

## H & Gs as the “first affluent society”

In his ethnology *Stoneage Economics* (1972) Marshall Sahlins, reflecting on the implications of detailed evidence on the subsistence of !Kung Bushmen (Ju/hoansi) of southern Africa and other h & g groups, dubbed them the “first affluent society”.

**An affluent society is one where all people’s material wants are easily satisfied. To assert that the hunters are affluent is to deny...that the human condition (must keep) man the prisoner at hard labor of a perpetual disparity between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means...**

### **Marshall Sahlins**

The Ju/hoansi live in a semi-arid savanna, near desert-like conditions with scatterings of trees and grasslands. Over 100 degrees in the shade during the day and can drop below freezing at night. Completely dry for 6 mths of the year, rains 6-10 inches per year, usually all at once. Game and vegetation are relatively scarce, but in diversifying their resource base and staying well below carrying capacity (1 person per 10 square miles), make a good living with little effort.

**Evidence of affluence – what are their needs and how easily are they met?**

**Richard Lee and the Ju/hoansi addressed this question by**

#### **1. Taking statistics on daily subsistence activities.**

- a. # of people in camp
- b. how many went out to h & g
- c. hours spent acquiring food
- d. weighed food brought in
- e. examined food in terms of calories and protein

#### **Findings –**

- a. men spend on the average 21.6 hours per week hunting and gathering (4/5ths of that time hunting)
- b. women spend 12.6 hours per week gathering (virtually no time hunting)
- c. 2355 calories per person per day, including 96.3 grams of protein (a more than adequate diet, our average is around 50 grams of protein per day)

## 2. Other tasks---

	<b>Subsistence Work</b>	<b>Tool Making &amp; Fixing</b>	<b>Housework</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>15.4</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>22.4</b>
	<b>Total workweek -- men</b>		<b>44.5</b>
	<b>women</b>		<b>40.1</b>

**Tool making/fixing** – 28 different tools for gathering, hunting, cooking and fetching water.

**Housework** – Manufacturing leather garments out of hides, constructing houses, clearing living sites, nut-cracking, butchering, gathering firewood etc.

**What is your workweek** – Most Americans work **more than 40 hours** per week (recent study shows us working more than ever – **new average 44 hours** a week --- at their wage-paid jobs. Around **19 hours** doing work in and around the house. Then add time spent driving to-and-from work, picking kids up at daycare, soccer practice, time spent at the grocery store, maintenance of material items such as taking the car in to get tires rotated, college classes or mandatory classes to improve job skills, studying time, taking care of the bills, figuring out your taxes or your new insurance plan, going to the bank etc.

## 3. Free time

**In contrast**, the Ju/hoansi spend as much as **2/3rds** of their time **visiting**. Have all night dances as often as 2-3 times per week. A !Kung man who feels his luck has run-out in the hunt may take a months vacation.

## 4. 40% do not participate in food procurement

- a. **30% too young** (don't food forage much until adult age) – (20 for males, 15-20 for females)
- b. **10% too old** (over 60)

**Affluence = needs and wants easily met**