

The Land of the Lost Long Weekend? Trends in Free Time Among Working Age Australians, 1974-1992

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**THE LAND OF THE
LOST LONG WEEKEND?
TRENDS IN FREE TIME
AMONG WORKING AGE
AUSTRALIANS, 1974-1992**

by Michael Bittman

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Tony Eardley
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Abstract

Australians have characteristically seen themselves as a people who are unenthusiastic about hard work and more oriented toward the pursuit of leisure. It has often been suggested that the basis of this national identity as a 'laid back and carefree people' was the uniquely Australian industrial system. Recently there has been a growing alarm that this situation has been eroded by deregulation of the labour market and by the emerging problems for women of balancing work and family. This sense of alarm is supported by high levels of subjectively reported time pressure. However, analysis of a substantial body of diary-based information about time use presents a paradoxical picture. While there continues to be a wide disparity between those population groups experiencing 'time poverty' and those who are 'rich' in available free time, between 1974 and 1992 average free time has increased. This holds true even after controlling for the social changes that make comparisons over time more difficult. Moreover, international comparisons suggest that Australians may not have realised that their pattern of free time has been typical. Most industrial societies have experienced similar amounts of average free time. Most industrial societies have exhibited a complicated trend towards increased free time, while at the same time believing themselves to be subject to greater time pressure.

1 Leisure and Australian National Identity

Towards the end of the 1960s Australians experienced a surge of interest in themselves. This heightened self-awareness gave rise to a whole genre of books¹ about national identity. These books generally had ironic, mocking or downright insulting titles in which, somehow, Australians recognised themselves. An important element in this recognition was the idea that the Australian lifestyle was relaxed and leisurely.

Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* was perhaps the most successful of this genre of books. The phrase 'the lucky country' is often used today by Australians, as an affectionate way of referring to their own country. In the opening chapter of the book, Horne relates an anecdote about an incident at Sydney's speakers corner, the Domain. 'The speaker shouts to the crowd: "Tell me this! What is an Australian? I say what is an Australian?" Someone in the crowd puts up their hand. "An Australian is a lazy boozier." The crowd laughs' (Horne, 1971: 41).

In Australia, as elsewhere, leisure and relaxation are assumed to be the obverse of (paid) work. Horne's summary of the state of the Australian nation in the middle 1960s emphasised the significance of a leisurely lifestyle based on short working hours:

Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck ... A nation more concerned with styles of life than with achievements has managed to achieve what may be the most evenly prosperous society in the world. It has done this in a social climate largely inimical to originality and the desire for excellence (except in sport) and in which there is less and less acclamation of hard work. Australia has been one of the pioneer countries in cutting down hours of work and increasing holidays. (Horne, 1971: 220)

1 In addition to the work of Donald Horne (1971), this genre included Peter Coleman's (1962) anthology *Australian Civilization*, work by Ronald Conway (1971; 1978), and Craig McGregor's (1966) *Profile of Australia*.

The psychiatrist and social commentator, Ronald Conway, used the metaphor of the weekend to express the idea of a national identity based on a preference for leisure. Addressing his readers as though he hoped to shake them out of their hedonistic lethargy, he called his second² major book on the mentality of Australians, *Land Of The Long Weekend* (Conway, 1978).

Continuing this metaphorical theme, a recent color supplement to a leading broadsheet newspaper lamented ‘the lost weekend’:

In Australia, the weekend once attained the status of the sacred. It was virtually a case of working for the weekend. It was a time for mowing the lawn, sharing the Sunday roast, reading papers, pottering in the garden, retreating back to the shed, having a picnic or taking a leisurely drive to the beach. Perhaps it was a chance to worship—in the dress circle, the outer [ground, at a football match] or a pew. Saturday and Sunday had a different rhythm. The weekend was your own time, the rest of the week it was the boss’s. It’s little wonder that the standard Friday send-off between workmates is ‘Have a good weekend’. (Dusevic, 1997: 13)

Under the heading, ‘Mass Murder’, the article suggests that now ‘leisure time is shrinking, the distinction between work time and own time has blurred, the pace of life has quickened’. Contemporary Australian circumstances have conspired to achieve what even the most hideous dictators could not. ‘Pol Pot tried to kill the weekend. So did Joseph Stalin’. Although the Khmer Rouge leader tried to turn ‘Cambodia into a work camp, with every 10th day being a day of rest’, and Stalin ‘tore up the Soviet calendar and abolished the universal day of rest’, both failed to convert ‘the living into “all-work and-no-play” automatons’.

Clearly Australians are worried. The emphasis on leisure, short working hours and the weekend in ‘the lucky country’ is under threat. The current

2 His other book is called, with disparagement characteristic of the genre, *The Great Australian Stupor* (1971).

Prime Minister appealed to this anxiety in the year before his election, saying:

For generations, Australians have seen themselves as a laid back and carefree people with an irrepressibly optimistic attitude towards life ... Today, there is mounting evidence that the Australian sense of self-confidence is being eroded like never before.
(Howard, 1995)

2 The Roots of the Growing Anxiety About a Time Squeeze

There are profound historical and institutional reasons why Australian discussions about leisure, living standards and well-being are inextricably linked with discussions of the regulation of paid work. These reasons can be found in the peculiar significance of the regulation of wages and working conditions in the development of the Australian welfare state.

Australia and New Zealand have a history of powerful labour movements that were unable to translate their popularity into lengthy periods of government. For most of the history of the Commonwealth of Australia, the federal cabinet has consisted of a coalition of parties united through their opposition to the Australian Labor Party. Under these circumstances, the labour movement settled for a strategy of regulating and defending wages. In response to the growing industrial muscle of the labour movement, Australia and New Zealand developed a unique system of industrial courts with the power to determine minimum wages. In the landmark Harvester judgment of 1907, Justice Higgins, the Chair of the First Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, established that ‘a fair and reasonable wage’ was one which was appropriate to ‘the normal needs of an average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilized community’. Accordingly the minimum wage standard was set at a level deemed to be sufficient for a man to support himself, his wife and his children in ‘frugal comfort’ (Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1907).

Coming as it did at the beginning of this century, the establishment of this generous minimum 'living wage' was hailed as a spectacular achievement in living standards and welfare by visitors to Australia and New Zealand. A French visitor, Albert Métin labeled the system 'socialism without a doctrine' (1977). In 1913, an American scholar described the legislation establishing this system as 'the most notable experiment yet made in social democracy' (Hammond, 1913: 285).

Toward end of the 1970s, Australians could boast that remarkably few people in (paid) work fell below the poverty line. The proportion of 'working poor' in Australia was half the average for OECD countries (Henderson, 1978: 169). Regulation of the labour market provided social protection for all employed men and their families. Gradually a welfare safety net was extended to cover those who fell through the mesh of the minimum wage provision, the retired, people with a disability, or widows and deserted wives and their children who lacked the 'protection' of a male provider.

In contrast to Continental Europe, this did not take the form of contributory insurance based system, with the size of its benefits often related to the size of the individual's contributions. Instead, social security in Australia took the form of highly targeted (through income testing), modest, flat rate benefits paid out of general revenue. The Australian welfare system was built on the foundation of a regulated labour market, progressive income tax (rather than a consumption tax), and a comparatively low level of government expenditure on tightly targeted, flat rate benefits

Francis G. Castles (1985, 1994) has called this arrangement a 'wage-earners' welfare state'. The low level of welfare expenditure has often led analysts to group Australia with other English-speaking countries as a 'residual' welfare state, that is, one intended to discourage and stigmatise welfare recipients, which relies almost exclusively on the operations of a free market. The 'wage earner welfare state', however, is distinguished from the 'residual' conception of welfare precisely by a strategy of creating a national minimum wage. It differs from the Scandinavian system of universal rights, for example, because the criterion for inclusion is the status of wage-earner rather than the status of citizen (Castles, 1985: 103).

Castles and Mitchell have argued that Australia and New Zealand belong to a distinct type of welfare state regime identified by patterns of low expenditure and targeted policy instruments with highly equalising redistributive effects (1990: 19). Despite their low spending, these 'radical welfare state regimes' perform comparably with Scandinavian 'social democratic regimes' in terms of outcomes: increased post-tax, post-transfer income equality (Castles and Mitchell, 1990: 22-5).

It is little wonder that Australian welfare workers and researchers used to think that if only they could get people (especially people of work force age) into regular employment, then most social problems would disappear. Regular employment, according to welfare specialists in Australia, secured retirement incomes, eradicated unemployment, raised the status of women, lifted sole parents out of poverty, and 'mainstreamed' people with disabilities. Conversely, being excluded from participation in paid employment was widely regarded as the greatest social danger. However, in the 1990s there has appeared in Australia a whole literature about the problems and dangers associated with employment (Campbell, 1997; Charlesworth, 1996, 1997; Teichner, 1996; Romeyn, 1994; Probert, 1995).

A recent report for the welfare agency, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Reforming Working Time: Alternatives to Unemployment, Casualisation and Excessive Hours*, is based on the presumption that paid employment is a source of new forms of disadvantage and inequality, and that employment may no longer guarantee an adequate standard of living or a meaningful place in society (Buchanan and Bearfield, 1997). As Australia has struggled to remain competitive in the new global economy, union membership has declined, employment conditions have become less secure (casualised), control over working hours and conditions has diminished, and unemployment has risen. The strength of the labour movement used to be the political foundation of the wage earner welfare state. But work force trade union membership has declined in the last few decades, from a high point of over 50 per cent to less than a third (Western, 1996).

There is now a substantial body of literature about 'workers with family responsibilities'. This literature has arisen in response to what has been called the 'greatest social change since World War II' (Peattie and Rein,

1983), namely the large scale (re)entry of women, especially married woman, into the paid labour force. Married women's increasing labour force participation signaled the collapse of the prevailing 'family wage' system, which could perhaps better be described as the 'male breadwinner model' since it assigned responsibility for providing a family income to men and domestic responsibilities to women. Initially, some believed that women's newly acquired breadwinner role would improve the status of women, automatically increasing, among other things, their domestic bargaining power, and initiating a process which reassigned shares of domestic responsibilities between the sexes (England and Kilbourne, 1990; Lundberg and Pollack, 1993). However, it has become clear that, while responsibility for breadwinning is increasingly shared between men and women, men have not proportionately increased their share of domestic responsibilities (Bittman and Pixley, 1997).

Labour markets have no in-built mechanism that ensures that employers will be interested in the lives of employees beyond the workplace. Labour markets tend to work on the assumption that individuals have no responsibilities or commitments that take precedence over the labour contract. The idea of a family wage - paying a wage to support someone other than the wage-earner - has lost favour, even with the unions that once promoted it.

There have also been significant changes in expectations about families. There has been a historical tension between the values of liberty and equality promulgated since the French Revolution, and the patriarchal form of the family, as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and J. S. Mill (1859) pointed out many years ago. Viewed sociologically, a situation where the demand for liberty and equality for all stopped at the door of the family household was inherently unstable. The kind of dependence, subordination and seclusion of women implied in the family wage model has been increasingly rejected by women. Women have sought to increase their independence from men by forming their own links with the labour market, demanding the same pay for the same work and by becoming politically organised. Men have become willing to share the responsibility of breadwinning. Divorce rates are at relatively high levels. Conceptions of marriage have increasingly become centered on

companionship and equality, and less on women's economic dependence and the male breadwinner role, as clearly demonstrated by measurements of these attitudes (Baxter, 1993; Woolcott and Glezer, 1995).

The combination of the demise of the family wage system and the spread of flexible work hours has given rise to a number of troubled prognoses about the future. One prognosis suggests that labour market deregulation is resulting in the maldistribution of (paid) working time, lowering the quality of life for all by obliging some to work excessive hours, while others suffer unemployment (Buchanan and Bearfield, 1997; Schor, 1991). Another prognosis suggests that given the evidence of the comparative failure of men to accept greater responsibility for child care and other domestic tasks, women have become the bearers of a 'dual burden' and will increasingly be disproportionately affected by the shrinking time available for recuperation and leisure (Hochschild 1997, 1989). Yet another position expresses the fear that women, through their efforts to minimise the effects of the 'dual burden', are becoming trapped in disadvantageous part-time employment (Probert, 1995; Watts and Rich, 1991; Tam, 1997).

Australians, especially younger Australians, are betraying signs of feeling pressured by time constraints. In the first wave of a large longitudinal study of women's health³, approximately 60 per cent of young and middle-aged respondents said they had experienced feeling pressured for time 'every day' or 'often' (more than once a week). Less than 20 per cent reported feeling relatively free from pressures of time (that is, feeling pressured at infrequent intervals: 'monthly or never'). The survey showed an inverse relationship between feeling 'rushed, pressured, or too busy' and health assessment, so that the more 'rushed' an individual felt, the greater the likelihood that she would assess her health as poor. Among the mid-aged cohort of Australian women, there was tendency for increasing reports of a feeling of 'constant tiredness' as hours of paid work increased.

3 Lois Bryson, of the Women's Health Australia Project, at the University of Newcastle kindly made these preliminary findings available. The first official study of Australian perceptions of time pressure based on Robinson's *Time Crunch Scale* (Robinson and Godbey, 1997) was conducted in 1997. Data from this study was not available at the time of writing.

3 Ideas About the Future of Leisure Time in Advanced Societies

Australian pride in a leisurely lifestyle has been a distinctive feature of national identity. The link between paid work arrangements and this lifestyle is also characteristic in many respects. However, in the feeling of having lost free time and being more time-pressured, the Australian experience is not very different from the experience of people elsewhere.

Writing in 1974, Jiri Zuzanek noted that ‘two different concepts of the future of leisure in industrial societies have crystallized recently’. The then predominant view predicted ‘a society of leisure’, while the alternative expressed the complete reverse: that ‘the future will be characterized by a scarcity of leisure time’ (Zuzanek, 1974: 293). In the 1960s and 1970s a bounty of leisure was assumed to be among the chief benefits of economic growth. In recent years the movement towards a society of leisure has been proposed more as a policy to mitigate unemployment (see Veal, 1989) and perhaps the view of the scarcity of leisure time has become the more predominant. Linder (1970) first proposed that increasing productivity creates the capacity to consume more goods and that consumption as well as production requires time, so that enjoyment of consumption goods (leisure) becomes increasingly harried. Schor, also attributes much of ‘unexpected decline of leisure’ to the ‘insidious cycle of work-and-spend’ (1991: 107-38).

The core problem for both these theories, and the first reason that the warnings of the prophets have fallen on deaf ears, as Anthony Veal suggested some time ago, is the feeling among specialists in the study of time use ‘that the future has arrived and its has not turned out nearly as badly as the prophets had predicted’ (Veal, 1989: 265-6). Recent work by Jonathan Gershuny in the UK and Robinson and Godbey in the US exemplifies the scepticism of time use specialists.

Gershuny alludes to the same portfolio of theories about the future of leisure. In general, he argues that there is support for the proposition that economic growth results in greater free time, although he acknowledges that the journey toward the modern peaks of free time travels by way of numerous plateaus. Perhaps the apparent trend in the 1980s was unexpected, but viewed in the long term this was exceptional rather than

the basis of a new trend. The average hours of paid work, even for women, are now (following a lag) also broadly conforming to this pattern. 'The conclusion we draw' from the best available evidence of the past 30 years, says Gershuny, 'must be that ... economic development tends on balance to free time from paid work' (1990: 14). According to Gershuny, the historical rise in earnings produces what economists call an 'income effect' on labour supply, so that less work is undertaken. This process of reducing the hours of work, increases the time free for consumption activities. 'The alternative recipe for a balanced economy is', according to Gershuny, 'productivity growth plus shorter working hours plus increasing hours for consumption of the increasing social product' (1990: 21). 'There is no basis, theoretical or empirical', says Gershuny, 'for thinking that we are "running out of time"'. The fact that many people's experience tells them that the world is busier now than before may be a 'confusion of the life-cycle process with a historical one'. 'We all maybe get busier throughout our lives', argues Gershuny, but 'our lives as a whole may still be less busy than those of previous generations' (1990: 22).

A major theme in the recent book by John P. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey (1997) has been the divergence between actual trends in free time and the perceptions of increasing 'time famine'. Bearing in mind that Robinson and Godbey include time spent in education in the category of 'free time', rather than the practice adopted here of treating education as an economic activity, they find that free time has increased by five hours per week since 1965. They point out that this 'translates to a gain of more than six 40-hour work weeks of additional free time per year, or an additional month and a half of vacation' (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 127). Objectively, 'the dream of more leisure time, time freed from the necessity of labour, has been realized' (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 304).

However, Robinson and Godbey concede that the increase in free time came most rapidly in the first ten years and that over the subsequent decade there was only a one hour gain in free time. There is even some weak evidence that there has been a recent 'slowdown in the pace of American life' (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 240). A similar pattern is

evident in the Canadian data with no change in free time between 1986 and 1992 (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 134).

Robinson and Godbey present data showing that an increasing proportion of people perceive their lives as 'rushed' and feel that they do not have enough time to fit in all the activities they should or would like to carry out. A related finding is that people report feeling subject to more 'stress' from time constraints. To complete the picture of a harried society, people agree with the proposition that they feel that they have 'less free time than in the past' (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 230-40).

The estimates of free time that respondents give in these surveys are markedly lower than the amounts time-diary studies show they have. As Robinson and Godbey note,

... in collective and societal terms, Americans have substantially reduced the number of hours a week that are devoted to work behaviors, but simultaneously feel more rushed and believe they have less free time. (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 303-4).

What can explain this paradox? Robinson and Godbey propose that it is perhaps the result of a revolution of rising expectations. Real increases in free time cannot keep pace with escalating expectations about how much free time is necessary, the result being a subjective experience of scarce free time. 'As Samuelson observed', say Robinson and Godbey, 'people are not aware of the extent to which their expectations about everyday life have increased or how former expectations have been fulfilled' (1997: 305). Further, according to these authors, there is something strangely comforting and attractive about adopting the self-righteous and aggrieved subject position of the victim.

Alternative explanations might surface if one adopted an alternative index of time pressure. Feeling rushed, for example, may result from the sheer number of separate activities rather than from their total duration. A rapid succession of short, frequently changing episodes of activity might be experienced as time pressure. Moreover, people engage in more than one activity for a significant proportion of the day and they may be

reporting an experience of having to do too much at once. Using the measure of the number of leisure activities accompanied by simultaneous activities involving unpaid work, for example, shows that women are more likely than men to be attending to family responsibilities while ostensibly enjoying leisure (Bittman and Matheson, 1996: 4). Unfortunately, owing to the difficulty and expense of collecting reliable information about simultaneous activities, a thorough investigation of the issue of increasingly onerous background responsibilities accompanying free time is currently only possible in one country (Australia), at one point in time (1992). Such an investigation is therefore beyond the scope of this paper and will have to wait until more data becomes available, later in the year.

From the above discussion it is obvious that there is some dispute about whether there is a unilinear relationship between economic development and the growth of aggregate free time, especially with concessions about 'exceptional periods' and potential 'slowdowns'. Intriguingly, the subjective experience of having less free time may not be a good guide to historical movements in free time. Since free time plays such a significant role in Australian cultural identity and because any general association between economic growth and increased free time should also be applicable to that country, the detailed analysis of trends in Australian free time is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

4 A Method for the Study of Australian Trends in Time Use

The data used to test these hypotheses are drawn from three Australian time use surveys. Time use surveys ask respondents to complete a diary of their daily activities. These surveys aim to record the duration of every activity undertaken in the course of a day. This provides information on what time a household allocates to work, rest and play. Repeated testing has shown that the diary is by far the most valid and reliable form of collecting information about time use (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 57-67; Robinson and Gershuny, 1994; Bittman, 1995: 7-8).

Time use surveys have been conducted since the early decades of this century, but a major advance accompanied the comparative study of time

use in 13 nations, conducted under the directorship of the Hungarian statistician, Alexander Szalai (Szalai et al., 1972). The key legacy of the Szalai study, as it has become known, was that it standardised activity classification. To this day, activity classifications used by major statistical organisations either use the Szalai activity categories directly or have developed classifications derived from it. This has opened the way for comparisons both cross-nationally and over different historical periods.

Australia's first publicly sponsored time use survey was conducted on behalf of the Cities Commission in 1974. This study was designed to compare time use in a regional growth center (Albury-Wodonga) with time use in a large metropolitan city (Melbourne). The final sample yielded 1492 one-day diaries from respondents, divided fairly evenly between Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga. Interviews were conducted between March and September, and activities were classified according to the Szalai 99 activity code. Respondents were between 18-65 years of age (Cities Commission, 1975).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1988) conducted a large-scale pilot survey in May-June 1987 in the city of Sydney. This survey was weighted to the 1981 census population benchmarks. It collected two diary days for all respondents over 14 years of age, and had a completed sample size of 3181 diary days. It employed an activity code largely derived from the Canadian experience (itself a modification of the Szalai 99 activity code). A formal method for expressing these codes in the Szalai format has been developed (Bittman, 1992).

The first full scale national time use survey was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1992. This survey was collected at four separate periods over the calendar year (with the aim of capturing seasonal variation). Once again, two-day diaries for all persons over the age of 14 years were collected. Only those living in private dwellings were selected for the sample. The final national sample contained 13 937 diary days. Although a more refined 75 activity code was developed for the 1992 survey, care was taken to maintain the possibility of aggregation to the 57 activity code used in the 1987 pilot study in Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1993a).

There are a number of steps which need to be taken before the results of these surveys can be compared. The most obvious issues are associated with geographical units and seasons. A study of the effect of regions on time use in Australia shows that there is little difference between the various major metropolises in Australia and, moreover, between national averages and the average time for any major metropolitan area. Much of the difference between rural and urban time uses can be explained by the different characteristics of the two sub-populations rather than by something intrinsic to the locality (Bittman, 1995: 7-8). In Australia, seasonal variation in time use, at the level of aggregated activity groups is not marked (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1993b: 39-40). These findings are supported by Robinson and Godbey (1997) and Gershuny (1990).

Since the issue is whether Australia's patterns of leisure are distinctive, or whether they resemble those found across the developed societies of Western Europe and North America, it is important that data be comparable with that collected in other nations. The Australian data were modified to be comparable with the data held in the Multinational Longitudinal Time Budget Data Archive (Gershuny, 1990). This limited the comparison to adults aged between 20 and 59 years. Fortunately this is the age range, covering people of labour force age, of the group to which most of the theories discussed in the earlier sections of this article are intended to apply. Details of the pooled final sample size of 13 137 respondents are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Year and Sex Composition of the Pooled Australian Dataset

	Male	Female	Total
1974	551	725	1276
1987	1088	1171	2259
1992	4544	5058	9602
Total	6183	6954	13 137

There is a tradition in the time use literature of distinguishing between various broad classes of time use which are believed to be fundamentally different in character. Robinson and Godbey, for example, argue that

time must be allocated between 'contracted time', 'committed time', 'personal time' and 'free time' (1997: 11-16).

Contracted time is time committed to income producing activities in the market place, such as working for a wage or the time spent by self-employed persons in their business activities. In its broadest sense it also includes the time spent commuting to work, breaks at work and, more controversially, time spent in formal study. The label 'paid work etc.' is used to refer to this category of time use throughout this article.

The label 'committed time' reflects the obligatory character of unpaid work. It includes child care, food preparation, house cleaning, laundry, household management, gardening, house maintenance and repairs, car care and shopping. This broad category of time use is called 'unpaid work' in this article.

Personal time is associated with the maintenance of bodily functions: sleeping, eating, washing, grooming, dressing and medical treatment. In this article such activity is called 'self care' to distinguish it from narrower uses of the term personal care.

Free time is a residual category. It is the time that remains after maintaining one's body in a healthy and socially acceptable state, contracting time to the market, and meeting domestic and family responsibilities. Free time encompasses both time devoted to activities undertaken explicitly for leisure, and discretionary uses of available time such as religious and civic activities.

The treatment of time spent traveling has only recently become more standardised. The emerging standard is to assign traveling time to its associated purpose. In this way one can speak about 'the journey to (paid) work', 'travel to shopping', or 'leisure travel', and travel time can be assigned to the appropriate broad activity category. However, because the data reports here were often collected decades ago, the treatment of travel is not always consistent with this nascent standard. As a result, the time spent traveling to (paid) work is assigned to the category 'paid work etc.', travel time associated with domestic labour is assigned to the category 'unpaid work', while the remaining travel time is grouped into a category of its own, 'other travel'.

5 Gross Changes in the Allocation of Time, 1974-1992

A consistent and striking finding of time use research is the profound and persistent influence of sex differences on the average time spent in different activities. In practice, the sexual division of labour remains one of the most important principles of organisation in contemporary societies. But it comes as a shock to most sociologists that, contrary to expectation, neither income, education nor occupation are important determinants of how people spend their time. Instead, sex and life course status (sometimes proxied by age) are the most profound influences (Bittman and Pixley, 1997: 85-115).

The continuing significance of the sexual division of labour in Australian society can be seen in Table 2. Men continue to specialise in the commitment of time to paid work (men's average hours of paid work etc. are more than double women's), and women seem to be unequally responsible for domestic and family care labour (women's average hours of unpaid work are more than double men's). Differences between men's and women's average time spent in self care, other travel and free time are comparatively minor. Furthermore, over the 18-year period between 1974 and 1992 even these differences are apparently diminishing.

Table 2: Weighted Mean Hours per Week Spent in Broad Activity Categories by Sex by Year of Survey

Year of Survey	Men			Women		
	1974	1987	1992	1974	1987	1992
Paid work etc.	44.91	47.19	43.92	15.21	23.67	21.32
Unpaid work	12.31	14.10	15.90	41.53	35.51	35.02
Self care	71.72	70.87	69.60	76.15	74.21	72.00
Other travel	4.02	3.64	2.95	3.15	2.79	3.06
Free time	35.04	32.20	35.63	31.96	32.55	36.60

Changes in the average time devoted to paid work over this period reflect a complicated amalgam of often contradictory long- and short-term trends. The figures are the result of trends affecting the sex composition the (paid) work force, the length of 'working life' and the business cycle.

Women have been increasing their labour force participation over the last few decades. Changes in school retention rates and in the proportion undertaking post-secondary education have been most dramatic among women. The proportion of women in the age range 20-59 years who were in the labour force rose steadily, from 43 per cent in 1974 to 64 per cent in 1992, although the largest increases have been in part-time work.

The working life of men has also been shortened by increasing years of education. In the 18 years between 1974 and 1992 there has been a trebling of the average time devoted to education by Australian men and women aged 20 to 24 years, reflecting the larger proportions of this age cohort in full-time post-secondary education. The 1992 levels are, however, slightly below those of 1987 when the post-secondary education phenomena was at its peak.

The length of men's working life has also been uniquely affected by earlier retirement. Inducements for early retirement have accompanied the organisational restructuring that has characterised the last decade, and early retirement has been rising steeply. Whereas 11 per cent of 55 to 59-year-old men had left the workforce in 1974, by 1992 over a quarter of men this age were no longer in the labour force. The proportion of men in this age range not in the labour force doubled over this period.

The impact of all these trends has been modified by the business cycle and its effect on the demand for labour. The early 1970s in Australia were part of the era of postwar full-employment, with low unemployment and a strong demand for labour. The labour market is a lagging indicator of the business cycle, so 1987 represents the end of the period of comparative boom conditions for labour, and 1992 represents a period of high unemployment as a consequence of the recession in 1991.

While there may be fewer men in the category of full-time male worker than in the past, on average a man in full-time work in 1992 spent an extra three-quarters of an hour in paid work and associated travel than his equivalent in 1974. Assuming that a measurement of men's subjective experience would show similar results to that found for women, then for the large majority of men (83 per cent), there is some factual basis for their subjective feelings of time pressure. The trend in hours of full-time work is upward. However the increase is not linear -

full-time workers worked longer hours in 1987 than in 1992. In 1987, full-time employed men worked, on average, three hours 22 minutes longer per week than their 1974 counterparts. Full-time workers would work longest when the labour market is booming (1987), when overtime is available, than during a recession (1992).

Over the same historical period, Australian women's experience has been different from that of Australian men. In 1992, women full-time workers in the 20-59 years age range worked an average of 12 minutes less per week than their counterparts in 1974. However, there were slightly more women in full-time employment in 1992 than in 1974. The largest growth in Australian women's employment has come in the form of an increasing proportion of women in part-time employment. Among women aged 20-59 years, the proportion employed for less than 30 hours per week has jumped to 29 per cent in 1992, compared with 12 per cent in 1974. At the same time the proportion not in the labour force declined from 57 per cent to 33 per cent in just 18 years. While many more women with dependent children are currently in the paid work force, this expansion has largely taken the shape of part-time work. Women's sense of being pressured for time comes from the fact that, whatever paid work they undertake, with very few exceptions women remain responsible for the unpaid work of domestic labour and child care.

Cross-sectional analysis has repeatedly shown that the higher a woman's hours of paid work, the lower her hours of unpaid work (Bittman, 1992; Gershuny, 1992). It is also clear from cross-sectional analysis that the burden of responsibility for the care of pre-school children falls upon women, and that this inhibits their labour force participation. Moreover, in families where women work longer hours in the paid labour force, there is no compensating increase in the hours of unpaid work performed by husbands or children. Regardless of the hours of paid work by wives and mothers, other family members continue to spend the same time in unpaid work as they would if she were not in the (paid) labour force (Bittman and Pixley, 1997). Given that women's labour force participation is rising, this suggests that, under the circumstances described above, there are two main strategies of adaptation open to them. The first is control over fertility, over the number and the timing of births. The second is a unilateral downward adjustment of their hours of

unpaid work. At the end of the twentieth century, Australian women are employing both these strategies: reducing fertility and delaying births (Hugo, 1992), and as can be seen in Table 2, reducing their average hours of unpaid work. In 1992, Australian women (aged 20-59 years) reduced the average weekly time they spent in unpaid work by six and a half hours, and increased their average weekly hours of paid work by almost the same amount.

In a process that has attracted some attention, men of similar age over the same period have increased the average time they spend in unpaid work by three and half hours per week, while their time spent in paid work has declined, on the average, by one hour per week. This process could not have been anticipated from cross-sectional analyses because at each point in time the distribution of men's unpaid work hours and the pattern of its associations have been remarkably similar. For example, in 1974, 1987 and 1992, there was no relationship between a wife's hours of paid work and her husband's hours of unpaid work, but in each successive survey the men's average hours of unpaid work rose regardless of their wives' labour force commitments. In absolute terms, however, men's hours of unpaid work remain low, the increase in their average hours of unpaid work being half the size of the average reduction in women's unpaid work hours.

Both men and women in this age range have experienced a significant fall in the average time devoted to self-care. Self-care includes sleeping, personal hygiene, grooming, eating and medical self care activities. In the case of men, the average reduction is a little over two hours per week. This is remarkable because it is associated with a decrease in average weekly hours of (paid) work. The decline in the average time spent in self-care among women has been much more dramatic, more than four hours per week in the 18-year period covered by these studies. It seems that the time saved through the reduction of self-care activities has been devoted to extra free time. In addition to the trade-off between paid work time and unpaid work time, it now seems that women have also been trading off self-care time for extra free time.

Part of the reduction is no doubt associated with changes in the form of eating meals. Meals at home are conventionally grouped with self-care activities, whereas meals out with family and/or friends are

conventionally grouped with leisure activities. Over the last decade or more, there has been a significant growth in the consumption of meals out by Australian households (Bittman, 1998). However, the shift towards meals out is more than an illusory increase in free time produced by the coding convention: it is a genuine shift from eating in a domestic setting with its associated domestic work, to activities pursued for their pleasant and sociable components.

Finally, despite the weight of popular opinion about increased time pressure, it appears that, at worst, average hours available for free time activities have not decreased and that at best, and certainly for women, they have most likely increased. In 1992, 20 to 59-year-old Australian women had, on average, four hours per week more free time than in 1974. On this evidence, Australia conforms to the paradoxical pattern described by both Gershuny (1992: 22) and Robinson and Godbey (1997: 240) - an increased perception of time poverty which has not been accompanied by an actual decrease in free time, but rather, by a possible increase.

6 Net Trends in Free Time

Of course, any conclusion about free time based solely on the examination of changes in average time for the population aged 20-59 years would be partial and incomplete. As has been noted earlier, between 1974 and 1992 there have been several significant shifts in the structure and composition of the Australian population. Australia in 1992 had a lower rate of marriage than 1974. On the whole, people married at later age and were significantly more likely to divorce. There were fewer families with children and the parents were older than in 1974 (Hugo, 1992; McDonald, 1995). In 1992, there were almost 50 per cent more women in this age range in the paid labour force than in 1974, and the gross aggregate hours worked by men had fallen slightly.

All of these changes have affected the way men and women allocate their time because they have affected the balance between paid and unpaid work. Marriage increases unpaid work for women and decreases indoor housework for men. Consequently, divorce increases men's housework time, while women's time is likely to be reduced, if there is any change

at all. The presence of pre-school children increases hours of unpaid work, and has differential effects on the paid work time of men and women. In 1992, men whose youngest child was between two and four years of age worked longer average hours of paid work than men with older children or no children at all. For women in 1992, the obverse was true: those with pre-school children had the shortest hours of paid work. There is also a trade-off, stronger for women than for men, between hours of paid work and hours of unpaid work.

Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) (Andrews et al., 1973) is a technique, based on multiple regression, devised to show the association between one variable (in this case free time) and another (year of the survey) while holding all other factors constant. It permits an understanding of changes in free time over the period 1974 to 1992, if there had been no other important changes. Using this technique allows for a more secure understanding of changes in free time because we have eliminated the other shifts in the composition of the population over the same period. Changes in free time can be examined more directly because the influence of confounding factors has been removed.

In Table 3, the results of the MCA procedure are shown as grand means and deviations from the grand mean. The grand mean for the free time of all 20 to 59-year-old men is a little more than 35 hours per week. Other being things equal, the effect of full-time employment is to reduce men's free time by more than three hours per week, that is, men in full-time employment have on average less than 32 hours free time per week. Men working part-time enjoy five hours more free time per week than the mean, giving a total of more than 40 hour per week. As might be expected, non-employed men have more free time than men in any form of employment, having on average more than 52 hours.

Although the grand mean for women in the same age range is over 35 hours per week and slightly higher (14 minutes per week) than the grand mean for men, regardless of their particular employment status women have less free time than comparable men (28.41 hours per week compared with 31.80 hours per week). On average, women employed full time have roughly three and a half hours per week less free time than

Table 3: Grand Means and MCA Effects (deviations from the grand mean), Hours per Week

	Men	Women
Grand mean	35.11	35.35
Effects		
Employment	*(a)	*
Full-time	-3.31	-6.94
Part-time	5.55	-0.45
Not employed	17.12	6.59
	0.00	0.00
Age group		*
Below 45 years	0.29	0.25
45-54 years	-0.79	-1.03
55-59 years	-0.49	0.36
Civil status	*	*
Married, de facto	-0.80	-1.14
Separated, divorced, widowed	2.08	3.21
Children	*	*
No children	1.58	3.37
Pre-school age children	-2.48	-6.70
Children, aged 5-14 years	-1.61	-1.03
Day of the week	*	*
Sunday	18.21	10.82
Monday	-4.54	-3.83
Tuesday	-6.91	-3.92
Wednesday	-7.21	-4.26
Thursday	-7.06	-5.43
Friday	-3.80	-2.85
Saturday	13.95	9.38
Year	*	*
1974	0.29	-2.94
1987	-2.07	-3.49
1992	0.46	1.23
Adjusted R-squared	0.31	0.21

Note: a) Significant at .05 level or better

equivalent men. The average free time available to women in full-time employment is substantially less (almost seven hours per week less) than the average free time available to all women. Only responsibility for pre-school children rivals the sheer magnitude of the effect of full-time employment on women's free time. Among part-time workers, men enjoy five and a three-quarters hours more free time a week than women, and among the non-employed, men's advantage over women stretches to more than ten hours per week. These differences are consistent with the proposition that men exchange paid work responsibilities for free time, whereas women exchange paid and unpaid responsibilities.

When all other factors are held constant, men and women below 45 years of age have free time slightly above the average, while those in the middle age group (45-54 years) have below average free time. Surprisingly, when the influence of employment status and other factors is removed, men over 54 years of age have below average free time, while equivalent women have slightly above average free time. However, it should be noted that effects of this age grouping on men's average free time (after controlling for employment and other factors) are not significant.

Marriage has the effect of shortening free time for both men and women. Being single results in above average free time for both sexes, but the effects of marriage are more pronounced for women.

After full-time employment, the factor most likely to diminish women's free time is responsibility for pre-school children. All other things being equal, being the mother of a pre-schooler reduces a woman's average free time by six and three-quarter hours a week. Being the father of a pre-school child also leads to less free time, but the reduction of roughly two and a half hours per week is about a third that experienced by women. Older children also diminish parents' free time, although to a lesser extent, the effect for men (one and a half hours less per week) being a little greater than for equivalent women (one hour less). Childlessness promotes greater hours of free time, especially for women. Free time among women without dependent children is more than three hours above the average for all women, while childless men's hours of free time are one and half hours above the weekly average for all men. These findings are consistent with the pattern of variation in subjective

feeling of time pressure experienced by women in the US. Those with the lowest free time - full-time employed, middle age range mothers of pre-school children - also report the highest levels of feeling time pressured (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 131, 236).

Days of the week have been included in the MCA procedure to ensure that different days are held in the same proportions for each survey. This is to avoid the implausibility of assuming that the week is composed of seven repetitions of the same day. For example, if the week were composed only of Sundays men would have an average of 52 and a half hours of free time per week. A more plausible form of this information is presented in Table 4, which shows the average number of hours of free time available on each day.

Table 4: MCA Adjusted Mean Daily Hours of Free Time

Day of the week	Men	Women
Sunday	7.62	6.60
Monday	4.37	4.50
Tuesday	4.03	4.49
Wednesday	3.99	4.44
Thursday	4.01	4.27
Friday	4.47	4.64
Saturday	7.01	6.39

As might be expected, free time is more heavily concentrated on weekend days and peak on Sunday, with an average of more than seven and a half hours free time for men and more than six and half hours for women. That women's average weekend hours of free time are consistently lower than men's on both Saturday and Sunday points to the sexually unequal division of domestic responsibilities. Unlike most paid work, unpaid work allows no rest simply because it is the weekend. On week days, women's average free time hovers around four and a half hours a day, between ten and thirty minutes higher than the daily average for men. Among men, the distribution of free time over the week has a marked U-shape, with the lowest amount of daily free time falling on a Wednesday, and rising monotonically either side of this trough. There is also some evidence of a pattern of consolidating free time around the weekend, a pattern consistent with the notion that men prefer to take

leave on the days closest to the weekend, thereby creating a long weekend.

The cumulative significance of these effects is to create sub-populations of the time-rich and the time-poor. Married, full-time employed women aged 45-54 years, with children under five years of age, would be the extreme of time-poverty. On the basis of this MCA procedure, such women would have an estimated 19 and half hours of free time a week, while her male counterpart (the most time-poor group among males) would have an estimated 27 hours 43 minutes per week of free time. The extreme of time-wealth is found among single, non-employed men, below 45 years of age, with no dependent children. Such men are estimated to have 56 hours eleven minutes per week of free time. Women with similar characteristics have an estimated 37 hours 26 minutes per week free time and are the most time-wealthy among women.

Finally, the weekly average hours of free time for each of the surveys, all other factors held constant, are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: MCA Adjusted Weekly Hours of Free Time

Year	Men	Women
1974	35.39	32.41
1987	33.04	31.86
1992	35.57	36.58

Contrary to popular perception, this table shows that, for both men and women and after controlling for confounding influences, average weekly hours of free time were higher in 1992 than in 1974. It is evident that compared to 1974, average free time decreased in 1987 before recovering to exceed 1974 levels. It is noteworthy that, despite controlling for various forms of employment, there are still apparent business cycle effects. One explanation for this cyclical pattern could be that, during boom periods, employers require longer hours of work from those already in employment, in addition to hiring extra labour.

There is also evidence that compared to 1974 there is a noticeable difference in the size of this increase according to sex. Whereas the average free time for men in 1992 was a mere 11 minutes per week

greater than in 1974, the increase in average free time gained by women was a substantial four hours ten minutes per week. Perhaps even more remarkably, women's average weekly hours of free time have risen from three hours less to one hour more than men's. In the 13 years between 1974 and 1987, women's average net hours of free time remained below that of men, although the gap between the sexes narrowed. Metaphorically, women have come from last to first. In the five year period between 1987 and 1992, the rate of movement relative to men increased from an average gain of eight minutes per week each year for the years before 1987, to one of 26 minutes per week for every year after 1987.

7 International Comparisons

Returning to the theme of leisure and Australian national identity, it is reasonable to ask: how distinctively Australian are the changes in Australian free time? This question can be further analysed according to the major propositions implied in it: that Australia experienced a golden age of leisure which ended in 1983 with the floating of the Australian dollar and the increasing globalisation of the Australian economy. The inference that flows from this proposition is that Australia should rank very high (if not highest) in terms of the average weekly free time enjoyed by men and women, in the 1970s. A ranking of countries by weekly hours of free time is shown in Table 6.

This ranking is derived from the Multinational Time Budget Data Archive, with the Australian surveys added in a comparable form. This produces a pooled dataset containing 128 931 cases drawn from 36 surveys conducted in 19 countries and covering the period from 1961 to 1992. Since the surveys for each country were not collected in the same years, each survey was assigned to one comparatively narrow band of historical time. These time periods are set out in Table 7. An MCA procedure was used to hold the historical period constant. The ranking of weekly hours of free time for both men and women are based on the estimate of the national deviation from the grand mean of the entire dataset. Since these deviations are deviations at the mean value for the pooled dataset for all variables, in effect this procedure provides an

Table 6: Countries Ranked by Male Average Weekly Hours of Free Time
(MCA Adjusted to circa 1978)

	Men	Women
Denmark	46.79	45.33
Netherlands	43.09	41.91
Canada	37.51	35.05
UK	36.84	36.01
Finland	35.94	33.41
Italy (Turin)	35.62	29.56
Belgium	35.52	31.63
Sweden	35.11	32.02
West Germany	34.93	30.95
Czechoslovakia	34.81	24.76
USA	34.49	34.30
Australia	33.05	33.78
Norway	32.43	32.14
Poland	31.40	24.52
East Germany	31.31	25.07
France	30.68	25.82
Yugoslavia	30.36	19.98
Bulgaria	30.23	26.27
Hungary	24.94	19.68

Table 7: Hours per Week Free Time: MCA Derived Period Effects for Whole Multinational Dataset

		Men	Women
Grand Mean		34.42	31.78
Period	1961-1970	-4.46	-3.48
	1971-1977	-0.40	-0.62
	1978-1982	1.89	1.34
	1983-1991	0.63	0.77
	1992 onwards	2.70	2.07

estimate of relative weekly free time in the mean period (1978-1982), and probably towards the beginning of this period.

Australian women lead a relatively leisurely existence, ranking sixth out of the nineteen nations. Remarkably, Australia is the only nation where women's average free time exceeded men's average free time. In the US, Norway, Denmark and the UK, there was some parity between the sexes in their average weekly hours of free time at the end of the 1970s. Other countries show varying degrees of disparity, those disadvantaged by less than average free time being invariably women. The disparities are relatively minor in the Netherlands, Canada and the Scandinavian countries, increasing in severity in the Low Countries, West Germany, the Latin countries and Eastern Europe.

By contrast, circa 1978 Australian men's free time was below the world average, ranking a lowly twelfth out of nineteen. In view of the cultural importance of a leisurely lifestyle and its identification as distinctively Australian, this is a surprising finding. It is even more so, given the significant role popularly attributed to the industrial victories of Australian men. Could these be the same Australians from the golden era, referred to by the Prime Minister (Howard, 1995) as a 'laid back and carefree people'? It would seem that Australians' images of their own society are rooted in ignorance about how the rest of world, was also experiencing the benefits of free time. This is not to say that Australians' belief in a paradise lost does not have other social consequences, only that it is not based in actual changes in the use of time.

Further evidence that the Australian experience of leisure is not a distinctive phenomenon comes from the pattern of change in free time presented in Table 7. This table shows how more free time became steadily available to both men and women from 1961 to 1983, was reduced in the 1980s, and then recovered to resume a historical pattern of increase. This pattern of historical change in free time is based on the average for 19 separate countries. The historical change in free time in Australia conforms to this broad pattern.

Is leisure shrinking as we move towards the next century? Gershuny argued that leisure time increases with economic development. However, the evidence he presented involved declines in paid and unpaid work

time, not direct measurement of movements in free time. Moreover, his measurements compared only two points in time, and hence cannot be used to detect cyclical movements. Nevertheless, if it is the case that there have been only a few short periods of negative economic growth in Australia in the period under investigation, the underlying trend toward increasing free time is broadly consistent with his view. Robinson and Godbey are able to compare three points in recent American history, covering two decades (1965, 1975 and 1985). The pattern of a more rapid increase in the first decade followed by a distinct slowing of that increase is consistent with the cyclical pattern across the pooled data (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 126).

It is interesting to note that Robinson and Godbey describe the beginnings of what could be a pattern of lagged subjective response to the business cycle with the feeling of being time pressured, rising until 1992 and then either falling or staying steady (1997: 239-40).

8 Conclusion

Investigating changes in free time in Australia, reveals that, despite the weight of popular opinion to the contrary, Australians are not world leaders in leisure. There are considerable differences between the time rich and the time poor. Married, full-time employed women aged 45-54 years, with children under five years of age, are the group experiencing the extreme of time-poverty. At the opposite extreme single, non-employed men, below 45 years of age, with no dependent children experience the greatest time wealth. The difference in the average free time experienced by these groups is roughly 37 hours per week. Notwithstanding these differences and without suspecting it, Australians may be the most egalitarian society in term of the distribution of free time between the sexes.

As elsewhere in the world there is evidence that Australians have gained free time over the period under consideration. The situation of women significantly improved over this period. However, there is also evidence of a cyclical trend. When measurements are available for longer historical periods it may be possible to judge whether these cyclical movements are merely oscillations around a more fundamental upward

trend, or an indication that leisure time could also fall to levels below that experienced in the mid-1960s. A further implication of these movements is that the relationship between economic growth and free time can also be negative. Times of economic boom can also reduce free time, especially among prime working age individuals. This suggests that the theory that one benefit of economic growth is more leisure requires, at a minimum, refinement.

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