

## 'All Else Confusion': What Time Use Surveys Show About Changes in Gender Equity

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**‘ALL ELSE CONFUSION’:  
WHAT TIME USE SURVEYS  
SHOW ABOUT CHANGES IN  
GENDER EQUITY**

by Michael Bittman and  
George Matheson

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Tony Eardley  
Editor

## Abstract

Not so long ago most industrial societies believed that the private life of families should be organised around a division of male 'provider' and female 'homemaker'. The poet, Lord Alfred Tennyson, believed only this arrangement accorded with nature and reason, and declared 'all else confusion'. As we approach the end of the twentieth century it is clear that 'providing' is no longer the exclusive responsibility of men. However, opinion is divided as to whether women's new responsibilities for paid employment will be offset by husbands' increased responsibilities for home and family. Arlie Hochschild (1989) has complained of a 'stalled revolution' in men's domestic responsibilities and warned that women are being obliged to work a 'second shift' after arriving home from (paid) work. At the other extreme the symmetrical family thesis assumes that women's increasing income equality with men is part of larger process of convergence that will inevitably lead to equality in domestic responsibilities. Jonathan Gershuny's theory of 'lagged adaptation' proposes a theoretical framework capable of reconciling these apparently opposed views. According to Gershuny, men's domestic adaptation to their partner's employment is delayed by short- and long-run processes. In this way both the 'stalled revolution' and the convergence of sex roles are to be expected. This paper examines the evidence for both short-run lags, using longitudinal data from the German Socio-economic Panel, and long-run lags using a cohort analysis of Australian time use data 1974-1992. While finding some support for the Gershuny theory, it concludes that women's adaptations has been empirically the more important process.

# 1 The Future of the Sexual Division of Labour

Not too long ago most industrial societies believed that the private life of families should be organised around a division of male ‘provider’ and female ‘homemaker’. In the words of the poet Lord Alfred Tennyson,

Man for the field and women for the hearth:  
Man for the sword and for the needle she:  
Man with the head and women with the heart:  
Man to command and women to obey;  
All else confusion. (Tennyson, Alfred, Lord, 1847,  
*The Princess, iv, Introductory Song*, line 427)

It was not just poets who believed that the division into masculine providers and feminine homemakers was the moral and proper order of things. Legislators, trade unions and the designers of the welfare state also assumed this fundamental division between the roles of the sexes (Sainsbury, 1994).

In this context it is hardly surprising that the rising proportion of married women in paid employment has been greeted by many as one of the most important social changes in the late twentieth century. The British sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1991; 1992), is just one of a number of celebrated thinkers who sees women’s new found economic independence as revolutionary. Building on the work of Ulrich Beck (1992) and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens believes that the change in women’s employment patterns is one of the crucial factors behind the recent upheavals in people’s everyday lives. He describes this as the ‘transformation of intimacy’ (1992).

Competition among Australian commentators to best describe the significance of women’s large-scale entry into the paid labour force has led to an escalation of ever more dramatic claims. The popular commentator Hugh Mackay lists in his book, *Reinventing Australia* (1993), the key contemporary changes in Australian society: immigration and the end of ‘Anglo’ cultural hegemony; the passing of full employment and the widening gulf between rich and poor; the credit card boom and the end of saving; and the revolution in gender roles and family relations. Of all these changes, Mackay says: ‘There is no doubt

about which redefinition of the last 20 years has had the most impact: it is the redefinition of gender roles' (McKay, 1993: 24).

It is sobering to remind ourselves, that we only have to go back as far as the mid-1970s to realise that a revolution of breathtaking speed has taken place in Australian women's view of themselves - and, by implication, in their view of men. (Mackay, 1993: 24)

Not to be outdone, the Australian economic historian Graeme Snooks, argues that the change in women's labour force participation is the fulcrum of something he calls 'the new economic revolution', comparable in scale and significance to the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Snooks, 1994: 14-15)

## **2 Competing Interpretations of Change**

While there is general agreement about the significance of the collapse of the provider/homemaker system, there is hardly any agreement about how to interpret the meaning of these changes. Interpretations range from a harmonious vision of emerging equality between the genders to dark predictions that women will become superexploited.

Let us begin with the last mentioned of these predictions. Arlie Hochschild (1989), for example, following in the footsteps of earlier feminists, complains of a 'stalled revolution' and asserts that men's failure to change is obliging women to work a 'second shift'. Catherine Hakim (1995) recently attracted a popular notoriety by reversing the process of blame. It is women not men, Hakim argues, who hold women back. Hakim suggests that the majority of women are home-centred, do not want careers and deliberately choose employment in lowly part-time jobs with little responsibility. This gives rise to two tribes: single career minded feminists (who, Hakim argues, have distorted the political agenda to portray all women as like themselves) and a silent majority of family-centred women on what Americans call the 'mommy track'.

Much of this discussion, however, has run ahead of the information available. Many theories about these changes have been based on cross-

sectional information, that is, information about one point in time. A proper test of these theories would require data from at least two points in time and some of these theories, as we shall see, require that we follow the same individual over time.

In contrast, Jonathan Gershuny (1995; Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994) suggests that the present situation is transitional. He agrees that contemporary women are working the 'second shift' but argues that this inequitable situation is slowly resolving itself as men belatedly adapt to women's greater role as providers and begin to assume greater domestic responsibilities. Gershuny calls this pattern of change 'lagged adaptation'. This paper concentrates on Gershuny's theory of lagged adaptation, for three main reasons. First, it is a plausible theory which attracts widespread sympathy. Secondly, it is grounded in a long acquaintance with time use statistics, and thirdly it is the product of an attempt to summarise historical change. In the process of dealing with Gershuny's theory one is obliged to examine propositions at the centre of competing theories. In the paper we argue that Gershuny is both right and wrong - right about the long term trend towards sexual equality and wrong about the processes by which this is being achieved.

### **3 'Total' Work, Sex Equity and Confusion**

Before considering what is specific to Jonathan Gershuny's theory of lagged adaptation, let us begin by clearing away a distracting spectacle: namely, the use of 'total work' as an indicator of sexual equality. This largely derives from the ambiguous use of concept of the 'second shift', 'dual burden', or 'double load' as it has sometimes been known. Some authors have treated this concept in a very literal manner, assuming that women's increased hours of paid employment would simply be added to an undiminished quantity of time spent in unpaid work - practically a quantitative doubling. A weaker version of this interpretation comes from those with more familiarity with the results of time use investigation. This version assumes that a decrease in time spent in unpaid work is not sufficient to compensate women for the increased hours of paid work and that the result is an unfair excess burden on women compared to men. By contrast, some theorists accept the 'second shift' as a metaphorical concept implying that while women's access to the labour market is

becoming more comparable with men's, the domestic responsibilities of the latter remain notably smaller than women's.

I believe that this last interpretation of the meaning of the second shift is the only sustainable one. Klas Rydenstam (1994), has argued that there is no literal 'second shift' in Sweden because the total paid and unpaid work-time of men and women in aggregate is roughly equal. A similar situation applies in Australia. However, this apparent 'equality' in the burden of all types of work masks a deep inequality in responsibility for domestic tasks which Rydenstam uncovers by event history analysis.

The idea that equality is reached when the 'total' primary activity workloads of women are equal to those of men rests on a cluster of dubious assumptions and has greatly confused the issue. First, this idea rests on the presumption that data about primary activities are sufficient and secondary activities need not be considered. In Australia (and we suspect elsewhere) if secondary activities are examined, then a clear difference between men and women re-emerges<sup>1</sup>. Second, perhaps the most heroic assumption is that family households operate as single units, to maximise the family's joint utility. This assumption conflicts with the individualistic basis of utility theory. It is difficult to demonstrate that the outcomes over the life course are the same for men and women, let alone for parents and children. Moreover, concentration on what is common to both paid and unpaid work deflects attention from the important difference between paid and unpaid work - namely, that some work is rewarded with pay (and hence the status and power that this confers) while some is not. This reminds us of the core issue at stake: do women's family responsibilities result in social disadvantage? If it can be shown that in most Western countries men get paid for 65-70 per cent of all their primary work time while women get paid for only 30-35 per cent of their's, then the equality of 'total' work time seems largely irrelevant. In practice it is a return to the philosophy expressed in the Tennyson poem.

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1 Our analysis of the Australian 1992 Time Use Survey (ABS, 1994b), shows that if the secondary unpaid work activities accompanying personal care or leisure are considered, a clear difference between men (mean of 42 minutes per day) and women (mean of 88 minutes per day) is revealed.

## 4 Gershuny's Theory of 'Lagged Adaptation'

The theory of lagged adaptation is an explanation which preserves the idea of a future convergence in the family roles of men and women by accounting for the 'stalled revolution' amongst men. It achieves this by proposing 'there will be a delay, ladies and gentlemen, while men adjust their domestic habits' (Gershuny, 1995: 8). This delay or 'lag' in men's adaptation to women's changed role arises out of the processes of learning. In the first instance men must unlearn a pattern which has become familiar. Then they must acquire a new competence in performing unfamiliar domestic tasks: they must learn to cook, clean, do the laundry, care for young children and, most importantly they must share responsibility for these tasks being performed. Gershuny argues:

The skills of domestic production are only gradually built up (the husband may not understand the mechanism of the washing machine, or have the ability to sort the clothing appropriate for different washing machine programmes). (Gershuny, 1995:8)

At a deeper level men must unlearn or relearn an identity based on a particular conception of masculinity - what it means to be a male and how to live as a man with dignity.

### Short-run Lags

Let us first examine the issue of learning the unfamiliar domestic tasks. At the most basic level this consists of learning that domestic tasks must be done and that men must accept a share of responsibility for these tasks. To test this proposition, with the help of Jonathan Gershuny and John Brice at the ESRC Centre for Micro-social Change, University of Essex, we assembled a dataset containing information from the German Socio-economic Panel (GSOEP) waves A to F, covering the years 1984 to 1989 (Gershuny and Brice, 1994). The GSOEP is one of the very few longitudinal databases that has asked a consistent question about time spent in housework over a six year period. We consider that the pattern of adaptation found in Germany will be broadly similar to that found in any other industrialised society.

The GSOEP questionnaire, among many other things, asked how many hours on an average weekday and how many hours on an average Sunday respondents usually spent in a variety of tasks. Among the alternative tasks on which information was sought the one of greatest interest in this context was the time spent in housework and household errands (*Hausarbeit und Besorgungen*). This daily information has been transformed into a variable expressing the time spent in housework (including errands, but not childcare or households repairs or car care) in hours per week. These unpaid tasks have been typically considered ‘feminine’ and have been predominantly women’s responsibility (Bittman, 1995: 9-10).

At this point, it is worth commenting on the quality of data collected by what are often called ‘stylised’ questions. A study of problems using Australian data (Baxter and Bittman, 1995) has lead the authors to conclude that stylised questions produce poor estimates of the actual time spent in activities. In other words, apart from time spent in paid employment, respondents cannot estimate with any accuracy the weekly time spent in particular activities. However, while the magnitudes of diary and questionnaire estimates are often discrepant, the patterns of variations are broadly similar. That is to say that regardless of whether the information is collected by diary or by stylised questions, the same factors will be associated with an increase or a reduction of the amount of time spent in housework. Others who have studied this issue (Robinson, 1985; Robinson and Gershuny, 1994; Niemi, 1993; and Pallié, 1993) would agree with this conclusion.

The use of the GSOEP data makes it possible to track individual couples across time and directly study the adjustments to changing circumstances that they make. The theory of lagged adaptation suggests that wives’ entry into the labour force should lead men to increase their share of domestic labour, but that this increase is delayed because men must learn unfamiliar domestic skills and develop the capacity to take responsibility for domestic tasks being performed. To test this theory, we have searched for cases where wives moved into paid employment<sup>2</sup> and studied the hours spent by their husbands in housework and household errands at the time of this

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2 Wives were previously not in the labour force or unemployed and became employed full time, part time, as a trainee or a casual or both, or entered military service.

transition and in subsequent years. This method disregards the actual year of the wife's transition to paid employment and expresses the husband's response in terms of years elapsed since this transition. Table 1 shows actual year of entry to paid employment.

**Table 1: Year of Wife's Entry Into Paid Employment**

	No.	%
Wife entered paid employment 1986	68	16.1
Wife entered paid employment 1987	79	18.7
Wife entered paid employment 1988	108	25.5
Wife entered paid employment 1989	168	39.7
Total of wives moving into paid employment	423	100.0

Table 2 shows the time elapsed since the wife's transition to paid employment, the number of such husbands in the sample (taking into account missing data), the mean time spent in housework and the statistical significance of the cumulative change in mean time.

**Table 2: Mean Hours Per Week Spent by Husbands in Housework in the Years Following Their Wives' Transition to Paid Employment**

Time Since Transition	No.(a)	Mean Time Spent in Housework	Change from Year Zero (t-test; P values)
0 years	363	5.98	
1 year	363	6.83	0.058
2 years	222	6.55	0.303
3 years	122	7.42	0.043
4 years	56	8.05	0.019

Note: a) The number 363 in this table is less than the number in Table 1 because of missing data.

A study of the mean time devoted to housework and errands by husbands in the years following their wives' move into paid employment provides relatively consistent support for the idea of a lag due to the unlearning of old habits, the recognition and acceptance of shared responsibility, and the acquisition of unfamiliar housework skills. This table shows some

pattern of cumulative change, with the most significant difference being found four years after wives' transition to paid employment. The progress of this 'adaptation' is slightly uneven, consisting of a small increase (less than one hour per week) in the first year, followed by a delay (or even a slight reversal) in the second and then further increases in the subsequent years.

This pattern of stuttering initial and subsequent adaptation provides ambiguous indications about the process of delay. Choosing any one reference point after their wives' entry into paid employment shows a much weaker pattern of changes in husbands' weekly hours of housework (and one which is not statistically significant). Furthermore, only among those whose wives who entered paid employment in 1985 does the increase in husbands' time spent in housework in subsequent years reach the threshold of statistical significance. Sifting the evidence is made difficult by small numbers and missing data. The most aggregated forms of analysis provide some support for small changes in the predicted direction but at a more detailed level of analysis, the fragility of the evidence for the process of men's lagged adaptation become more apparent.

### **Long-run Lags**

Recently, Jonathan Gershuny and co-workers have extended an idea of Alva Myrdal and Vera Klein (1968) originally developed in 1956. The kernel of this idea is that married women's increasing participation in paid work creates strains in the pattern of gender relations within the family. Myrdal and Klein pointed to the recent emergence of the 'career woman'.

The acceptance of this feminine role shows that it is possible for women to envisage the idea of work outside the home as a career for life without any feeling of self-denial or resignation. (Myrdal and Klein, 1968: 8)

They note that this ideal 'has until recently been held by women only - and a very limited number of women at that'; and 'men have, for a

variety of reasons found it difficult to adjust themselves to the idea of a wife who so radically differs from their mothers'. Faced with two other 'ideal' feminine roles - 'hard-working housewife' and 'lady of the salon', young women with a paid job still envisage marriage and motherhood as the centre of their ambitions. As Myrdal and Klein argue, 'in this case, there is an unusually long time lag between the emergence of new realities and relationships and the acceptance of their full implications' (1968: 8-9).

Gershuny and his collaborators claim that key studies of the distribution of household work (especially Hochschild, 1989), are based on people who were in their twenties or thirties in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that is people born and raised before the 'second wave' of feminism. The implication of this statement is that these respondents whose crucial early socialisation took place in the era of traditional sexual division of labour when men were breadwinners and women were home makers. Gershuny, Godwin and Jones approvingly quote Hochschild's description of individuals' subjective 'gender strategies' noting that

to pursue a gender strategy, a man draws on his ideas about manhood and womanhood, beliefs that are forged in early childhood and thus anchored to deep emotions. He makes a connection between how he thinks about his manhood, what he feels about it and what he does. It works the same way for a woman. (quoted in Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 154)

Since the generation observed by Hochschild (and most others) 'must confront and uproot the emotionally charged gender images of their childhood', Gershuny, Godwin and Jones (1994) argue that the process of translating women's greater breadwinning into more sex equity in unpaid work will only occur after a considerable delay. They note

we could only expect it [sex equity] to be complete and painless once all adult members of households were themselves children in households with unchallenged egalitarian models - that is, a very long time into the future. (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 155)

According to them the process of lagged adaptation works like this:

The couple's division of domestic labour is a function of both early socialisation of the partners, and of the wife's employment experience. Starting from an initial position where the husband is generally employed and the wife generally non-employed, both partners may have a traditional gender strategy and the household has a stable and non-conflictual division of domestic labour. Women start to enter the workforce, and the influences of socialisation and employment experience at first push in different directions: socialisation tending to maintain traditional female responsibilities for unpaid work, but the time-use consequences of the women's job leading to a 'dual burden', and hence pressure for change... [These] changed patterns of domestic labour, must then feed back into the socialisation of the next generation. Children growing up in an environment that has been affected by these processes, observe patterns of behaviour which are less encouraging to the traditional gender strategies: their socialisation will encourage more of them towards intermediate or egalitarian gender strategies. So in this generation the influences of early socialisation and the consequences of work experience will be less opposed, and change in the domestic division of labour will thus be easier.' (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 186-7)

Regardless of the slow pace of progress, Gershuny and his co-workers are confident that 'this process of confronting and uprooting inherited gender ideologies is really taking place' (1994: 155). Using data from the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (which studied six local labour markets in the United Kingdom), as well as time use information from the UK and seven other countries, they produce evidence which shows an association between a wife's paid employment, including her employment history, and her husband's greater share of domestic duties.

They declare that this evidence may 'reflect some historical shift in the actual domestic division of labour' (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 175).

They also find that the domestic division of labour is influenced by both couples' current attitudes to the sexual division of labour and the respondents' reports of their parents' attitudes on this issue. If a couple accepts traditional attitudes, favouring the pattern of husband as provider and wife as homemaker then their division of labour is likely to reflect these views. Such couples, moreover, are likely to have had parents who practiced a traditional domestic division of labour. Conversely, couples with egalitarian views about the domestic division of labour are more likely to share housework, child care and shopping and to have had parents who did the same (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 168-75). Gershuny, Godwin and Jones comment that parents' influence on the domestic division of labour parallels the 'well-known influence of parents' party political allegiance on current behaviour and attitudes' (1994: 174). But they are still puzzled.

If couples do indeed adapt their distributions of domestic work to compensate for changes in the pattern of paid work', they ask, 'why is it that husbands of full-time employed women still do substantially smaller proportions of the total work of the household? (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994, 179)

Gershuny and his collaborators answer their own question by arguing that 'households adapt gradually'. Thus, until the wife enters paid employment, the household pays little attention to the domestic division of labour. Employment puts considerable pressure on the wife and draws the attention of the household to this problem and the household acts to reduce the pressure. However, couples may still find it difficult to establish an equitable partnership because the couple may 'not know how much work they themselves do, they may similarly not know how much work their partners do' and, therefore 'the adaptation of the division of domestic labour may, in short, lag behind the change in paid work pattern' (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 180).

## 5 Evidence for Short-run Lags

At first sight it would seem that Gershuny, Godwin and Jones have assembled a persuasive case for the process of lagged adaptation. ‘Our findings so far are themselves at the least consistent with the “adaptive partnership” view’ (1994: 174). First, there is the evidence that husbands’ proportion of unpaid work rises (slowly) in response to wives’ length of attachment to the labour force. Second, they document ‘a regular steady, and substantial growth in men’s proportional contribution to the unpaid work total’ rising from a quarter in the 1960s, through 30 per cent in the 1970s and reaching 40 per cent by the 1980s, a period when women’s labour force participation has increased steadily (1994: 183). Third, these authors point to evidence of greater parity in ‘total work load’ (the sum of paid and unpaid loads). Finally, there is the evidence that current attitudes are connected to parents’ behaviour and that both influence the actual domestic division of labour. Taken together Gershuny, Godwin and Jones argue that these points ‘add up to a clear case for a model of gradual and lagged adaptation’ and while women’s paid work increases faster than the men’s substitution of unpaid for paid work, ... nevertheless a process of adaptation is clearly under way.’ (1994: 183-5).

The lagged adaptation thesis is open to a number of objections. First there is the whole problem of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. There may be little association between attitudes and behaviour. Even where a correlation between a particular set of attitudes and relevant set of behaviours can be established, it is far more difficult to show that attitudes cause the behaviour. It is equally plausible to argue that attitudes change to justify the actions currently being taken. A second problem has to do with tracing change by following movements in the relative shares of unpaid work done by husbands and wives (Gershuny, Godwin and Jones, 1994: 151). An alternative argument is that most of the adaptation to women’s increasing labour force participation has come from women reducing the time they spend in unpaid work. Even without any absolute change in the time men devote to unpaid work, their ‘contribution’ to the total of household time devoted to such tasks increases if their wife reduces her time. In other words, unless husbands actually reduce the time they spend in domestic

labour, it appears as though they are compensating for wives' greater paid work demands. These changes in the relative shares of unpaid work are more often the result of women's adaptation, while men remain relatively inflexible. This point can be illustrated by contrasting the 'adaptation' of wives to their own change in employment status to that of their husbands. Let us return to the GSOEP data again but expressly concentrate on the changes in wives' weekly housework hours in response to entering paid employment (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Mean Hours Per Week Spent by Wives in Housework in the Years Following Their Transition to Paid Employment**

Time Since Transition	No.	Mean Time Spent in Housework	Change from Year Zero (t-test; P values)
0 years	402	36.54	
1 year	402	29.31	0.000
2 years	232	29.15	0.000
3 years	128	28.23	0.000
4 years	56	29.00	0.001

A comparison of Table 2 and Table 3 clearly shows that before entering paid employment women devoted six times as many hours to housework as men. Once employed they reduced their weekly hours by almost 20 per cent, an adaptation of over seven hours per week compared with compared with the less than one to two hours increase by men. The pattern of wives' adaptation to paid employment is instantaneous and highly significant. Practically all this change takes place in the wives' first year of employment regardless of which calendar year they entered paid employment.

The magnitude and timing of women's adaptation has considerable impact on Gershuny's proportional index of the division of domestic labour (DODL), as show in Table 4. The DODL index express the wife's hours of housework as a proportion of the couple's total hours of housework, so if the index is 1 the wife does 100 per cent of the housework, if it is 0 then her husband does all the housework and 0.5 represents equal shares.

**Table 4: Husbands' and Wives' Relative Share of Time Spent in Housework**

Time Since Transition to Paid Employment	Wives' Hours per Week	Husbands' Hours per Week	DODL	DODL, if Men Static
0 years	36.54	5.98	0.859360	0.859360
1 year	29.31	6.83	0.811013	0.842518
2 years	29.15	6.55	0.816527	0.847993
3 years	28.23	7.42	0.791865	0.831210
4 years	29.00	8.05	0.782726	0.819466

Under the circumstances outlined above, merely maintaining a constant number of weekly hours gives husbands the appearance of lowering their wives' domestic burdens. It leaves unanswered the issue of how the seven hour reduction can be compensated for by a one to two hour increase. Clearly there is an overall reduction in the quantity of domestic labour and 'lagged adaptation' gives us no clues as to how this process is able to take place.

## 6 Evidence for Long-run Lags

Most importantly, establishing that a process of lagged adaptation means slow change over many generations requires information about the behaviour of different generations. Any observable change may be the compound of three logically distinct effects (Gershuny and Brice, 1994: 34). The simplest kind of effect is the change that occurs within a single generation over a person's life course. In the course of her life an individual may leave her parents' home, marry, become a parent, divorce, become a single parent, see all her children leave home, retire, and become a widow. All these life course changes have large effects on the time spent in unpaid work, especially for women. Another kind of change results from a cohort effect. When a whole group enters a particular state (being born, starting work, getting married) at the same historical point there is a relatively constant effect on each member of this cohort. Birth cohort effects, or generational change, occurs when a daughter's experience is different from her mother's experience at a similar life course stage. The third type of change can be called a period effect, which occurs when all respondents, irrespective of life course phase or

generation, experience a change because of the year of the survey. The example of a person's savings illustrates the distinction between these three effects. A person's savings may vary with their position in the life course, so that those who are mid-career and have no children find it easier to save. There may be a cohort effects on the savings; those who reached their prime earning years during the Great Depression, for example, may have saved less. In a period of economic recession everyone, regardless of life course phase or generation, may be able to save less - this is a period effect.

Cohort analysis follows information about people born in a particular year. For example someone who was 20 years of age in 1974 is 33 years of age in 1987 and 38 years in 1992. Perhaps more importantly, this kind of analysis makes it possible to examine the issue of generational change.

The theory of lagged adaptation explicitly predicts that each successive generation of men will participate more equally in domestic labour. The authors of this theory argue that the generations before 1970 will be capable of only small adjustments over their lifetimes, whereas the young adults of the 1990s, born to mothers in the vanguard of these changes, will exhibit not only egalitarian attitudes and altered gender identities, but will also manifest more egalitarian behaviour. The remainder of the paper argues that the behaviour of this cohort gives few indications of this lagged adaptation prediction being fulfilled.

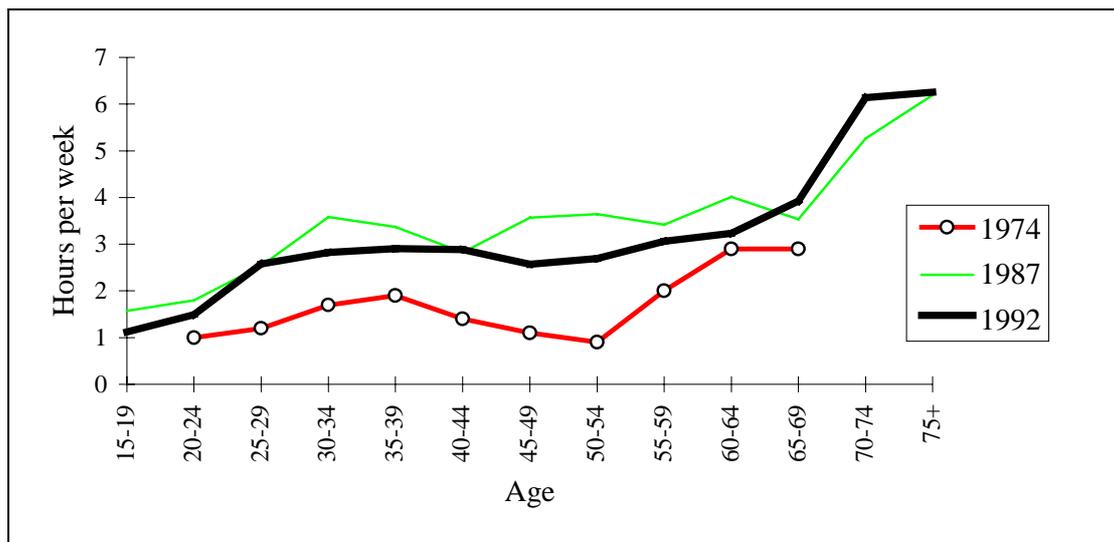
In 1992, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducted its first ever national Survey of Time Use. These statistics provide a major new information resource. Neither the 1974 nor 1987 time use surveys were national in scope and they were collected in autumn and winter. So when we compare the raw results of these surveys we are never sure whether to attribute any differences to regional variation, seasonal variation or to historical change. To alleviate this difficulty, in conjunction with Duncan Ironmonger and Sue Donath of the Households Research Unit, University of Melbourne, we have developed a method of mathematically standardising the three survey so that all results are given in terms of Sydney, May-June (Bittman, 1995).

Another fact which also needs to be taken into account when considering change is that over time the composition of the population alters. The

population of Australia has become significantly older in the past two decades. We know that age affects time use, so by comparing change within narrow age bands we remove this source of confusion. A very useful by-product of the division of the population into five year age bands is that it opens the way for analysis by birth cohorts.

An examination of time use survey data shows that the phrase ‘stalled revolution’ describes, more aptly than Hochschild could have guessed, the changes in men’s domestic participation over the last two decades. Let us begin with the largest (in terms of mean time nationally) of all the domestic tasks and therefore the one in which the pattern will be most defined and most robust: cooking (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Men’s Time Spent in Cooking by Age: 1974, 1987 and 1992** (Hours per week)

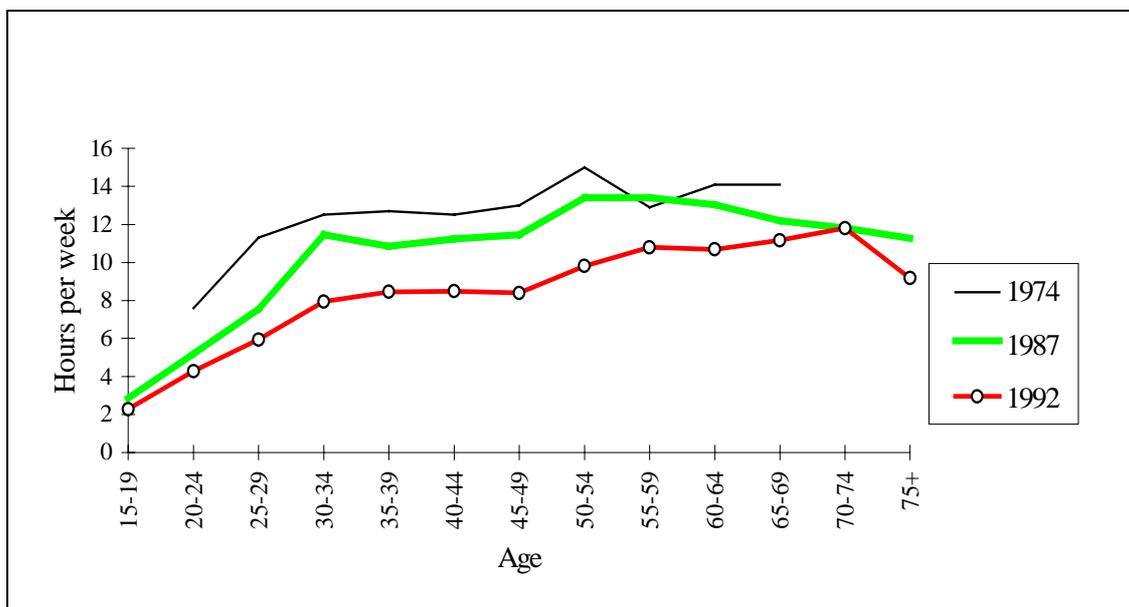


Most of the change which has occurred took place as a result of the period effect rather than a cohort effect. For all men born in 1953 or earlier there has been an increase in their cooking time between 1974 and 1987 and either no increase or a very small decrease over the five years from 1987 to 1992. Among those born in 1953 or after, the picture is considerably more complicated. It shows traces of generational change together with evidence of changes in the timing of life course transitions. Cohorts born after 1957 exhibit average cooking times that are slightly higher than those born before 1952 at similar ages. However, in more recent times there is little evidence that successive age cohorts have

started from a higher plane. Indeed, the ‘stalled revolution’ is nowhere more evident than in the failure of younger men, raised in ‘post-feminist’ households, to increase their contribution to cooking.

In contrast to the changes in men’s time spent in cooking, the change in the time that women devote to cooking (Figure 2) has never been more evident than in the last few years. Strangely, while much has been written about women’s expectations of men, the actual change in women’s own domestic labour times, independent of the actions of men, has gone largely unnoticed.

**Figure 2: Women’s Time Spent in Cooking by Age: 1974, 1987 and 1992 (Hours per week)**



Not only is the magnitude of the change in women’s cooking time the largest of any of the changes in housework activities but the rate of change has increased markedly. While no one can confidently claim there have been changes at the extremes of the age distribution, across the broad span of adult women’s life course, from age 25 to 64, there has been a significant ( $p < .01$ ) reduction in women’s cooking time in the last five years. The magnitude of this change has been smallest (1 hour 37 minutes per week) among young adults aged 25-29 and greatest among 30-34 year olds and 50-54 year olds (3 hours 31 minutes and 3 hours 37 minutes per week respectively). For those aged 35 -49 and 55-64 average

cooking time reduced by at least 2 hours 19 minutes per week between 1987 and 1992. With the exception of 25-29 and 35-39 year olds, the extent of this reduction that occurred in the five years between 1987 and 1992 is double that which occurred in the 13 years between 1974 and 1987. In what is historically speaking a short period of time, both the order of magnitude and the acceleration of these changes in women's cooking behaviour has been astounding.

The analysis of the age cohorts of women uncovers a pattern which is in many respects the opposite of that for men. Once again it is the result of a combination of period effects, cohort effects and life course effects. For women born in 1947 or earlier, there appears to be no pattern of generational change but a powerful period effect in the last five years. Among these women there has been a sharp fall in cooking time over the period from 1987 to 1992, regardless of age. For those born in 1948 or after there may have been a generational change. After this date each younger cohort has a lower cooking time than women of an equivalent age in the cohort before. The pattern is complicated by the effects of a dramatic rise in high school retention rates among women, greater participation in tertiary education and a continuing pattern of postponed marriage and childbirth (ABS, 1994a: 32, 90). Continuing study lowers women's time spent in housework, and marriage increases it (ABS, 1994a: 121-2; ABS, 1994b: 58; Bittman, 1992: 53-5, 108-9). All these factors contribute to lower cooking time for those born after 1947. Nevertheless there is continuing evidence that young women at home spend more time in cooking than their brothers (ABS, 1994a: 124; Bittman, 1992; 38, 108-11). If sex roles were predicted to dissolve among the younger generation it has not happened yet, not even among groups whose mothers were young enough to have their child rearing practices influenced by feminism. On the other hand, in more recent times it makes much more sense to talk about all women's behavioural rejection of the idea that 'their place is in the kitchen'.

A number of possible explanations spring to mind for this steep decline in the time women (and therefore households in aggregate) devote to cooking. Perhaps the most commonly offered explanation is the diffusion of the microwave. There were practically no households with microwave ovens in 1974 but by 1987 more than a third of Australian households

owned a microwave. Between 1987 and 1992, the proportion of households owning a microwave oven rose to more than two-thirds (Ironmonger, forthcoming). Presumably the microwave oven yields greatest time savings in cooking when combined with food purchases tailored to maximise the advantages of the appliance. Analysis of the patterns of expenditure on food items shows there has also been a shift away from raw foods towards high convenience foods that require minimal preparation (Bittman and Mathur, 1994).

Of course, many of these food purchases would reduce meal preparation time even using conventional food preparation appliances. This observation immediately raises the possibility that food preparation time can be reduced by greater resort to the market, in effect substituting the labour of an employee for that of the unpaid 'homemaker'. Certainly the same analysis of expenditure shows that households are increasing their outlay on restaurants, take-away meals and school lunches (Bittman and Mathur, 1994). All these tendencies may take place within the framework of changing norms about what constitutes nutritious home cooking, or who decides what should be eaten. This would not only license the purchase of more convenient foods, especially if stir-fry and prepared vegetarian pasta is seen as healthier than home-made suet pudding, but also alters the idea that a mother's love and devotion is judged by the hours she commits to home-cooking. Perhaps the modern parent can demonstrate affection by sanctioning the purchase of a pizza!

Analysing men's laundry time by birth cohorts does not reveal much. The variation among cohorts is rarely above two minutes per day, meaning that any increase or decrease in men's laundry time is likely to be so small that it is not greater than the variation that could be expected as a result of sampling error. There may be a different pattern for men born before 1952 but again the movement is too small, and the period too short, to confidently claim a generational change. Men's laundry time remains very low and there is little evidence to support the idea that those born to a generation of mothers influenced by feminism are behaving differently from their fathers.

On the other hand the contraction of time women spend in the laundry has been the second major reason for the decrease in their overall

housework time. Across all age groups women's time spent in laundry activities has decreased (by 44 minutes per week). The distribution of women's mean laundry time by age shows a progressive diminution of an early adult peak, which was quite a pronounced feature of women's laundry pattern in 1974. The general pattern of the change over the 18 year period has been for this peak to be postponed and lowered until ultimately becoming a plateau stretching from the mid-thirties into the fifties. This pattern of decline is consistent with the reduction in family size and the postponement of childbirth that has occurred between 1974 to 1992. The effects of this change in women's laundry time are quite age specific. The largest changes occurred first among 20-29 year old women (a reduction of more than a third between 1974 and 1987) and then among 30-44 year-old women (a reduction of 10-20 per cent between 1987 and 1992). In recent years there has been little change in the ownership of laundry appliances.

The analysis of women's laundry time by birth cohorts shows a pronounced period effect, which leads to a decline in laundry time from 1987 for women of all ages. This has been combined with a gradual generational shift which compresses the age range of peak laundry times. This is evident at both ends of the age distribution, with each younger cohort taking more years to reach the age of peak laundry time and beginning their descent from peak times at a younger age. Those born 1948-52, for example, did less laundry than older cohorts in their twenties, reached their peak of laundry activity in their thirties, and their laundry time declined in their forties. The mothers of these women did a similar amount of laundry into their fifties.

The most predominant feature of men's time spent in cleaning is the rise associated with retirement. There is some evidence that this rise, like retirement itself, is beginning earlier with each successive generation. Period change or general change across the age range associated with the passage of historical time is not particularly evident. The strength of the effect of being beyond 50 years of age on time spent in cleaning is far stronger than any of the small shifts that might be attributed to generational change.

The overall shape of the age distribution of women's average cleaning time has not changed in the 18 years between 1974 and 1992, rising gently until age 70 years and then turning downwards. The 1992 curve is smoother and has lost many age-specific peaks, which may also be an effect of the greater numbers used in estimating this curve. In contrast to the stability of this overall shape, however, changes in the magnitude of time devoted to cleaning is a story consisting of two distinct parts. In the first part of the story, between 1974 and 1987, there is a substantial decline, frequently of the order of three or more hours per week. The second part of the story is the failure of the expected decline to continue. On the basis of what has come before, it would have been reasonable to expect one further decline of approximately one hour per week in women's cleaning time between 1987 and 1992 but there has been no such general decline. In recent years, the only significant ( $p < .05$ ) age specific changes in women's cleaning time which have occurred in recent years are among those aged 45-49 years (which corresponds to a peculiar peak in the 1987 distribution) and those aged more than 70 years. Among women aged 70 years and over in 1992 there has not been the same sharp downturn in cleaning found in 1987. There are no real cohort effects.

The search for generational change in the time devoted to yard work among men reveals, on the whole, remarkably little change. The exception is that yard work of men aged over 65 years appears to be falling for those born after 1912. A cohort analysis of women's time spent in garden, lawn, pool and pet care suggests three separate conclusions - a decline in the yard work of adolescents and young adults born after 1963, an increase in yard work activities for those born after 1947 and a diminution of time spent in these activities for women born after 1922. The pattern of generational change in yard work is not particularly distinct, and confident predictions are probably unwarranted

A cohort analysis of changes in the time men devote to Do-It-Yourself tasks indicates there have been shifts in the timing of peak activity. Men's home maintenance and car care activity exhibits two peaks separated by a trough in middle age. The timing of the first peak has become progressively earlier and less pronounced for men born after 1938. As might be expected, there a tendency for the middle-aged trough to occur earlier. While there is a distinct second peak for those aged 50-

69 years it is difficult to detect any consistent pattern of generational change in either the magnitude or the timing of the peak. Among women, the magnitude of time devoted to home maintenance and car care is small and consequently the changes are small. Although it is not possible to speak with any great confidence about these changes, there is a consistent upturn in women's Do-It-Yourself activity at a particular point in their lives and this point has been occurring earlier for each successive generation born after 1928. This may reflect the changing timing of home renovation. Perhaps renovation was once connected with the retirement or the empty nest phenomenon and more recently it has been connected with the purchase of a first home.

An analysis of men's time spent in child care by birth cohorts reveals an older change and a newer, more complicated set of changes. For men born before World War II there is a progressive tendency for child care to contract into a narrower age range. For those born in 1933 child care time at age 50 years is considerably lower than for men born in 1928, which is lower in turn at age 60 years than for men born in 1923. This may reflect the of wartime postponement of fatherhood. For men born after World War II there is a progressive tendency for higher child-care time among younger men, a trend which is reversed among men born in 1959 or later.

Although women's child-care activity time has risen across all ages, there are clear traces of changing timing of births. This is most clearly seen when comparing the curve of women's child-care time in 1974 with those of later surveys. The peak age for child-care activity among women in 1974 was 25-29 years, after which time it began a series of stepped declines. In both 1987 and 1992 the peak falls in the category age 30-34 years. While women aged 25-29 years spent a similar quantity of time in child-care activities in all surveys, among 30-34 year old women child-care time increased by 3 hours 14 minutes per week between 1974 and 1987 and by a further 2 hours 16 minutes per week in 1992. Over the 18 years between 1974 and 1992 the increase in child-care activity totalled 5 hours 40 minutes per week for women in this age group.

Among the youngest generations of men, those born after 1952, there is a progressive tendency for shopping time to rise. Among men born between 1923 and 1938 there appears to be tendency for shopping time

to peak earlier in life for each successive five cohorts. This generation of men has the highest peak shopping time of all birth cohorts. Those men born in 1922 or before show a pattern of elevated shopping time only in their advanced years.

There is some evidence of a generational shift in the time women devote to shopping, with women born before 1939 spending less time in this activity compared to those born after this date. Among the groups of birth cohorts - those born before the outbreak of World War II and those born after this date - the evidence of change revolves around the timing of life course events. The trough between the 'child-rearing peak' and the 'mature children peak' of shopping varies in its duration and depth. To make a confident interpretation of the generational pattern, more time points than are currently available are required.

## **7 Conclusion**

In summary, analysing the data by five year age groups reveals a mixture of life course, cohort and period effects. There is no consistent evidence that the generation with more experience of mother in paid employment (and with feminist ideals) is breaking with sex stereotypes in domestic labour. Gender segregation in domestic tasks continues to be powerful among the younger cohorts. In particular, there is no increased participation by young males in the traditionally 'feminine' indoor household tasks - cooking, laundry and cleaning. The only evidence (and this not strong evidence) of 'role reversal' comes from women's increasing participation in home maintenance and car care activities, a development that is not directly anticipated by the 'lagged adaptation' hypothesis.

Despite falling family size both males and females are continuing the century-long trend of increasing time spent in child care. This finding is consistent across practically every analysis of changing time use regardless of country and historical period. Among males there is a marked tendency towards greater involvement with infant children.

The most striking characteristic of these changes is that they are not those anticipated or debated in most discussions about family and gender

issues. On the whole, the process has been one of women 'doing it for themselves', reducing the time spent in the kitchen and in laundry, ironing and clothes care. Women are also increasing their activity in the traditionally masculine area of home maintenance and car care. These changes have been purchased at the cost of increased 'travel to shopping' time. The only area of unpaid domestic work where men have increased their activity has been in child care. However, both fathers and mothers are spending more time with their children.

It seems justifiable to conclude that many of the theories we have used to understand change in the domestic division of labour need some significant revision. The belief that men will respond to women's new responsibilities as 'providers' by assuming increased domestic responsibilities appears to be groundlessly optimistic. However, the fear that women will become superexploited bearers of a 'dual burden' of market income and unpaid family responsibilities, also cannot be accepted too literally. There is some evidence to support the idea of a short-run process of 'lagged adaptation' among men but the eventual adjustment in men's behaviour is small and newer generations do not exhibit behaviour radically different from their fathers. The evidence shows that *it is women who adapt* and, moreover, adapt rapidly. This mitigates the effects of the dual burden of responsibility and leads to more equality in domestic burdens because women's domestic behaviour comes to resemble men's (and not *vice versa*). Through all the confusions associated with this rapid change, more policy emphasis needs to be placed on women's adaptation and the processes that support it. Perhaps policy-makers also need to concentrate on the supports which allow women to have domestic responsibilities similar to men. In practice this means a shift away from programs targeting the attitudes of men and the expectation that men will assume the domestic burdens of women, and the redirection of resources toward the reduction of women's unpaid work. Such a policies strengthen women's participation and attachment to the paid labour force and minimise the disadvantages caused by domestic responsibilities over the life course. The provision of accessible and affordable child care is a model of the kinds of policies needed, as is the generously funded parental leave found in some Scandinavian countries (Bryson, Bittman and Donath, 1994). The growth in the demand for and the supply of domestic services shows that other paid

services can play a similar role. The continued growth in these services might be promoted through tax rebates and concession. This policy approach recognises that, on average, men are well disposed toward the state transfers, while at the same time resisting an increasing their own unpaid work (Bittman and Lovejoy, 1993). Since these policies work with clearly established processes of adaptation and not against them they are far more likely to avoid frustration and confusion in the face of rapidly changing gender relations.

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