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Spending Time Together—Changes Over Four Decades in Leisure Time Spent with a Spouse

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Abstract

Using American time diary data from 1965, 1975 and 2003, this study investigates to what extent couples' joint leisure time has changed in the past four decades and to what extent joint leisure time varies between men and women and between single and dual-earner couples. Results show that partners now spend more time together engaged in various leisure activities than they did in the past, not only in percentages but also in absolute number of minutes. The difference between men and women (women reported a lower percentage of joint leisure than men) has grown smaller in the past four decades.

KEYWORDS: Leisure/sociological aspects, marriage, trends, gender differences, work arrangements

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Introduction

Family is the most common social context for leisure activities (Shaw, 1997). People spend most of their leisure time at home and with other household members (Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2007; Kelly, 1997). Family researchers have demonstrated the importance of spousal leisure for marital quality (Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Orthner, 1975; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) and of family leisure for family cohesion (Orthner & Mancini, 1990, Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Spending time with a spouse is generally seen as an important relationship maintenance strategy (Baxter & Dindia, 1990). Spousal interaction and spouses' joint leisure activities draw spouses closer together, helping them to maintain the marriage (Hill, 1988).

Despite evidence for the importance of joint leisure in present-day society, our knowledge of the amount of time married partners actually spend together and the nature of that time is limited. There is reason to assume that processes of individualization have changed the preferences and restrictions associated with joint leisure time for couples over time. Individualization can be defined as the promotion of exercising one's goals and desires and the idea that individuals are increasingly required to construct their own lives (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). With respect to leisure time of couples, it is important to note that the family has become an association of individual persons each with his/her own interests and experiences, and each subject to different restrictions. What we do not know yet is whether to expect an increase or a decrease in joint leisure time.

On the one hand, individualization may have led to decreasing levels of joint leisure. With less interdependence within couples and with more demands from other domains, such as the labor market, couples may have more difficulty synchronizing their schedules to arrange leisure time together (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). On the other hand, processes of individualization may increase the desire for leisure time with a partner, resulting in more leisure time spent in the presence of a partner. More equality between husbands and wives has reduced interdependency in marriage, but the continued search for intimacy may lead partners to create new, fulfilling associations (Gillies, 2003). Shared activities may function as a way of tying couples together (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

Changes in leisure time with a spouse may vary for different groups in society and for different leisure activities. For example, processes of individualization may have differing effects on the way men and women spend their leisure time. Gender relationships in the work and private domains as well as work arrangements themselves have changed (Presser, 2003; Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2007). Therefore, it is important to study the relationship between gender, work, and leisure with regard to couple leisure.

The present study investigates to what extent and in what ways in-home and out-of-home leisure time with a spouse has changed in the past four decades and to what extent such joint leisure time varies between men and women and between single and dual-earner couples. This study contributes to the existing body of research in several ways. First, changes in leisure time with a spouse have only recently become a topic of research. So far, studies have focused only on the extent to which spouses have joint lifestyles (e.g., Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001) or on

whether there is a causal relationship between spouses' shared time and marital quality (Berg, Trost, Schneider & Allison, 2001; Crawford et al., 2002; Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Orthner, 1975). None of the previous research has considered changes over time. Second, by using the American Time Use Survey, which has extensive, comparable information about time allocation in the 1965-2003 period, we have reliable and comparable time measures from time diary data at our disposal (Fisher, Torres, Pollman & Gershuny, 2006). Third, we not only look at the overall changes, but also focus on group-specific changes in leisure time with a spouse, focusing on the importance of gender and work arrangements. Finally, we distinguish between in-home and out-of-home leisure activities and thus increase our knowledge of whether changes in leisure time with a spouse are the same for both domains. This offers us insights into changes in the nature of the leisure time people spend with their spouses.

Three research questions guided this study. The first and main question was: How has the time U.S. couples spend on leisure in each other's presence changed over the last 4 decades? Second, are trends in joint leisure time the same for in-home and out-of-home leisure? Finally, we explored changes for different groups by asking: To what extent does the change in the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse vary by gender and work arrangement?

Background

Definition of Leisure

Following Roberts (2006), we define leisure in this study as time that is not spent at work, doing domestic tasks, or on personal care such as sleeping, bathing and eating. We also excluded "grey areas" – activities that some experience as leisure, while others see them as work – such as gardening and Do-It-Yourself chores. Core attributes ascribed to leisure are freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation and enjoyment of the experience (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). We focus on leisure with a partner, which needs to be distinguished conceptually from individual leisure and from family leisure, where children are present. Moreover, the work involved in family leisure is often unequally divided between men and women (Shaw, 1997). We focus on leisure time of couples with and without children and therefore do not use the term "family leisure," as this might be confusing, but instead refer to "couple leisure".

Processes of Individualization in Relation to Leisure Time with Spouses

When considered in terms of intimate relationships, such as partner relationships, individualization refers to processes of de-traditionalization, in which the roles of men and women are less strictly defined, making partner relationships more susceptible to free choice and negotiation. Choice and individual freedom can either be at the expense of long-term commitment, or they can lead to newly negotiated relationships between men and women (Gillies, 2003).

Several researchers have theorized about processes of individualization in partner relationships. According to Amato (2004), marriage in western societies has changed from a social institution, regulated by social norms, public opinion,

law and religion, into a more private arrangement. Cherlin (2004) stated that a process of deinstitutionalization of marriage is occurring, that he defined as “the weakening of the social norms that define people’s behaviour in a social institution such as marriage” (p.848). He argued that marriage has lost its taken-for-granted nature and is now situated in a context characterized by an increase in choices people have in how they want to shape their personal lives. In addition, he stated, people look for different rewards in marriage these days, emphasizing personal growth and intimacy. Along a similar line, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) stressed that the family is changing from what they call a *community of need*, based on mutual interdependencies, into a *group of elective relationships*, in which individual choice is more central. The weakening of marriage as a social institution and the increased centrality of choice within family relationships in general suggests two sides of individualization, one of disintegration and one of renewed negotiation. Based on these two sides, we identify two opposing expectations regarding leisure behavior of couples. On the one hand we expect a decrease in joint leisure time, but on the other hand an increase in joint leisure time can also legitimately be expected.

Decrease in Joint Leisure Time of Spouses

The first expectation, that there is a decrease in joint leisure time of spouses, sees individualization as resulting in increased restrictions on joint leisure. Recent trends toward increasing individualization act against family cohesion (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001), because spouses face more restrictions on joint leisure. The many competing demands faced by spouses within a marriage result in a struggle between each spouse’s own time and shared spousal time (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim). This struggle might make it increasingly difficult to spend time with a spouse in leisure activities.

Empirical support for the view that couples face more restrictions on joint leisure comes from qualitative research on couples raising children, showing that people indeed experience a shortage of family time; they want more family time, but feel hampered by competing demands on their time (Daly, 2001). In addition, Hochschild (1997) found that people not only have trouble combining work and family, they may even seek refuge in paid work to escape home, indicating separate life spheres of spouses, which might hamper spending leisure time with a partner. Further evidence of increased restrictions to couple’s time from France shows that the amount of *desynchronization* of work schedules of dual-earner couples – measured in hours where only one of the spouses is working – increased dramatically between 1985 and 1998, reducing both time with a spouse as well as family time (Lesnard, 2008). Individualized lifestyles and multiple working schedules impact a couple’s opportunities to spend leisure time together. These increased restrictions on leisure time with a partner lead to the formulation of *Hypothesis 1*: Over the past four decades, the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse has decreased.

Increase in Joint Leisure Time of Spouses

The second expectation states that processes of individualization have resulted in different preferences regarding spending time with a spouse. With their increased labor market participation, women have become less dependent on their spouses. The de-traditionalization of roles has also created space to negotiate the relationship. Intimacy in marriage is now something that has to be created, rather than something that is ascribed (Gillies, 2003). Because of this need for intimacy and because marital partnerships nowadays are thought to be based more on the *mutuality of self-disclosure*, in which roles are not predefined but negotiated, partners are expected to be more focused on each other and look for personal satisfaction in their relationships (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

More than 40 years ago, Burgess and colleagues (Burgess, Locke, & Thomes, 1963), referring to the single-earner, breadwinner-homemaker marriages in the 1950s, already noted that marriage had changed “from an institution to a companionship” (p. vii). In the companionate marriage spouses were supposed to be each others companions, although there still was a sharp division of labor. More so than in the 19th century, emotional satisfaction became important for marital success. Cherlin contends that this transition was followed by a second transition in marriage, which began in the 1960s and accelerated in the 1970s. In this period, the husbands’ and wives’ roles became more flexible and negotiable, suggesting a more individualistic perspective on marriage. In sum, marriage has lost in practical importance, with less clear-cut roles for husbands and wives and lower levels of financial interdependence, but its symbolic relevance might even have increased (Cherlin, 2004). In times when roles are not predescribed and partners have an increased level of independency, joint leisure activities may form an increasingly suitable context for mutual self-disclosure and hence may contribute to more personal satisfaction.

Research has often demonstrated the relationship between marital quality and time spent with a spouse (Hill, 1988; Crawford et al., 2002). Although it contains no information on changes over time, one empirical study on joint lifestyles of couples in the Netherlands showed that people engage in many leisure activities with their partner, indicating that contemporary (i.e., late 20th century) couples have joint rather than separate lifestyles (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). This line of argument states that individualization in society has led to more joint leisure with a spouse. *Hypothesis 2* is therefore: The percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse has increased over the past four decades.

Work Arrangements

Restrictions on engaging in leisure time with a spouse may vary between different groups in society. Those groups with less time at their disposal may have particular difficulties in arranging time together. For example, dual-earner couples face more time restrictions than couples in other work arrangements (Kingston & Nock, 1987; Van der Lippe & Peters, 2007), and so might be expected to spend less leisure time together.

The behavior of dual-earner couples, however, may have changed over time. Shared leisure time is highly valued by couples (Sullivan, 1996a), and research on synchronization of working hours by couples indicates that couples make an effort to reserve time for leisure at the same time (Hallberg, 2003; Hamermesh, 1998, 2000). This is found to be true especially for dual-earner couples. For example, Kingston and Nock (1987) found only a small difference between the time single and dual-earner couples spend together. As dual-earner couples become more common, society may be better equipped to facilitate their leisure, for example by providing more options for outsourcing domestic work and flexible working times (De Ruijter & Van der Lippe, 2007). It is likely that dual-earners are better able to afford outsourcing. This leads to *Hypothesis 3*: The difference between dual-earner and single-earner couples in the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse has become smaller in the past 40 years.

Gender

It is well established in leisure research that men and women do not have the same amount of leisure, nor do they experience leisure in the same way. This is related to the “care ethic” of women, whereby women are encouraged to put their family’s leisure needs above their own (Shaw, 1997). The extensive amount of literature on paid and domestic time of spouses shows major differences in their time use, with women spending more time on housework and men on paid work outside the home (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2007; Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). Studies on changes over time show that women increasingly spend time on paid labor, and that men have increased their time spent on housework and child care, albeit to a lesser extent (Bianchi et al., 2006; Coltrane, 2000; Gershuny & Robinson, 1988). Consequently, research has demonstrated the emergence of a gender gap in the amount of leisure time (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Beblo & Robledo, 2008).

Men and women differ not only in their quantity of leisure time but also in the kind of leisure and how they experience it. Also, women and men have different preferences in leisure (Henderson & Hickerson, 2007). With respect to how leisure is experienced, women’s leisure is found to be more family-oriented, home-bound and fragmented (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003), whereas men generally have more opportunities for independent leisure. Larson, Gillman and Richards (1997) found that mothers were less able to distance themselves from the role of caretaker and family manager, and thus may enjoy leisure less and have shorter periods of leisure than men. Herridge, Shaw and Mannell (2003) found that young women experienced tension between couple leisure and personal leisure or leisure with friends and family. A study by Brown, Brown, Miller and Hansen (2001) showed that mothers with young children had a desire to engage in more physically active leisure, but faced restrictions that were both structural (a lack of time, money and energy) and ideological (a sense of commitment to others). The smaller reservoir of leisure time of women together with the stronger orientation toward the family and fewer opportunities for independent leisure compared to men, lead us to expect that women spend a larger percentage of their leisure time together with their spouse than men do.

Processes of individualization have changed the position of women in society as well as in the family. In many respects, the lives of men and women have become more similar (Gershuny, 2000). We expect that men and women have become more similar to each other in their leisure time as well, although we do not expect gender differences to have disappeared altogether. We therefore formulate *Hypothesis 4*: The difference between men and women in the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse has become smaller over time.

Interaction Between Gender and Work Arrangements

Research suggests that participation in the labor market influences women's leisure. Apart from it diminishing the amount of leisure, it may also influence the type of leisure in which they are engaged. Employment gives women a source of income, social contact and an independent life outside the home and makes women feel more entitled to leisure (Kay, 1996). This leads to the expectation that women in single-earner couples differ from women in dual-earner couples with regard to their leisure time with a spouse. Women in dual-earner couples are expected to spend a smaller percentage of their leisure time in the presence of a spouse than women in single-earner couples, for example because they have a social life outside of the couple thanks to interactions at work.

A change over time is expected here as well. With dual-earner couples being increasingly common and time allocation of men and women becoming increasingly comparable (Gershuny, 2000), society may be better equipped to facilitate leisure of dual-earner couples, as stated above, including more options for working women's leisure. Developments in the private sphere have increased leisure time of women, such as men's increase in their share of domestic work (Bianchi et al., 2000), more possibilities for outsourcing domestic work (De Ruijter, 2004) and further technical advancements diminishing time spent on housework. Developments in work circumstances, such as more possibilities for flexible working hours (Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2007), may have increased possibilities for dual-earner couples to synchronize their leisure time. Also, developments in the field of leisure itself have increased possibilities for joint leisure in dual-earner couples, such as the increasing commodification of leisure (i.e. package holidays and theme parks) (Roberts, 2006). Hence, *Hypothesis 5* states that the difference between women in single and dual-earner couples in the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse has become smaller over time.

Other influences

In addition to our main focus on gender and work arrangements, various other influences on the joint leisure of couples need to be taken into account. First, age is included because demands from the labor market and the family are not equally heavy for all age groups and leisure behavior differs among age groups (Roberts, 2006). Further, more highly educated people generally work in jobs where there is more autonomy in determining the work schedule, and flexibility of work schedules may be important for leisure with a partner (Van der Lippe & Peters, 2007). In addition, different educational groups can have different preferences for leisure with a partner as well (Roberts, 2006), and so we have included

educational attainment. One important restriction on shared time is the presence of children. Caring for children diminishes the time available for joint leisure, so, unsurprisingly, couples with children have less shared leisure time than childless couples (Hamermesh, 2000; Hill, 1988).

Leisure Activities

So far, we have assumed that the patterns of involvement are the same for different types of leisure activity. However, it could very well be that a decrease in leisure time with a spouse in some activities is compensated for by an increase in other activities. To gain more insight into this, we distinguish between different groups of activities. Because in-home leisure has historically been central in women's leisure, we distinguish between in-home and out-of-home leisure. For in-home leisure, we make a further distinction between such things as playing games and media use, because the category "media use" consists largely of watching TV; this takes up a large portion of the total amount of leisure time, which would obscure any variation in other in-home leisure activities if they were all lumped together. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we do not formulate hypotheses on type of leisure but merely explore differences between them.

Methodology

Data

Time Budget Diaries

We investigated how individuals spend their leisure time by using time budget diaries. In time budget research, people meticulously keep track of the time they spend in various activities by maintaining time diaries. Time diary data offer several advantages over data from questionnaires. First, they are likely to be more accurate, because people are asked to record their activities as they go along, so data are less retrospective (i.e., study participants are typically asked to complete the diary throughout the day or at the end of the day and thus the time of recall is shorter than for questionnaires) (Sullivan, 1996b). Second, it is harder to "cheat," because the total time must add up to 24 hours a day, making it harder to overestimate or underestimate time spent in specific activities (Bianchi et al., 2006). Also, whereas questionnaires usually only ask whether or not people engaged in specific activities, the diary approach takes into account that people perform some activities more frequently than others and that some activities can be more time-consuming than others. Time budget diaries can also be constructed in such a way as to assess the incidence, duration and social context of what is done (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). This allows for a more accurate estimate of time spent together with and apart from a spouse. In this study, leisure time spent with a spouse is approximated by using information on whether or not the respondent reported the partner's presence at the time of the activity. Although this does not by definition imply that the spouses are interacting with each other or are engaged in the same activity, time that is spent *in the presence of a spouse* provides an approximation of time that is spent *with* a spouse.

Time diary methods are particularly suitable with regard to time spent in *leisure* because they are better able to capture activities whose duration is not institutionally controlled. Whereas people are generally able to easily recollect time spent doing paid work, for example, it is much harder to recollect time spent in personal care or leisure. Keeping a diary facilitates this recollection process (Chenu & Lesnard, 2006).

The American Heritage Time Use Study

Data came from the American Heritage Time Use Study (AHTUS) (for an extensive discussion of the separate datasets, see Fisher, Egerton, Torres, Pollmann, & Gershuny, 2006). The AHTUS is a database containing several time use studies conducted in the U.S., which were harmonized for comparability purposes. We used all data in which the presence of others had been recorded, which included the datasets from the years 1965, 1975 and 2003. For all years, the assessment concerned activities engaged in during a 24-hour period, the duration of those activities, and who else (if anyone) was present during each activity.

The 1965 data were collected by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and are part of the 1965 Multinational Comparative Time-Budget Research Project (Szalai, 1972). The original sample size was 2,021. The 1965 survey sampled only respondents aged 19 to 65, living in households with at least one adult member of the household working in an industry other than agriculture. The original study collected two samples: one from the city of Jackson, Michigan, and the surrounding rural areas ($n = 778$) and a second, larger sample of 44 mainly urban census districts from around the country ($n = 1,243$). Of the diaries, 2/7 were collected on a weekend day and 5/7 on a weekday. Response rates were 82% and 74% respectively. Each respondent was asked to complete a diary for one day. The sub-sample of married couples we used consisted of 1,528 respondents. See Table 1 for a description of the demographics of the sample.

The 1975 data, presented in *American's Use of Time: Time Use in Economic and Social Accounts* (Robinson, Jacobson & Godbey, 1999), were collected by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan and formed a nationally representative sample of households. Four waves of data were collected from the same respondents to represent all seasons of the year and all days of the week. Sample size in the first wave was 1,519 respondents and the response rate was 72%. Of all respondents, 44.9% completed diaries during all four waves. The study aimed to collect one diary on a Sunday, one on a Saturday, and two on different weekdays from each sample member. In total, the sample consisted of 2,394 diaries (947 diaries from wave 1; 442 from wave 2; 411 from wave 3; and 594 from wave 4). There were 2,394 diaries of individuals who were married and within the age range of 19 to 65 and the data of these individuals were used in the current study (see Table 1).

The 2003 data came from the *American Time Use Survey*, a national survey collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Diary data were gathered from individuals aged 15 years and older who were living in households that participated in the eighth and final wave of the Current Population Study, selecting one respondent per household. The time-use sub-sample of

the CPS removed the oversampling of small states, but over-sampled families with children. Half of the diaries were collected on weekdays and half on weekend days. The original sample size was 20,720 respondents (response rate was 57.8%) who completed a one-day diary. We included married individuals between 19 and 65 years, resulting in 8,284 complete diaries of married individuals. See Table 1 for more details on the demographic characteristics of this sample.

All datasets were weighted to be representative for gender, age and an equal distribution by day of the week (Fisher et al., 2006). Datasets were harmonized with respect to coding the activities, time intervals and background variables. For a detailed description of the coding and harmonization procedures, see Fisher et al. (2006). Low-quality diaries (90 minutes or more missing, less than 7 episodes, less than 3 out of 4 basic activities, i.e. sleeping, eating, personal care, travel, present in the diary) were excluded from the analyses.

Only main activities could be included in the study, because the data set for 2003 did not contain secondary activities. We were therefore unable to incorporate whether respondents were engaged in more than one activity at the same time (for instance ironing while watching TV). Similarly, because no diaries from the partners were available, we could only include the *presence* of a partner during the respondent's activities, not whether the partner was *involved* in the same activity. Hence, it is possible that the respondent was engaged in leisure with the partner present, but that the partner was doing something else, for example domestic work. Finally, we focused on activities with partners and not on whether or not children were present while engaged in leisure activities, so as not to exclude childless couples. We did control for presence of children in the household, however.

Measurement

Dependent Variables

This study focused on out-of-home leisure, in-home leisure, and media use, and hence included leisure activities that fit into one of these three groups. These groups of activities were further divided into categories to arrive at a detailed description of changes in the amount and percentage of time engaged in various leisure activities in the presence of a partner. With regard to out-of-home leisure, the first group consisted of *visits to cultural and sports events*, and included attending sports events and going to a movie, the theatre, a concert, an opera, a museum or an exhibition. The second group consisted of activities related to *going out*, including going to a restaurant, café, bar, party or reception. For in-home leisure, we again created two groups. The first category, labeled *social activities in the house*, consisted of receiving or visiting friends and other in-home activities such as playing games. *Arts, crafts and hobbies* formed the second group, and included all in-home arts, crafts and hobbies. The last group of activities consisted of *media use*, including watching television, listening to the radio and listening to music. The number of minutes reported was summed for each group of activities, as was the number of minutes spent on each group in the presence of the spouse. The relative time spent on these activities in the presence of the spouse was then calculated.

It was necessary to aggregate these groups into the out-of-home leisure, in-home leisure and media use categories for the explanatory part of the analyses in

order to avoid very small group sizes. Only respondents who engaged in the specified activity could be included in the regression analyses explaining which part of this time was spent in the presence of a partner. The more detailed the group of activities, the smaller the number of respondents reporting time spent on these activities. We also summed up all leisure in order to create an overall leisure measure as well to calculate the percentage of total leisure in the presence of a spouse.

Independent Variables

Two dummy variables were included for the years 1965 and 2003. The reference group was 1975. A dummy for gender was included (male respondents formed the reference group). The gender division of the respondents was approximately equal in all three datasets (see Table 1). Couple's work arrangements were represented by two dummy variables, one referring to dual-earner couples and one referring to an arrangement where both spouses were unemployed. The reference group was the single-earner couple, in which only one of the spouses was engaged in paid work. Table 1 shows that the percentage of dual-earner couples was larger in later years (32% in 1965 and 59% in 2003). The percentage of single-earner couples was lower in 1975 (33%) than in 1965 (65%) but remained stable in 2003 (34%).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Independent and Control Variables

		1965 (N = 1,582)		1975 (N = 2,394)		2003 (N = 8,284)	
	Range	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
<i>Independent Variables</i>							
Single-earner household	0-1	.65	.48	.33	.47	.34	.47
Dual-earner household	0-1	.32	.47	.40	.49	.59	.49
Both unemployed	0-1	.00	.06	.03	.18	.06	.25
Female	0-1	.49	.50	.50	.50	.49	.50
<i>Control Variables</i>							
Age	19-65	39.93	12.33	39.68	12.41	43.21	11.35
Education	1-6	2.95	1.23	3.26	1.33	4.12	1.27
Child under 5	0-1	.32	.47	.21	.41	.26	.44
Child 5–18	0-1	.67	.47	.62	.49	.56	.50
Total leisure (hours)	0-21.92	2.92	2.34	3.13	2.52	3.40	2.62
Weekday	0-1	.71	.45	.72	.45	.70	.46

Control Variables

Age was included in years, and centered on its mean value of 42.1. The average age was somewhat lower in 1965 (39.9, Table 1) and 1975 (39.7) than in 2003 (43.2). Education was measured on a 6-point scale varying from 1 = 0-8th grade to 6 = post college. In the regression analysis, education was centered on the mean. Average educational level was higher in later years (Table 1). Whether or not the household included children younger than 5 or between 5 and 18 years old was represented by two dummy variables. Table 1 shows that the percentage of respondents with children under 5 and children between 5 and 18 in the household was highest in 1965 (32% and 67% respectively). The total amount of leisure time spent on the activities reported on the diary day was included in hours. The total amount of leisure in hours was highest in 2003 (with a mean of 3.4 hours) and lowest in 1965 (2.9 hours). A dummy variable represented whether the diary was completed on a weekday or a weekend day (1 = weekday). Because the dataset was weighted for day of the week, the percentage of weekdays was about equal in all three years (about 71%).

Analytical Strategy

We begin by presenting descriptive results assessing a general trend toward either more or less joint leisure time of spouses. These results included total minutes spent on the five groups of activities, total minutes spent with a spouse and time spent on the specified leisure activity in the presence of a spouse as a percentage of the total time spent on this leisure activity. Differences were tested with t-tests. To allow for conclusions about increases and decreases in time spent with a spouse, we included both absolute amount of time spent with a spouse and the percentage of the total amount of leisure.

Regression models for total leisure time as well as for in-home leisure, out-of-home leisure, and media use helped explain changes in leisure time with a spouse. By controlling for differences between the three years, we were able to assess the extent to which differences in the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse over the four decades remained, and to assess the extent to which the effect of gender and work arrangements was equally strong in the various years by including interaction variables. The regression models with main effects only reveal trends in leisure time with a spouse (*Hypothesis 1* versus *Hypothesis 2*) and the models including interaction variables refer to *Hypotheses 3, 4* and *5*.

Results

Changes in Time Spent in Leisure Activities

Table 2 presents the total number of minutes in five categories of leisure and the percentage of this leisure time that included a marital partner in 1965, 1975 and 2003. It therefore offers a first test of *Hypotheses 1* and *2*. Over the years, the total amount of time spent on the leisure activities included in this study increased from 175 minutes a day in 1965 to 188 minutes in 1975 and 204 minutes in 2003 (all changes were significant at $p < .001$). The percentage of time spent in the presence of a spouse when engaged in these leisure activities was higher

in later years: in 1965 this was 59%, in 1975 it was 62% and in 2003 66%. The increase between 1975 and 2003 was significant, but the difference between 1965 and 1975 was not significant. These results are in line with *Hypothesis 2* while *Hypothesis 1* is rejected.

Table 2. Total Minutes on Average Day (Standard Deviations) and Percentage of Time Spent in the Presence of a Partner in 1965, 1975 and 2003 for Leisure Activities

	Total minutes			Percentage with spouse		
	1965	1975	2003	1965	1975	2003
Total leisure activities	175.1 (140.4)	187.5 (151.2)	204.1 (157.3)	59 (40)	62 ^a (40)	66 ^b (37)
Out-of-home leisure						
Cultural and sports events	4.6 (29.4)	5.7 (31.6)	6.0 (33.5)	63 (49)	64 (48)	71 ^b (45)
Restaurants, bars, parties, etc.	17.1 (51.4)	7.7 ^a (38.4)	22.0 ^b (53.7)	47 (49)	41 (49)	63 ^b (47)
In-home leisure						
In-home social activities	43.3 (78.2)	41.9 (81.8)	44.2 (83.3)	41 (46)	47 ^a (47)	64 ^b (44)
Arts, crafts and hobbies	9.6 (38.7)	10.6 (47.1)	1.6 ^b (17.6)	19 (37)	20 (37)	20 (39)
Media use						
TV, radio, music	100.5 (102.5)	121.6 ^a (125.4)	130.2 ^b (132.1)	68 (41)	69 (40)	65 ^b (42)

^aSignificant difference ($p < .05$) compared to 1965

^bSignificant difference ($p < .05$) compared to 1965 and 1975

The increase in the percentage of time spent in the presence of a spouse was not found in all the groups of leisure activities included (Table 2). With respect to in-home leisure, there was a significant difference between all three years only for in-home social activities, with higher percentages in later years. No significant changes were found for arts, crafts and hobbies. With respect to out-of-home leisure, the percentages for visiting cultural and sports events increased over time (63% in 1965, 64% in 1975 and 71% in 2003, the differences with 2003 were significant, the difference between 1965 and 1975 were not). For going out to restaurants, bars and parties, the percentage was lowest for 1975 (41%) and highest for 2003 (64%). Compared to 1965 (47%) and 1975, the percentage was significantly higher in 2003. For media use, the percentage of time spent in the presence of a spouse was significantly lower in 2003, but did not differ significantly between 1965 and 1975.

When considering these percentages, the total time spent on these activities should also be taken into account. There was a slight increase over time in minutes spent attending cultural and sports events, but this increase was not significant. The average number of minutes reported for going out to a restaurant, bar, party or reception decreased in 1975 and increased again in 2003. The total time spent on in-home social activities was about the same in all three years. Average time spent on arts, crafts and hobbies at home was significantly lower in 2003 than in 1965 and 1975, dropping from 10.6 minutes in 1965 to only 1.6 minutes in 2003. The average time spent on media use showed a major increase from 100.5 minutes in 1965 to 121.6 in 1975 and 130.2 minutes in 2003 – a significant difference in all three years.

In summary, people spent more time (in percentage as well as number of minutes) going out, attending cultural and sports events, and on in-home social activities in the presence of a spouse in 2003 than they did in the earlier years. A comparable increase was not found for more individual activities such as arts, crafts, hobbies and media use. Although people's lives may have become busier by 2003, couples were spending an increasing amount of their social time in each other's company.

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses with only main effects for all leisure activities taken together and for out-of-home leisure, in-home leisure and media use separately, providing a further test of *Hypothesis 1* and *Hypothesis 2*.

After including the independent and control variables, there was still a significant increase in the later years in the percentage of leisure time spent in the presence of a spouse, providing further support for *Hypothesis 2*. In terms of separate groups of activities, this effect was found for in-home leisure only. The difference between 1965 and 1975 was not significant for out-of-home leisure. For media use, the percentage was smaller in 2003 than in 1975. There was no significant difference between 1965 and 1975.

Table 3 further shows that—after controlling for differences in work arrangements and background variables—women spent a smaller percentage of their leisure time in the presence of their spouse than did men. The lower percentage for women compared to men was found for in-home leisure and media use, but not for out-of-home leisure. Only for some activities, such as media use, dual-earner couples spent a lower percentage of their leisure time in each others' presence. However, when both spouses were unemployed, there was a positive relationship with joint leisure time for both out-of-home leisure and media use. Regarding the interaction between gender and work arrangements, we expected a negative interaction effect, indicating a lower percentage of leisure time in the presence of a partner for dual-earner women, but Table 3 shows a positive interaction effect: Women who were part of a dual-earner couple spent a larger percentage of their leisure time in the presence of a spouse compared to women in a single-earner couple. The coefficient for the interaction term is about as large as the one for gender, which means that the difference in percentage of joint leisure between men and women is large for single-earner couples (a difference of 11.69%), but much smaller for dual-earner couples (the difference between women in dual earner couples $(-11.69 - 6.53 + 10.03 = -8.19)$ and men in dual earner couples (-6.53) is only

Table 3. Regression of Percentage of Time in Presence of Partner (Total Leisure Time, N = 12,824, Out-of-Home Leisure N = 2,821, In-Home Leisure N = 5,365, Media Use N = 9,498)

	Total Leisure		Out-of-home Leisure		In-home Leisure		Media Use	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	84.06***	1.50	64.25***	4.32	62.58***	2.62	90.98***	1.80
1965 ^a	-2.70*	1.31	-.84	3.96	-5.36*	2.20	-1.19	1.57
2003 ^a	5.07***	.99	16.27***	3.30	18.11***	1.70	-2.56*	1.17
Female	-11.69***	1.03	-1.28	2.65	-10.30***	1.75	-10.18***	1.21
Dual-earner household ^b	-6.53***	1.04	-3.50	2.55	-1.67	1.89	-7.71***	1.23
Both spouses not employed ^b	3.28~	1.72	8.80*	4.17	-1.75	2.81	6.40**	1.97
Age	-.20***	.04	-.12	.09	0.09	.06	-.29***	.04
Education	-.56~	.29	.22	.73	1.94***	.50	-.87*	.34
Child under 5 in household	-2.78**	1.02	-1.88	2.50	.09	1.72	-3.81**	1.22
Child 5-17 in household	-6.75***	.87	-4.74*	2.08	-1.54	1.48	-8.32***	1.04
Total leisure in hours	-1.31***	.15	.46	.38	-.87***	.25	-1.49***	.18
Weekday	-10.15***	.81	-22.71***	1.85	-11.26***	1.33	-8.35***	.97
Dual-earner hld* female	10.03***	1.43	3.36	3.48	2.44	2.45	11.28***	1.70
Adjusted R ²	.036		.076		.076		.028	

^aReference group is 1975

^bReference group is single-earner household

~p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

1.66%). When analyzing the groups of activities separately, this result was found only for media use, and not for in-home leisure or out-of-home leisure.

The presence of children in the household showed a negative relationship with total joint leisure, and also with the separate groups of activities, with the exception of in-home leisure. Also, the percentage of leisure time spent in the presence of a spouse was lower for older and higher educated people, since they had more leisure time at their disposal. This was found for total leisure, in-home leisure and media use. For all leisure groups, the percentage of leisure time spent in the presence of a spouse was smaller on weekdays than on weekends.

Leisure Time: Gender and Work Arrangements

To answer the second research question, that is whether changes in leisure time with a spouse vary by gender and work arrangement, we estimated regression models with interaction terms. Table 4 shows the results when including the interaction terms gender * year and work arrangements * year, testing *Hypotheses 3, 4 and 5* on differences over time between groups. Significant interaction terms for the separate groups of activities are not presented in the tables, but are discussed in the text.

Hypothesis 3 stated our expectation that the negative relationship between dual-earner households and spending leisure time with a spouse would be weaker in 2003 than in the earlier years. Model 1 in Table 4 shows that the interaction of work arrangement with year was not significant, providing no support for our hypothesis. Neither did we find any significant relationship between work arrangement and joint leisure when looking at the three groups of leisure activities separately (results not shown).

For the relationship between gender and spending leisure time with a spouse, we expected that the difference between men and women in the percentage of time spent in the presence of a spouse would be smaller in later years (*Hypothesis 4*). Model 2 shows a positive interaction between 2003 and gender, indicating that the difference between men and women indeed was smaller in later years, supporting *Hypothesis 4*. When examining the three groups of leisure separately, this significant interaction was found only for media use, and not for out-of-home and in-home leisure.

Finally, Model 3 shows that the positive interaction between gender and work arrangements – indicating that women who are part of a dual-earner couple spend a larger part of their leisure time in the presence of their spouse – did not vary over time. Whereas the significant interaction between dual-earner couple and gender indicated that the relationship between work arrangement and leisure with a spouse differed for men and women, this did not change over time. Women from dual-earner couples spent a larger part of their leisure time in the presence of their spouse than men, and this relationship did not change significantly between 1965 and 2003. Therefore, *Hypothesis 5* was not confirmed.

Table 4. Percentage of Total Leisure Time Spent in the Presence of a Spouse Including Two-Way and Three-Way Interactions (N = 12,824)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	84.46***	1.62	84.96***	1.65	85.50***	1.53
1965 ^a	-2.81	1.61	-1.30	1.86	-2.84*	1.43
2003 ^a	4.43**	1.29	3.11*	1.36	4.38***	1.09
Female	-11.72***	1.03	-13.49***	.174	-11.72***	1.03
Dual-earner household ^b	-7.52***	1.84	-6.06***	1.05	-6.40***	1.05
Both spouses not employed ^b	3.46*	1.73	3.12	1.72	3.47*	1.72
Age	-.20***	.04	-.20***	.04	-.20***	.04
Education	-.57*	.29	-.56*	.29	-.58*	.29
Child under 5 in hld	-2.78**	1.02	-2.80**	1.02	-2.79**	1.02
Child 5-17 in hld	-6.76***	.87	-6.75***	.87	-6.76***	.87
Total leisure in hours	-1.31***	.15	-1.30***	.15	-1.31***	.15
Weekday	-10.15***	.81	-10.12***	.81	-10.16***	.81
Dual-earner hld* female	10.05***	1.43	8.90***	1.47	7.38**	2.45
1965* dual-earner hld	.09	2.77				
2003* dual-earner hld	1.42	1.90				
1965* female			-2.93	.261		
2003* female			4.00*	1.88		
1965* female* dual-earner hld					.42	3.61
2003* female* dual-earner hld					3.36	2.35
R ²	.036		.037		.036	

^aReference group is 1975

^bReference group is single-earner household

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper reports the results of a study exploring whether the percentage of time individuals engage in leisure activities with a spouse present changed between 1965, 1975 and 2003, and if so, what factors might help explain that change.

Several researchers have expressed their concern that couples today have more difficulty organizing shared time than before because of increasing demands from the labor market (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). We conclude that partners spend more than half of their leisure time in the presence of their spouse. Results further indicate that this percentage was higher in 2003 than in 1965 and 1975. Although the mere presence of a spouse during a leisure activity does not by definition mean that the partners are engaged in the same activity, the results of this study nonetheless indicate that couples still spend leisure time together, and more so today than four decades ago.

The increase in the percentage of time spent in the presence of a spouse over the past four decades was particularly evident for social activities, such as going out to a restaurant, café, bar, party or reception. In addition, joint leisure time spent on in-home social activities increased, such as visiting and receiving friends and playing games. The presence of a spouse during these activities is likely to mean that the spouse is engaged in the same activity. Overall, irrespective of processes of individualization in American society, spouses appear to spend more time together when engaged in those leisure activities that are of a social nature.

The fact that couples spend more time in each other's presence in social leisure activities might be interpreted in line with theoretical work on how marriage has changed, in particular the claim that personal satisfaction is now more central to marriage (Bellah et al., 1985) and therefore partners have come to construct their own form of togetherness (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). If couples spend an increasing amount of their leisure time in each other's company, this may mean that partnerships have become more intimate and are based more on shared experiences than in the past, for example enjoying leisure activities together. This is in line with Giddens' idea that there has been a "transformation of intimacy" in marriage in recent decades (Giddens, 1990; Gillies, 2003).

The increase in leisure time spent with a spouse contradicts the popular idea that people are increasingly busy nowadays and have less time for their families. We did find that dual-earner couples spent less time in the presence of their partner than single-earner couples, indicating that couples facing more time restrictions have relatively less time left for each other. However, within the time constraints imposed by other domains, people appear to prioritize time with their partner and succeed in this to a certain extent, more so now than in the past.

Women reported a lower percentage of joint leisure time than men, but this difference became smaller in later years, indicating that men and women have become more similar over time. This is in line with other findings regarding gender differences in men's and women's time use (Gershuny, 2000). With more comparable workweeks, similar levels of education, comparable jobs, and shared child care, men and women have become more similar in their leisure time as well.

Still, important differences in leisure time, experiences and preferences remain between men and women, especially where family leisure is concerned. First

of all, the frequently demonstrated positive relationship between marital satisfaction and spousal joint leisure (Berg et al., 2001; Sullivan, 1996a, 1996b) is contingent on the spouses' leisure preferences (Crawford, Houts, Huston, & George, 2002). Not all leisure has the same beneficial effect. Leisure can also have negative effects, especially for women in households with children. For mothers, the role of a family caretaker makes it harder to perceive family leisure as enjoyable, while fathers experience family leisure as time for diversion and self-expression (Larson, Gillman and Richards, 1997). Furthermore, family leisure may constrain individual leisure, especially for women (Shaw, 1997; Henderson & Hickerson, 2007). Previous research has shown that women report stronger feelings of overall balance when they have more couple leisure without children present, whereas men feel they are better able to balance different roles in life when leisure is experienced as a family (Marks, Huston, Johnson & MacDermid, 2001). Our study showed that the presence of children in the household diminished the percentage of joint leisure time spent with a spouse, which is in line with these previous findings.

Restrictions imposed by the labor market proved to be an important influence on leisure time spent with a spouse. People with a paid job generally have less leisure time and when both partners in a couple have a paid job, the relative share of what is already a curtailed reservoir of leisure time spent in each other's presence is smaller than for single-earner couples. Furthermore, changes in society that make it easier for dual-earner couples to arrange time together (longer store opening hours is one example) have not affected the difference between single-earner and dual-earner couples in the percentage of leisure time spent with a partner. The absence of change can also be interpreted positively, however, as the difference has not become larger either. Although research shows that dual earners feel more time pressure than ever (Van der Lippe & Peters, 2007), they seem to manage to spend as much time together as in the past.

While we demonstrated a clear trend of increasing leisure time with a spouse, we were less successful at explaining differences between groups in the percentage of leisure time spent with a spouse over time. Explained variance was low, implying that although we found significant differences between single and dual-earner households and between men and women, we had not identified many other factors contributing to spending more leisure time with a spouse.

Limitations and Future Research

One important limitation of our study is the approximation of joint leisure by looking at reported presence of a spouse. Presence of a spouse does not guarantee that the spouse is involved in the same activity, and even then it is not certain that a couple engages in this activity together. For instance, partners could be watching separate TV sets at the same time. On the other hand, it is also possible that even if the spouse is not engaged in the same activity, his or her mere presence may allow for interaction. Also, the activities for which our results are most convincing are those where the presence of a spouse is most likely synonymous with the spouse's participation in the same activity, such as going out to a restaurant or visiting friends. Nonetheless, it would undoubtedly have been better if we could have included diary data from the partner. Future research could take this next step and

examine couple leisure by using matched data from both partners. Finally, engaging together in the same leisure activity does not imply per se that they both enjoy it. More research is needed into the subjective experience of leisure time.

The data we used had other limitations. First of all, the 2003 data only included the primary activity the respondent was engaged in, whereas people can be involved in multiple activities at the same time. Which one of the activities is reported is at the discretion of the respondent. As a result, leisure as a secondary activity could not be included. Most likely this led to an underestimation of leisure time reported by women. Research shows that women are more likely than men to be engaged in domestic work or child care simultaneously with leisure, referred to as contaminated leisure (Mattingly & Bianci, 2003). In addition, women's leisure is more likely to be interrupted by non-leisure activities (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000).

We did not address family leisure because we did not include the presence of children while engaging in leisure activities. We opted for this approach because we wanted to paint an overall picture of couples and their leisure behavior, not limiting ourselves to couples with children. Future research should further address this issue by studying changes in leisure time while separating time alone with a spouse from time with both spouse and children. Ideally, such a study should not only address trends in the quantity of leisure time, but also in enjoyment and overall experience and the differences between men and women in that respect. Furthermore replicating the study using couples level data might provide even stronger support for our findings.

In conclusion, this study has provided an initial understanding of the joint leisure time of couples over the past four decades. The clear increase in the percentage of leisure time spent *in the presence of* a spouse over four decades at the very least suggests that spouses spend more leisure time *together*. Because this is the first assessment of such a change, and because it is at odds with the general experience of increasing time pressure (Van der Lippe & Peters, 2007) this result is highly relevant and warrants continued investigation.

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