Trends in Older Women's and Men's Time Use in the United States, 1965-2012

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ABSTRACT: Over the past half century aging in the United States has been transformed, given improvements in life expectancy, educational attainment, and population health coupled with the unraveling of conventional retirement exits and protections. Yet we know very little about how the day-to-day experiences of older men and women have changed—or remained stable—during this period. Using time diary data from the American Heritage Time Use Study from 1965–2012, we examine trends in older Americans' time use in the United States in tandem with major shifts in later adult demography, workforce/retirement timing, and risk. We focus specifically on older (ages 50-79) women's and men's participation in paid work, leisure, exercise, eating, unpaid work, and sleep, theorizing within-gender historical changes as well as growing cross-gender convergence over time. We use decomposition analyses to consider whether patterns we observe are the result of changes in behavior or changing population composition.

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Introduction and Background

Scholars have identified a mismatch between social policies undergirded by an assumption that retirement is a one-way, one-time exit from long-term employment at specific ages and actual experiences of retirement (e.g., Riley et al 1994; Moen 2016). Research shows that retirement is a process more than an event, and that there is growing heterogeneity in the timing and nature of retirement (e.g., Mutchler, Burr, Pienta, & Massagli 1997). In particular retirement from the career job is no longer synonymous with non-employment in later adulthood. There is a vast literature on bridge jobs and post-retirement employment underscoring heterogeneity in exit patterns (e.g., Cahill, Giandrea, & Quinn 2006). Given changes in the processes of aging and retiring in the larger contexts of increasing life expectancy, educational attainment, and population health, but also greater risk and heterogeneity around retirement, we address the question: What have been continuities and changes in the experiences—as reflected in daily time use—of men and women moving through later adulthood over the last 50 years?

Social policies, such as Social Security and pension plans created in the second half of the 20th century, helped institutionalize retirement beginning in the mid-1960s (Atchley 1982). Traditional retirement ages, defined as eligibility for Social Security receipt, were 62 or 65, though this has gradually increased to age 67 to receive full benefits. There has been a push by government to postpone exits from paid work given population aging and strained social programs (Munnell and Sass 2008). Simultaneously, Americans are living longer, healthier lives, and there is evidence that some individuals are finding opportunities for social engagement, paid and unpaid, that entail less than full-time employment (Moen and Flood 2013).

Given changes in later life course demography, there have been efforts to identify and name what many see as an emergent stage in the life course situated in the space opening up between the career and family-building years and the frailties associated with old age. Laslett (1987) called this the “third age,” and Moen (2016) has termed it “encore adulthood,” the term we use here to describe Americans in their 50s, 60s, and 70s (Moen, 2016). We recognize that encore adulthood is defined less by specific ages and more by where people are in their life courses, but it captures the fact that people in this age group are not young, but neither are they typically “old” in terms of being frail and unable to accomplish the activities of daily living.

Our focus in this research is on time use during the encore years and how it may have changed from 1965 to 2012, a period in which social contracts surrounding work have been changing (Rubin 1996; Sweet and Meiksins 2013) and heterogeneity in employment participation and exits has been increasing (Cahill, Giandrea, & Quinn 2006; Mutchler, Burr, Pienta, & Massagli 1997; Warner, Hayward, & Hardy 2010). Given that paid work is a major driver of what, when, and the intensity with which individuals engage in other aspects of daily life (e.g., Flood, Hill, & Genadek 2018; Flood & Moen 2015; Moen 2005; Moen & Flood 2013), we expect that the population-level changes in employment will influence population-level time use in other areas of life. Indeed, this historical period captures the

remarkable increase in women's (and especially married women's) increasing labor force participation in the second half of the 20th century.

Data, Sample, and Measures

To assess continuity and change in everyday behaviors (paid work, exercise, sleep, eating, socializing, and other leisure, for example), we use harmonized US time diary data from the American Heritage Time Use Study (AHTUS) (Fisher, Gershuny, Flood, & Hofferth 2018). The data are from surveys taken in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1993, 2003, 2008, and 2012. Respondents recorded their activities over a 24-hour period, providing information on what they were doing and who they were with throughout that day. In addition to the time use data, each survey collected demographic information from the respondents.

Though the time use data are consistently coded within the AHTUS database, they were compiled from different original sources and vary in size and population representativeness. The 1965 sample is from the Multinational Comparative Time-Budget Research project and represents individuals aged 19 to 65 who lived in households where at least one member worked in a non-agricultural industry. The 1975 data are from the American's Use of Time project, which was designed to represent the adult population aged 18 and older. The 1975 data are part of a larger panel study, but we include diary data from the primary respondents collected over 1975 and 1976[1]. The 1985 data are also from the American's Use of Time Project; this version of the data includes respondents 10 and older. Data were collected via three modes for comparison of diary quality; we follow recommendations from the Centre for Time Use Research and only use the mail-back surveys[2]. The 1993 data are from the National Human Activity Pattern Survey, fielded from September 1992 to October 1994, and include both children and adults. The 2003, 2008, and 2012 data are from the nationally representative American Time Use Survey, which is the first federally-funded, ongoing time use survey in the United States. Given the gendered nature of the later life course, we examine continuity and change in daily activities separately by gender, using a sample including women and men ages 50-79 (with the exception of the 1965 sample, which collected data only on those up to age 65).

The time diary data we use include primary activity codes indicating what respondents were doing and location codes indicating where they were during each reported episode during the day; both activity and location codes have been harmonized in the AHTUS for consistency over time. We use information on how long respondents spent performing various activities and in various places to construct our measures of daily time use; note that there is overlap between activity and location based time use variables. Our focus in this paper is on a broad set of time use categories. Leisure at home includes leisure activities that take place within a respondent's home such as reading books, newspapers, and periodicals, listening to the radio and music, and engaging in written and verbal correspondence such as using the phone, writing letters or texting, and using a computer. Non-home leisure includes leisure activities (described above) that take place away from the respondent's home which may include at a friend's house, at a restaurant, or other public places. Meals includes eating and drinking activities at the

[1] This data include multiple observations for most respondents. We cluster the standard errors at the person level to account for this in our models.
[2] https://www.ahtusdata.org/ahtus/us1985.shtml

respondent's home or outside the home. Paid work includes activities associated with earned income labor and work breaks and activities associated with looking for employment. Physical activity includes a wide range of sporting activities such as baseball, bowling, golfing, exercise such as walking and yoga, outdoor recreation such as gardening, and pet and animal care. Television, separate from other leisure, includes watching television or movies. Unpaid work includes activities such as preparing food, housecleaning, performing house repairs, and purchasing items and services. We also consider where people spend their time, differentiating between at home, other places, and traveling. Finally, there are a number of activities that aren't reported by many respondents; here we include engagement in educational activities and caretaking (for either adults or children).

Preliminary Findings

Table 1 provides sample sizes and descriptive statistics for the data we use in our analysis. The results show known changes in population composition. The older adult population has become increasingly educated with about one-quarter holding a college degree in 1965 and 1975 and over half in the 2003 and later period. The share of non-white respondents has doubled during the 1965 to 2012 period, reflecting the increasing racial diversity of older adults. Since 1975 there has been an increase in the share of older adults who are employed both part time and full time; in 1975 about 60% of 50-79 year olds were not working for pay compared to 46% in 2012. The 50-79 population is also increasingly likely to live in urban areas over the study period.

Our preliminary findings show those in this encore stage of adulthood (ages 50-79) report consistent declines in time spent at home, especially in terms of leisure at home. More generally, from 1965 through 2012, we find less time spent in eating and, for women, less time engaged in unpaid work. By contrast we see, for both women and men, slight increases in leisure activities away from home, in time spent exercising, and in time allocated to watching television. For those who engage in educational activities on the diary, we also see increases in the time they spend. We observe increases of over an hour per day, on average, in time spent in paid work from 1975 to 2012. At least part of this increase is driven by increases in women's labor force participation over the period.

Next Steps

Our next steps are to examine these patterns in depth and highlight similar or divergent trends at the intersection of age and gender. Following this inspection, we will estimate OLS models to determine whether time trends are significant net of changing demographic characteristics reported in Table 1. To the extent that we observe significant change over the period 1965 to 2012, we will conduct Oaxaca-Binder decomposition analysis with 1975 and 2012 data to partition the change observed into that which can be explained by the model (e.g. based on demographic characteristics) and that which is unexplained (e.g. arguably due to changes in behavior). Note that though we include 1965 data in our analyses to extend the time series, we propose to use 1975 data in our decomposition analysis because the 1965 data are restricted to individuals 65 and younger, and our interest is in the broader 50-79 population.

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Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample by Year, 1965-2012

	1965	1975	1985	1993	2003	2008	2012
Sample Sizes	499	1567	820	2470	6981	4506	4753
Gender							
Male	46.2	43.8	45.3	44.1	46.9	46.8	47.8
Female	53.8	56.2	54.7	55.9	53.1	53.2	52.2
Age							
50-59	71.2	38.2	44.6	46.9	48.2	47.4	46.3
60-69	28.8	42.5	34.3	33.0	30.1	32.6	34.1
70-79	0.0	19.3	21.1	20.1	21.7	20.0	19.6
Education							
Less Than HS Degree	48.8	45.1	28.9	15.6	14.5	12.4	11.2
HS Degree	28.1	29.1	41.4	38.3	31.7	30.8	29.8
College Degree	23.1	25.8	29.7	46.1	53.8	56.8	59.0
Race							
White	90.8	94.3	0.0	87.7	85.1	79.4	78.4
Non-White	9.2	5.4	0.0	11.0	14.9	20.6	21.6
Missing	0.0	0.3	100.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Employment							
Full-Time	71.0	33.2	37.0	39.4	40.6	42.8	41.2
Part-Time Employed	2.9	7.3	9.8	9.1	11.8	12.0	12.3
Not Employed	26.1	59.6	53.2	51.5	47.6	45.2	46.4
Marital Status and Spouse Employment							
Not Married	22.4	41.3	24.1	0.0	39.3	48.6	48.5
Married, Spouse Not Employed	26.8	23.5	36.9	0.0	29.1	22.7	24.1
Married, Spouse Employed Part Time	0.0	2.1	6.5	0.0	8.5	7.0	7.5
Married, Spouse Employed Full Time	0.0	20.4	26.2	0.0	23.1	21.7	19.9
Married, Spouse Employment Missing	50.9	12.7	5.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Missing Both	0.0	0.0	0.6	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Location							
Urban	74.1	57.9	68.0	74.5	77.3	79.8	81.0
Rural	25.9	42.1	32.0	25.5	22.7	20.2	19.0
Income Tertiles							
Lowest 1/3	20.3	24.9	21.7	0.0	25.1	23.3	27.5
Middle 1/3	44.8	37.2	40.1	0.0	40.3	37.8	45.5
Highest 1/3	32.3	23.4	24.8	0.0	19.8	22.5	27.0
Missing	2.6	14.5	13.4	100.0	14.9	16.4	0.0

Table 2. Average Daily Time Use (in Minutes) for Women and Men Ages 50-79, 1965-2012

	1965 [1]	1975	1985	1993	2003	2008	2012
Sample Size	499	1567	820	2470	6981	4506	4753
Activity-Based							
Leisure at Home	121.3	163.6	141.5	155.8	138.1	129.4	126.4
Meals and Eating	84.0	95.0	94.5	81.1	60.1	59.3	57.7
Leisure away from Home	17.5	9.4	13.5	12.4	28.8	23.5	23.2
Paid Work	271.4	118.2	154.3	156.0	169.4	175.6	179.1
Physical Activity	11.5	31.1	37.1	32.7	39.0	38.3	41.6
Television Watching	96.8	148.7	161.6	183.8	180.7	201.1	207.1
Unpaid Work	173.2	176.9	168.2	164.2	145.0	132.1	129.3
Location-Based							
At Home	975.6	1087.3	1073.3	1037.9	1042.1	1052.9	1043.3
Away from Home	385.2	272.3	286.8	313.1	324.2	317.1	323.1
Conditional on Participation							
Caregiving	89.4	96.4	70.3	83.7	90.9	89.1	76.2
Education	35.9	132.0	159.3	155.1	170.2	200.9	193.6

Notes : [1]1965 data only include respondents up to age 65.