virtually the same in

2003 (33.2 percent) as in 1997 (32.7 percent) (although that is slightly up from the 29.9 percent levels found in 1998 and 1999).

Thus, the 1985-1998 NCHS trend figures do not match the steadily increasing amounts of time respondents report in some form of fitness activity in their diaries—one of the most consistent and dramatic increases found in table 1.

The table 1 time-diary trends conflict with many of the with “time estimate” trends in table 2, which show few (or offsetting) changes in paid work-time (BLS), as well as in specific free time activities like TV time (Nielsen), arts participation (NEA), fitness activities (NIH), religious attendance, and social life (GSS). In contrast, the diary data show dramatic increases in TV time and fitness activity since 1965, with possible declines in paid work-time, as well as in religious, arts, and social activity. The estimate and diary data sources do agree that there has been a dramatic decrease in newspaper reading and radio listening, although the latter has made a notable comeback as a secondary activity or multitasking).

Nonetheless, there is no indication in the table 2 estimate data of any decline in free-time activities, perhaps most notably in the dominant free time activity of TV viewing. Nor, despite popular media accounts to the contrary, is there any decrease in sexual activity in the GSS over the last decade due to mounting time pressures.

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME PRESSURE

After reviewing both our time-diary data on declining hours of work and our attitudinal data showing that many Americans believe they are becoming more rushed, marketing analyst Berry (1990) nonetheless recommended “marketing to the perception” rather than to the reality: “Time diaries may be the most accurate way to measure how people actually spend their time, but it is the perception that shapes behavior. People who believe they are pressed for time will respond accordingly.”

Until this point, our analysis has concentrated on the number of minutes or hours that people spend on various activities. This section

TABLE 3: PERCEPTIONS OF FEELING RUSHED, 1965-2002

A. "Would you say you always feel rushed, even to do the things you have to do, only sometimes feel rushed, or almost never feel rushed?"												
National (age 18+) (n =)	Mich 1965 (1,130)	Mich 1971 (9,519)	Mich 1975 (1,513)	Mich 1978 (3,665)	GSS 1982 (1,852)	UMD 1985 (2,976)	PSU 1992 (1,208)	UMD 1994 (503)	UMD 1995 (1,208)	GSS 1996 (1,452)	UMD 1999 (987)	GSS 2001 (1,538)
% Always	NA (24%)	22% (25%)	25% (28%)	18% (23%)	24% (28%)	32% (35%)	35% (38%)	NA (35%)	29% (33%)	30% (33%)	NA (34%)	28% (33%)
% Some-times	(53%)	51	49	57	52	48	48	(50)	54	52	(55)	54
% Almost never	(23%)	27	26	25	24	20	18	(15)	17	18	(11)	18
	18-64	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	18-64	100%	100%	18-64	100%

B. (If sometimes/never rushed): "How often would you say that you have time on your hands that you don't know what to do with—quite often, only now and then, or almost never?"												
(n =)	(888 ^a)	(2993)	(1404) ^a	(329)	(849)	(1377)						
% Quite often	(15 ^a)	—	9	(7)	9	8						
% Now and then	(37 ^a)	—	43	(32)	35	30						
% Almost never	(48 ^a)	—	48	(61)	56	62						
	18-64	100%	100%	18-64	100%	100%						

SOURCE: Americans' Use of Time Project.

a: Asked only if "sometimes" or "never rushed."

focuses on feelings about time pressure or stress, the subjective aspect of time that has most captured the attention of social observers. Several different measures related to the notion of perceived "time famine" are described. Of primary concern are perceptions people have that their lives are "rushed," that they do not have enough time to fit in everything they want to or should do. These questions were first asked in our 1965 study. Second, more recent data on self-perceptions of general "stress" from time constraints and other sources are reviewed. Third, data from other surveys on indicators of "time crunch" are examined, including perceptions people have that they have less free time than in the past.

Feeling Rushed: The oldest and most complete benchmark on time pressure is based on the two questions developed for the first 1965 national study of time: one on feelings of being rushed, the other on feelings of having time on one's hands. The questions are presented in table 3, along with the frequency response to the questions in 1965 and 11 subsequent national surveys, through 2001, for the rushed question, and in 5 subsequent surveys on the "time-on-your-hands" question through 2001.

The "always feel rushed" response has shown a gradual increase since the 1965 study, in which 24 percent of the 18 to 64 group described themselves as always rushed. By 1975, some 28 percent of the 18 to 64 sample reported being always rushed, and the number rose again to 35 percent in 1985 and to its peak of 38 percent in 1992; the four most recent national surveys show a slight decline. Much the same is found for the total population (including people aged 65 and older), rising from 22 percent in 1971 and 27 percent in 1982 to 35 percent in 1992, then moving back to 28 to 30 percent since then. Similarly the percent saying they almost never had time on their hands increased from 48 percent in the 1960s and 1970s to over 60 percent on 2001.

Across time, then, both questions show that people today feel more harried than 40 years ago. This is clearly counter to what might be inferred from diary trends of free time in table 1. The diary and subjective measures do seem to reflect the same phenomenon, in the sense

that the groups in these surveys that experience greater feelings of being rushed tend to be those with less free time noted in their earlier diaries: like the middle aged or college educated (as noted below). Thus, although the correlates and determinants of feeling rushed have stayed much the same, the trends have not. Counter to the increase in their free time, significantly more respondents in 2001 feel time pressure than 35 years ago.

Stress: Since 1985, the federal government's National Center for Health Statistics has been collecting trend data on American's perceptions of stress in their lives. The questions used are quite straightforward, asking respondents to describe the extent to which they have experienced stress in their lives over the previous two weeks and in the previous year, using a four-category response scale from "a lot" to "a moderate amount" to "a little" to "almost none." Interviews have been conducted across the entire year with very large samples of 10,000 or more.

The percentage reporting higher levels of stress did increase 6 points between 1985 and 1995 (versus the roughly 10-point increase in feeling rushed over the previous 30 years). Again, the increase is counter to the increase in diary free-time, and it is found in virtually all segments of society.

Further evidence of lower time pressure came from the 1995 NCHS study, which was asked of more than 17,000 respondents. Based on our earlier analyses, we were again surprised to find that not only was the 48 percent of American adults in 1995 saying they had experienced substantial stress in the previous two weeks lower than the 56 percent reported in 1993, but also lower than the 50 percent level reported in the first 1985 survey. Moreover, parallel declines were found in subsequent surveys, and on different stress questions in the NCHS—one dealing with stress felt in the previous year, the other with the effects of stress on one's health. Thus, the decline in reported stress was not confined to a single, isolated item.

Other questions: Three other stress-related trend questions do not show declines, but virtually no change in stress across time:

1. In the 1975 University of Michigan diary study, employed respondents were asked whether they were “very tired,” “somewhat tired,” or “not tired” after a day’s work. Only 24 percent said they were very tired. When the question was repeated in a 1995 survey, the comparable response was again 24 percent.
2. In a 1990 national survey, 50 percent of respondents said they would be willing to give up a day’s pay to get a day off from work. That figure was unchanged in a 1998 survey—and more workers in that latter study said they would prefer to work longer hours than shorter hours.
3. In that 1990 survey, respondents were also asked a 10-item “time-crunch” set of scale questions, with an average item having 32 percent agreement. Again that figure was unchanged in a 1998 replication of these items.

Although not a trend study, a 2000 national survey of work attitudes conducted at the University of Connecticut showed parallel results. When asked how important and how satisfied they were with various aspects of their jobs (job security, relations with coworkers, etc.), time pressure and work schedules ranked near the bottom in terms of importance to workers; and they were also above average in satisfaction levels. In other words, time and stress issues at work do not seem to arouse much concern compared to more basic job concerns.

It should be noted that there are two types of subjective questions that do elicit more of a “time-famine” type of response. One is whether respondents perceive they are more stressed than they were in the past five years; 45 percent of national respondents in a 2000 survey said they felt more stressed. (The government’s National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety has recently—in 2003—made much of this finding in promoting a less stressful workplace.) A second involves whether respondents report multitasking—doing more than one thing at a time. While 37 percent said they did this “most of the time” in our 1975 diary survey, by 2001 that figure had risen to 55 percent.

While these are two important signals of a highly time-pressed work culture, our other trend evidence reviewed above at worst suggests no change in work or general stress, with the large NCHS samples reporting lower stress levels. This may not be much different from what de Tocqueville first observed and what Hamermesh and Lee (2003) have more recently called into question.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

In regard to demographic differences in time use, age and gender are of particular interest. The changes in *age* patterns actually were relatively minor, but it is important to note how they have become accentuated over time as more workers have opted for early retirement or shorter work weeks. As they worked fewer hours, older people put in more time doing housework and sleeping. They also had more free time and used more of that free time for television, reading, and other media. It is encouraging, however, to see that, like younger Americans, senior citizens were also more involved in active, nonmedia activities like fitness and socializing (Robinson, Werner, and Godbey, 1997).

In the case of *gender*, we observed some significant changes over the 1985-1995 decade. Women's diary work hours were now closer to men's—as well as being closer to the work hours those women estimated they put in. Women also continued their reduced time doing housework, and men in the 1990s showed little evidence of continuing to pick up the resulting slack.

Nevertheless, these 1990s data also provided continuing long-term evidence of the converging androgynous lifestyles of men and women. In Robinson and Godbey (1999), we found that in 15 of all 22 activities, men's and women had become more similar between 1965 and 1985. If anything, the 1995 data make this point more clearly, since most of the androgynous trends were stronger in 1995 than 1985. Using a more quantified and recognized measure of activity similarity, Bianchi (1999) has calculated that the Euclidian "distance" between male-female patterns dropped from 24.3 hours in 1965 to 20.7 hours in 1975, 16.5

hours in 1985, and 12.5 hours in 1995. On this measure, then, the gap between men's and women's activities had been cut almost in half.

In terms of subjective questions, the eight-percentage-point decline in 1995 feelings of stress described in the previous section was found across the spectrum of demographic variables (Robinson and Godbey, 1999). Virtually all groups in the survey registered that decline and at about the same level, including both the elderly and young adults, for example. Interestingly, women continued to report greater stress than men, but that gender gap had also declined slightly in the 1995 data. Women were also slightly more likely to agree with the time-crunch scale items and to describe their lives as rushed. Middle-aged people (29-44) were more likely to report more feelings of stress, being rushed and time crunched. Here, these results do match with the diary data in that the 29 to 44 age group reported the least free time, reflecting their greater work and family demands at this stage of the life cycle.

Nonetheless, the correlates of stress were much the same in the 1990s as they were in 1985—and they were for feeling rushed. Women felt more stress than men, and increasingly so since 1985. Highest stress was reported by the middle aged, peaking in the 35 to 44 age group and dropping notably after age 54.

CONCLUSIONS

Could it be that Americans have learned to slow the pace of their lifestyles that most social and foreign observers consider busy to the point of being out of control? Have they become more aware that they in fact do have more free time than previous generations, or have they become familiar with the diary data reported in other mass media accounts? Will they be taking more time to smell the roses in the future?

Hopeful signs of Americans taking their free time more seriously can be seen in our diary data. Table 1 shows larger gains in non-TV free activities (like socializing and fitness) over the last decade. The decline in grooming time may signal lessening concern with fashion and appearance and more concern with dressing comfortably and naturally. The decline in meal time may reflect fewer people in households (now

about 2.6 persons) and a higher percentage of households (about one-quarter) with only one person in them. Increasing sleep may indicate more concern over restoring our energies and our bodies. The decline in housework may be disturbing, but it is unclear if that translates to today's households being messier than in the past.

Observers of American life (ourselves included) have expressed concern about the unbridled materialism of our culture, our slavish responses to the whims of advertising, our sedentary lifestyles, and the mindless content of our TV shows, popular fiction, and feature movies. In the face of mass advertising, however, there were signs in our data that more Americans were appreciating and taking advantage of the greater free time they had. Whether that set of choices will be revealed more clearly from future diary data, when the proportion of the population age 50 or over may reach 40 percent. As this happens, it is likely that free time will continue to increase.

The finding that time spent in behaviors considered to be free time (or even leisure) has increased from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990, or that people may feel slightly less time pressured than in the early 1990s, is very much at odds with the "common knowledge" of Americans' time famine. One might still hope to see increases in contemplation or sexual activity.

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