

## Spending time together – changes in joint activities of couples over four decades

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### Abstract

*Using American time diary data from 1965, 1975 and 2003, this study aims to provide support for the idea that marriage has changed over the last decades, towards a union that is more strongly based on intimacy and where partners create their own 'togetherness'. For this purpose it is tested whether people spend an increasing part of their time in several leisure activities in the presence of their partner in 2003 compared to earlier years. Results show that when social activities are concerned, partners indeed spend a larger part of their leisure time together, also after controlling for different compositions of the groups over the years, which is congruent with the idea that marriage has become more intimate.*

### Introduction

Shared time of spouses is important for their marital quality. Several authors have found evidence that shared leisure time is positively related to marital satisfaction (e.g., Crawford, Houts, Huston, & George, 2002; Miller, 1976; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Zuo, 1992). Yet little is known about the amount of time partners actually spend together. Furthermore, there are indications that, because of competing demands of the labour market, couples may have

less time together now than in the past (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). This paper sets out to investigate how much leisure time couples spend in each other's presence and how this has changed over the last four decades.

Changes in the amount of shared leisure time may reflect changes in the nature of the spousal relationship. If couples spend an increasing amount of their free time in each other's company, this may reflect that partnerships have become more intimate and are more strongly based on shared experiences. A decreasing amount of shared free time, on the other hand, may reflect increased individualisation, where both members have a more separate lifestyle.

Various authors have developed theoretical ideas regarding why the spousal relationship has changed. On the one hand processes of individualization are thought to have led to more independence of partners making them less focused on each other (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001), which can be expected to lead to less shared leisure time. Many competing demands result in a struggle between one's own time and common time (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). This struggle is thought to make it increasingly difficult to spend time together with a spouse.

On the other hand individualization is thought to have led to a transformation of intimacy; the increased impersonality of modern social life, is thought to have made partnerships more strongly based on the mutuality of self-disclosure, which implies that partners are more focused on each other (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Giddens, 1990). This would make a shared lifestyle more important for successful marriages, reflected in an increased share of leisure time by partners.

This paper aims to assess the extent to which partner relationships have changed over the last few decades by investigating leisure behaviour of couples. We argue that the nature of the spousal relationship is related to the shared experience of spouses. This shared experience can be examined by investigating shared leisure activities. We study joint leisure behaviour of

partners, because this represents how partners organize their day-to-day life together outside of paid and unpaid work. Furthermore, leisure activities are likely to become increasingly important in the lives of people as the importance of external constraints and complementary roles in marriage is decreasing (Orthner & Mancini, 1990).

Surprisingly, changes in shared experiences of couples have hardly been the topic of research so far. Whereas there are studies examining the relation between marital interaction and marital quality (White, 1983; Zuo, 1992), and enjoyment of shared activities of couples (Berg, Trost, Schneider, & Allison, 2001; Sullivan, 1996a, 1996b), they do not look at changes over time and studies that do look at changes over time look at demographical changes on the macro-level such as increased divorce, non-marital cohabitation and childbirth outside of marriage (Amato, 2004; Cherlin, 2004). Yet, the theoretical idea of the transformation of intimacy refers to the micro level, even though embedded in the macro structures of society. This paper looks at evidence, from a previously unexploited source, of changes in shared experience of couples over the last four decades, in order to see to what extent we can find any support for the claim of the transformation of intimacy on the micro level as well.

## **Background**

### ***The changing nature of marriage***

Over the last decades, the nature of marriage has changed, as a result of cultural and material trends during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several family scholars have written about these changes that by Burgess were labelled as a transition “from an institution to a companionship” (Burgess, Locke, & Thomes, 1963, p. vii). Marriage was changing from a social institution, regulated by social norms, public opinion, law and religion, to a more private arrangement based on

companionship between two autonomous individuals (Amato, 2004). With this transition Burgess referred to the change from families as production units to the single-earner breadwinner families that were dominant in the 1950s. Although there was a sharp division of labour, spouses were thought to be each other's companions and relationship satisfaction was more important than in the previous century.

Following this transition, Cherlin points to a second transition of marriage, that began in the 1960s and accelerated in the 1970s. In this period the roles between husbands and wives became more flexible and negotiable, suggesting a more individualistic perspective on marriage (Cherlin, 2004). Cherlin refers to a process of deinstitutionalisation, implying 'the weakening of the social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution such as marriage' (Cherlin, 2004, p. 848). He named this transition the transition from the companionate marriage to the individualised marriage. Individualization leads to the formation of partnerships that are more egalitarian and flexible and more strongly based on love and affection (Bumpass, 1990).

This growing individualisation of private life is in line with theoretical work by Anthony Giddens, who points at a 'transformation of intimacy': In a modernized world personal ties are thought to be guided more strongly by mutuality of self-disclosure and a concern for self-fulfilment (Giddens, 1990). '[A]s traditional sources of identity such as class, religion, and community lose influence, one's intimate relationships become central to self-identity: the emergence of the "pure relationship", an intimate partnership entered into for its own sake' (Cherlin, 2004, p.853). Bellah and colleagues referred in this respect to an increasing tension between marriage as a social function of stable, committed relationships that tie a couple into the larger society and as psychological gratification (Bellah et al., 1985).

Beck and Beck-Gersheim also acknowledge the changing nature of the family in general, by stressing that the family is changing from a community of need into a group of

elective relationships. As a result of individualization, the fixed context and content of marriage has made room for a union that is much more flexible and dynamic, where partners need to construct their own form of togetherness. The family is becoming an association of individual persons, each with their own interests and experiences, and each subject to different restrictions. Nonetheless, they acknowledge that individualization also fosters a longing for intimacy and security, as a result of which most people will want to continue to live in a partnership or family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

In support of their claim for a changed marriage, scholars often point toward observable changes in society that demonstrate the change in the meaning of marriage: increasing childbirth outside of marriage, growth of nonmarital cohabitation, higher divorce rates, and a changing division of labour between the spouses (Amato, 2004; Cherlin, 2004). With the exception of the changing division of labour, these changes all reflect structural changes in society, rather than a change in the experience of marriage itself. What is missing is a clear insight into the experience of couples. To what extent do those people who are married now have the same kind and amount of shared experiences as couples in the 1960s? Is there a change in the behaviour couples display now compared to then?

One could expect that if there is indeed a transformation of intimacy, where couples search more for psychological gratification from their relationship, that shared experiences of couples are more important now than in the past. Where several decades ago marital quality may have been important, it could have been more dependent on other aspects such as role performance, because the fixed roles of husband wife and parent defined marriage more strongly, possibly leaving less room for shared experience of spouses.

*From shared experience to shared leisure time*

We look at shared experience by examining leisure time partners spend in each others presence. Shared leisure time of couples is in our opinion a good proxy for intimacy. First, shared time by partners is important. Although not always explicitly formulated in these studies, the numerous studies on the relation between shared activities and marital satisfaction (e.g., Berg et al., 2001; Hill, 1988; Miller, 1976; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Zuo, 1992) are based on the same theoretical idea; that spending time together in families reflects intimacy. The greater the amount of 'togetherness', the happier the marriage (Kingston & Nock, 1987).

Second, when looking at shared time, it is informative to look at shared leisure time. Not all time partners spend together necessarily reflects intimacy. Most indicative of intimacy can be expected to be joint leisure time, because people are relatively free in how to spend this time and with whom. Second, leisure activities in general are activities people enjoy. When partners spend this time together it may enhance intimacy, through a shared enjoyed experience. Indeed, people are found to enjoy leisure activities more when they are done in the presence of a partner (Sullivan, 1996b). Furthermore, shared leisure time of couples reflects interdependency: the more leisure time is spent together, the more one's well-being is dependent on the partner and raise the costs of a possible break-up (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

We expect that over the last four decades the amount of shared leisure time that partners spend in each other's presence has increased. Increased copresence – if we should find it – of course cannot be taken as *necessarily* indicative of a growth of intimacy; but contrarily, if intimacy has indeed increased, it would be most unlikely that spousal copresence would have decreased. So we have some sort of empirical test of the Giddens hypothesis.

*Changes in joint leisure time: group compositional differences or changed behaviour*

When assessing change over several decades it is important to be aware of the fact that we are comparing different groups of people. The composition of the group of married individuals as well as the context in which they live changes in various respects over the period under observation. The biggest relevant change in this case is the increased labour force participation of women. Dual earner families have become increasingly common over the last decades, and the breadwinner model is no longer the dominant form. Also, leisure time differs between men and women. Whereas gender differences became smaller with respect to paid work and domestic work, they increased in the amount of free time, especially after marriage and having children (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). Couples with children have less shared leisure time (Hill, 1988).

Increased labour force participation of women has led to increased time restrictions as it has become increasingly complicated to bring together family members with more independent lives (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). There is evidence that the increased difficulty in balancing work and family is more the result of a shift from male breadwinner to dual earner couples rather than changes in the length of the workweek per se (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). Similarly, when both partners work, it may be more difficult to arrange shared time, a finding sustained in some older studies (Kingston & Nock, 1987), and this was found to be related to less marital interaction (Kingston & Nock, 1987) lower marital satisfaction and higher likelihood of marital conflict (Rogers & Amato, 1997, 2000). Thus, although partners may have a stronger preference to spend leisure time together, they may have more difficulty in realizing this, as a result of increased pressure from other domains (Daly, 2001).

To assess changes in intimacy by looking at changes in shared leisure time, it is important to look at this effect net of time restrictions imposed by the labour market. So it is important to find out to what extent changes in shared leisure is really about a change in the

composition of the group (consisting for a larger part of dual earner couples in the later years) or an actual change in a preference for shared leisure time.

Changes in society lead to a different context in which couples make decisions regarding how to spend their leisure time. This implies that in a society in which more women are active on the labour market the importance of this participation may be different from earlier years. The same can be expected about the presence of children in the household.

In addition to looking at changes in copresence – in what follows we will try to examine the components (or “decompose”) of any changes in copresence, in order to make explicit whether any such change remains having accounted for what may be associated with factors other than intimacy. Decomposition is done in two ways, as a shift-share analysis where changes between years are adjusted for changes in group composition for various characteristics (see also Gershuny, 2000; Jenkins & O’Leary, 1997), and as a more formal decomposition, where a distinction is made between changes in the composition of the group and changes in actual behaviour (Althausser & Wigler, 1972; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000).

### ***Shared leisure time: the time budget approach***

The best way to investigate how couples spend their leisure time is to use time diary data. In time use research people are asked to keep meticulous track of the time they spend in various activities by the use of time diaries. There are several advantages of time diary data over the use of questionnaires. First, they are more accurate, because people are asked to record their activities as they go along, so data is not retrospective. 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. Also, where in questionnaires usually only ask for whether or not people engaged in specific activities, the diary approach takes into account



that some activities are done more frequently than others and can be more time consuming than others. This allows for a better estimation of time spent together and apart. Specifically with regard to time spent in leisure, time diary methods are better at capturing activities which duration is not institutionally controlled. Where people in general are well able to recollect time spent doing paid work for example, it is a lot harder to recollect time spent in personal care or leisure. Also, time diary data include time spent at home relaxing etc, which is a very common way of spending time and is often not captured by questionnaire method, which usually asks for specific activities.

In many time use studies people are not only asked about their activities, but also about who they were with at that time. Thus, joint activities of couples can be assessed by using information on whether or not the respondent reported that the partner was present at the time of the activity. This implies that we do not know whether the partner was engaged in the same activity or doing something else. Nevertheless, for certain activities, such as visiting friends, it seems plausible to assume that a partner is engaging in the same activity when present. For activities in the home this is less clear, but presence of a partner provides opportunities for interaction and hence for intimacy.

### **Data and methods**

Data come from the American Heritage Time Use Study (AHTUS) (Fisher, Egerton, Gershuny, & Robinson, 2006). The AHTUS is a database of harmonized national time-diary data that standardizes information on almost forty years of daily life in the US. We use data from the years 1965, 1975 and 2003, allowing us to draw conclusions on how couples' leisure activities have changed over the last forty years. In all years activities over 24 hours were assessed as well as who else was present during the 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. Original sample size was 2,021. The sub-sample of couples we used consisted of 1,586 respondents. Data were collected in two parts: one part from Jackson, Michigan and surrounds (n = 778) and one part consisted of a national sample of 44 metropolitan areas (n = 1,243). Response rates were 82% and 74% respectively. Each respondent was asked to complete a diary for one day, on the day.

The 1975 data, titled American's use of time: Time use in economic and social accounts, were collected by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan and consisted of four waves of data collection from the same respondents. Sample size in the first wave was 1,519 respondents and the response rate was 72%. 44.9% completed diaries 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 consists of 2,846 diaries. It is acceptable to use information from the same people over four waves for several reasons. First, the diary days cannot really be treated as longitudinal data, because time use surveys do not reveal the range of patterns in which any particular individual engages, but rather reveals what patterns of activity occur in the general population. A second reason to use all four waves is that small numbers of diaries can produce peculiar results and using all four waves increases the sample size. Third, the four waves span a whole year, allowing for inclusion of seasonal activity variation. The other datasets used have information from throughout the whole year as well.

The 2003 data come from the American Time Use Survey, collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (USA Department of Labor) and is a national sample. Original sample size is 20,720 respondents who were asked to complete a one-day diary. The analytical sample consisting of only couples was 10,835 diaries. Response rate was 57.8%.

### *Dependent variables*

Five groups of activities were studied. Table 1 shows which activities were included. The first group consisted of visits to cultural and sports events. Activities related to going out to dinner, parties, reception and other functions were grouped together in a second group, labelled going out. Third, social activities in the house were grouped together, containing receiving or visiting friends and other in-home activities such as games. Arts, crafts and hobbies were included as a fourth group, containing 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. All these activities have in common that they are leisure activities, have potentially a social aspect to it and are measured in all three years. For all groups of activities, the number of minutes spent in these activities were summed, as were the number of minutes spent in these activities in the presence of a partner. A relative share in these activities in the presence of a partner could then be calculated.

Table 1. Categories of leisure activities

<b>Cultural and sports events</b>	<b>In-home social</b>	<b>Media use</b>
attend sporting event	Receive or visit friends	listen to music (cd etc.)
go to cinema	other in-home social, games	listen to radio
theatre, concert, opera		watch television, video
museums, exhibitions		
<b>Going out</b>	<b>Arts, crafts and hobbies</b>	
restaurant, café, bar	artistic activity	
parties or receptions	Crafts	
	Hobbies	

### *Independent variables*

On the independent side, gender and working arrangements were taken into consideration. This was done in two ways. First, gender of the respondent was taken into account together by creating different categories for gender and whether or not the respondent has a paid job, where a distinction is made between no job, a parttime job and a fulltime job, resulting in six categories (men and women in three categories of employment). Secondly, analyses were run controlling for the following variables separately: age gender and educational level of the respondent, the number of children younger than 5 in the household, the number of children between 5 and 18 in the household, and dummy variables for whether the household is a single earner or dual earner household (reference category), or whether they are both unemployed.

### *Method*

First, descriptive results are presented to assess a general trend towards more or less joint leisure time of partners. Second, these figures are adjusted for changes in group composition between the different years by shift-share analyses, in which figures are weighted. Finally, a decomposition analysis is done in which variation is decomposed into a part attributable to differences in means between the different years, a part attributable to differences in effects of the independent variables and an interaction part in which differences in means and effects cannot be distinguished.

### **Results**

Table 2 presents the proportions spent in the presence of a partner on the five groups of activities in 1965, 1975 and 2003. It shows that people spend a larger part of their leisure time together with their partner when visiting cultural and sports events, restaurants, bars, etcetera,

and in-home social activities are concerned. A much smaller increase is found for arts, crafts and hobbies and even a decrease for tv, radio and music is found.

Table 2 Proportion of time spent in the presence of a partner in 1965, 1975 and 2003 for five groups of leisure activities

	1965	1975	2003
Cultural and sports events	.55	.65	.71
Restaurants, bars, parties, etc.	.47	.45	.70
In-home social activities	.40	.50	.66
Arts, crafts and hobbies	.19	.24	.24
Tv, radio, music	.68	.69	.66

When considering these proportions, it should be noted that also the total time spent on these activities should be taken into account and that differences in joint leisure between the couples in the 60's and 70's and in 2003 can be attributable to the fact that the composition of the groups differ in the different years. For instance, more women have joined the workforce, leading to different time restrictions but also to different lifestyles. For this reason the proportion of time spent in the presence of a partner is presented both unadjusted as well as adjusted for compositional differences with regard to gender and working arrangements. This is done by the earlier mentioned method of "shift-share" analysis, where means for different years are adjusted for changes in labour force participation of men and women. A more formal decomposition procedure is followed as well, later in the study, in which changes in other variables are included and also changes in behaviour are modelled.

Figures 1a to 5b show the results for cultural and sports events (Figures 1), going out (Figures 2), in-home social activities (Figures 3), arts, crafts and hobbies (Figures 4) and media use (Figures 5). The models a show the total number of minutes spent on the given

activity on an average day in 1965, 1975 and 2003. The models b show the relative share of time spent on this activity with a partner present for the same years, both adjusted for changes in the composition of the group based on gender and working arrangements as well as unadjusted for this. The unadjusted figures show the total change, the adjusted figures represent the change if one takes into account the fact that the groups we are comparing (1965, 1975 and 2003) differ in composition.

Figure 1a shows that, overall, people spent slightly more time on attending cultural and sporting events in 2003 than a couple of decades ago. But it should be noted that still the average number of minutes per day is low (5.8 minutes in 2003), as these activities are usually not that frequent. As expected, the average part of this time that is spent in the presence of a partner increased in this period (Figure 1b, the difference between 1965 and 2003 is close to significance with a p-value of -1.853 for a two-sided t-test of means,  $p = .07$ ) and when controlling for differences in group composition (part of the increase is caused by more working women in later years, who spend more time on going to cultural and sports events) the increase becomes smaller but is still there. Thus, not only do people spend more time on these activities, but that they also spend a larger proportion of this time together with a partner.

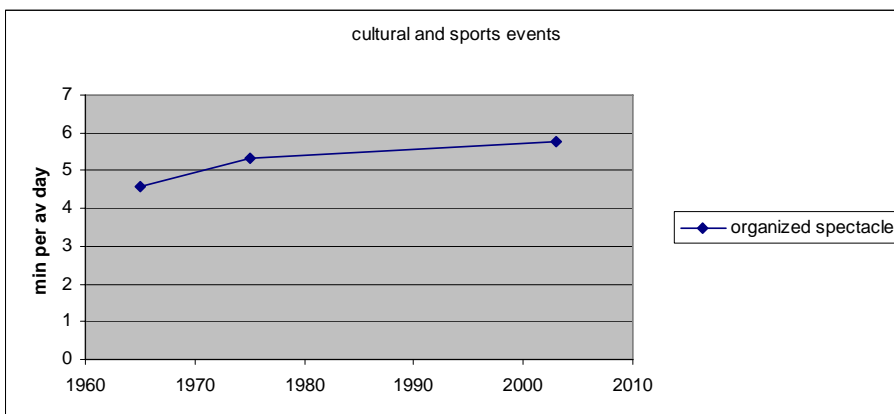


Figure 1a Total time spent on an average day on cultural and sports events

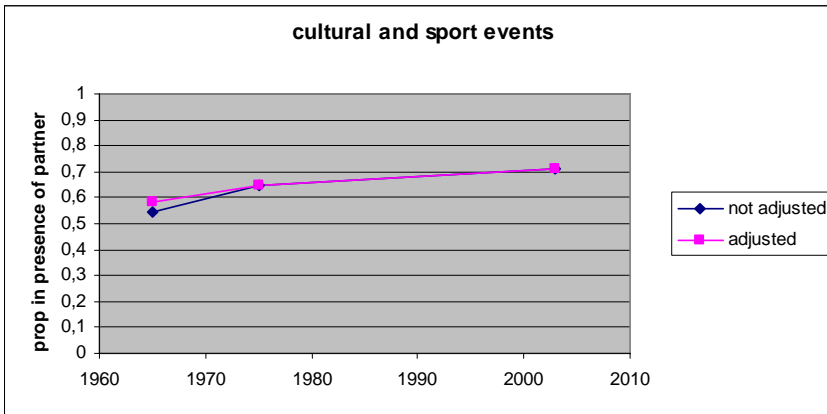


Figure 1b Proportion of time spent on cultural and sports events in the presence of a partner (both adjusted and unadjusted for changes in labour force participation of men and women)

The number of minutes spent on going out to a restaurant, bar, party or reception first decreased in 1975 from 17 to 7 minutes after which it increased to about 22 minutes (Figure 2a). The relative share of this time spent with a partner (unadjusted for changes in group composition) went up from around .46 (1965/1975) to .70, which is highly significant (t-value of -7.537 for 1965-2003,  $p < .000$ ). Adjusting for differences in group composition leads to an increase in proportion spent in the presence of a partner for the 1965 data, but has no effect for the 1975 and 2003 data.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in 2003 people go out to restaurants, bars etcetera more than a couple of decades ago and also do this more as a couple.

A comparable trend can be observed in Figures 3a and 3b, concerning social activities in-home. The total time spent on in-home social activities went up slightly from 43 minutes in 1965 to slightly less than 46 in 2003. The proportion of this time spent in the presence of a partner went up from .40 to .66 (t-value = -13.219 for 1965-2003,  $p < .000$ ), which hardly

<sup>1</sup> The adjustment both here and in what follows hardly makes a difference, and essentially the same emerges from the formal decomposition in the following section.

changed after taking account of differences in group composition (from .42 to .67). The majority of time in these activities is thus spent as a couple, and increasingly more so now than in the past.

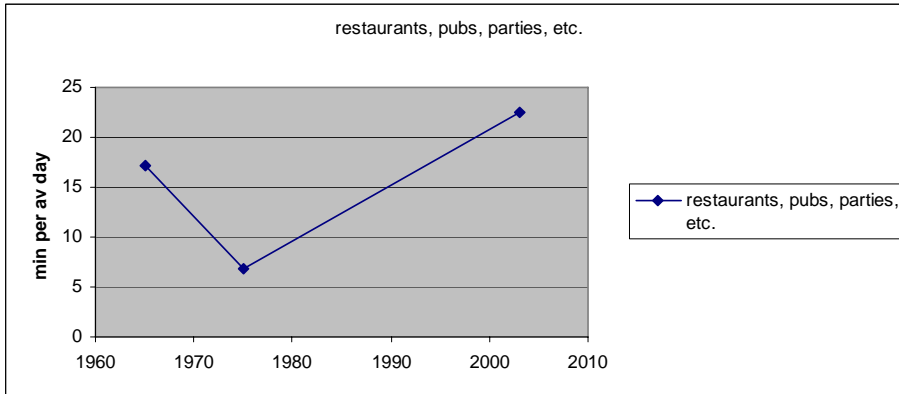


Figure 2a Total time spent on an average day on going out to restaurants, pubs, parties and receptions

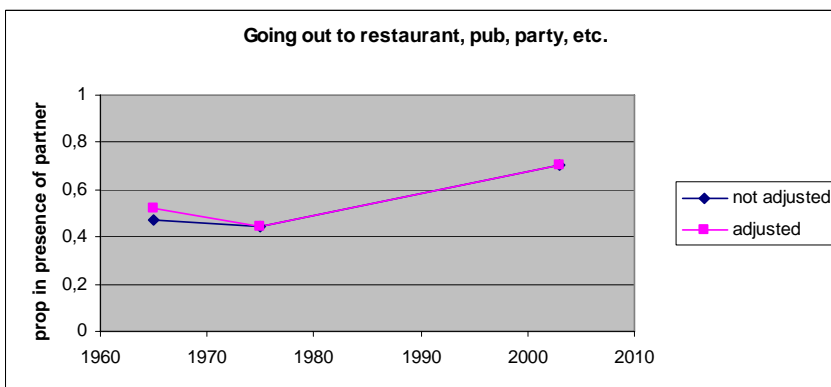


Figure 2b Proportion of time spent on going out to restaurants, pubs, parties and receptions events in the presence of a partner (both adjusted and unadjusted for changes in labour force participation of men and women)



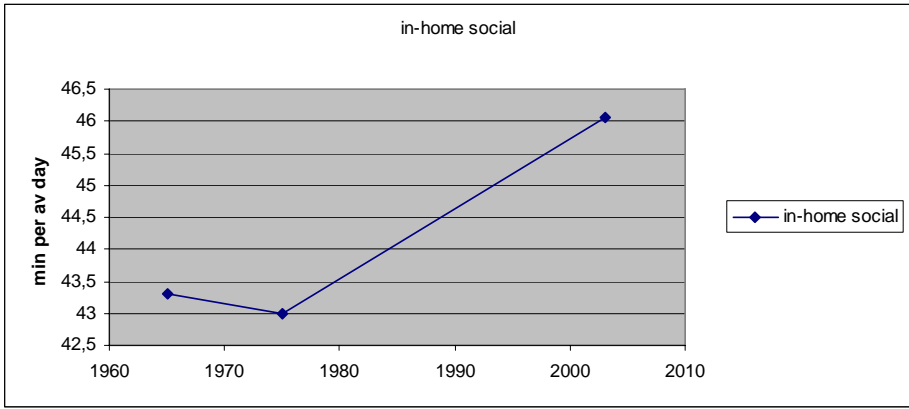


Figure 3a Total time spent on an average day on in-home social activities

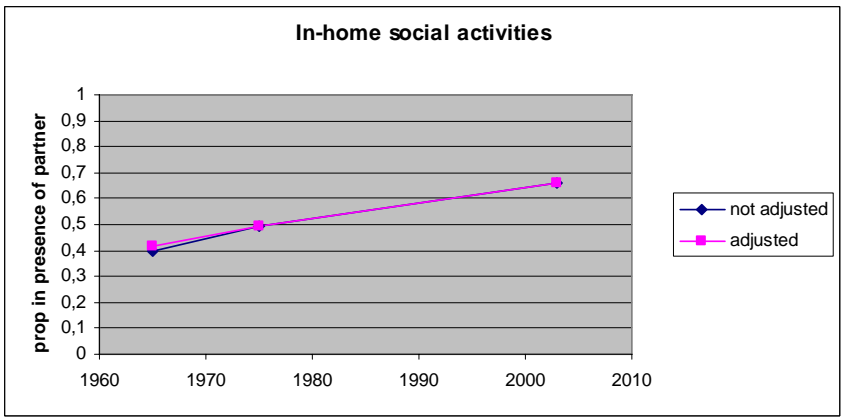


Figure 3b Proportion of time spent on in-home social activities in the presence of a partner (both adjusted and unadjusted for changes in labour force participation of men and women)

The less 'social' activities of arts, crafts and hobbies; and watching television and listening to the radio or to music show less increase or remain stable in time spent as a couple. Overall time spent on arts, crafts and hobbies at home went slightly up from 10 minutes in 1965, to 12 minutes in 1975, after which it went down to only 2 minutes (Figure 4a). The overall time spent on media use showed a large increase from 101 minutes in 1965 to 142 minutes in 2003 (Figure 5a). The relative share of time spent on the in home activities of hobbies and media

use in the presence of a partner stayed around the same level; around .24 for arts, crafts and hobbies, and around .67 for media use, and differences were not statistically significant. Controlling for group differences even reveals a decrease in proportion from 1965 to later years for arts, crafts and hobbies, but hardly affected the results for media use.

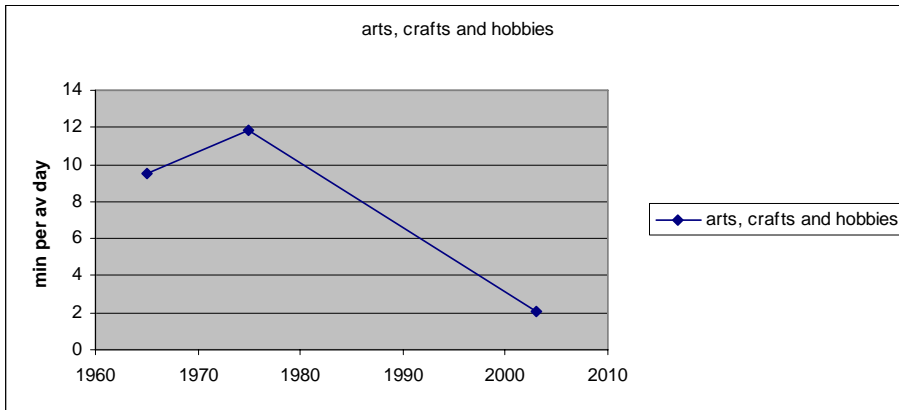


Figure 4a Total time spent on an average day on arts, crafts and hobbies in the home

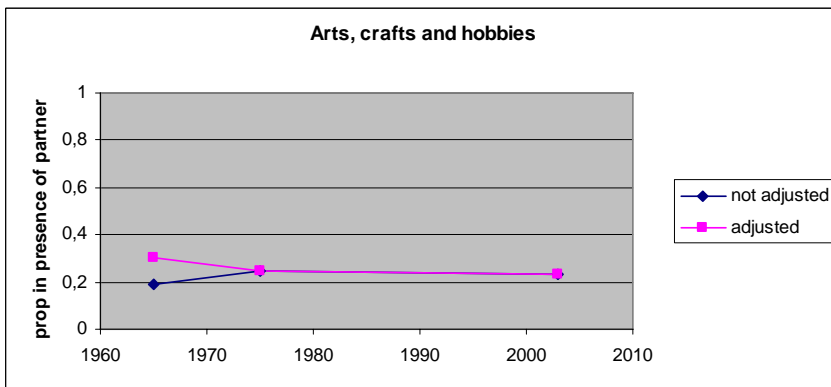


Figure 4b Proportion of time spent on arts, crafts and hobbies in the home in the presence of a partner (both adjusted and unadjusted for changes in labour force participation of men and women)

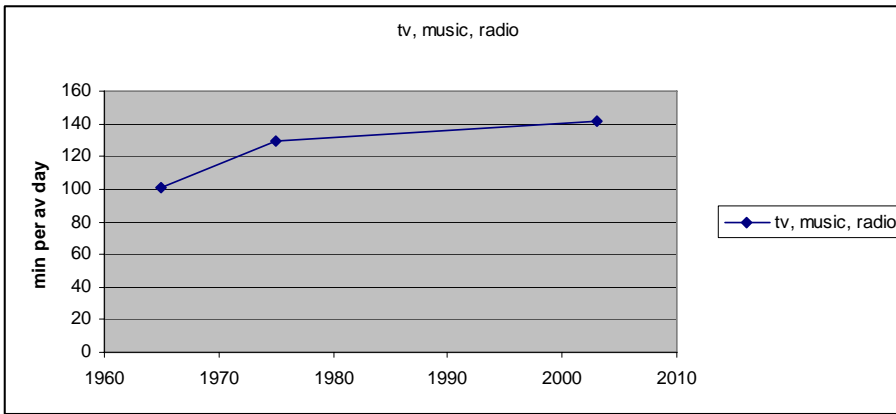


Figure 5a Total time spent on an average day listening to music or the radio and watching television

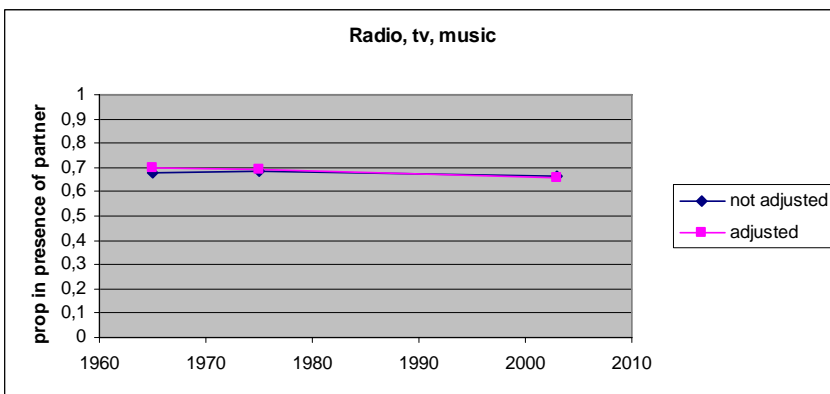


Figure 5b Proportion of time spent listening to music or the radio and watching television in the presence of a partner (both adjusted and unadjusted for changes in labour force participation of men and women)

In sum, especially more time in social events (including cultural participation and sporting events) is experienced as a couple, rather than the more individualistic activities such as arts, crafts, hobbies and media use and these increases cannot be attributed to a different composition of the population in terms of gender and working arrangements. This points to a

change in shared experience of couples: social activities nowadays are experienced more often as a couple than separately whereas this was less the case in the past. Even though people's lives may have become busier, and more women joined the workforce making it increasingly hard to coordinate shared time, still couples spend more of their social time in each other's company. We find support for our idea that a change in intimacy, in shared experience, is reflected in an increase in joint leisure activities.

This is not the case for less social activities, such as in-home hobbies and watching tv or listening to the radio. Apparently couples actively arrange for joint social activities, whereas the less social in-home activities are less influenced. These may count less as 'quality time' and therefore less effort is made to do these activities together.

Thus, after controlling for differences in composition, we still find an increase in proportion of time spent together as a couple for social activities. The next step is to find out to what extent changes can be attributed to differences in the propensity of people to spend time as a couple. Thus, the importance of characteristics may have changed over time. Perhaps working arrangements were more important for shared leisure time in 1965 than in 2003. To decompose changes into a part reflecting changes in composition (means) and changes in propensity (coefficients and slopes) we adopted the method of Bianchi et al. (Bianchi et al., 2000). They distinguish between differences in means, differences in coefficients and an interaction between the two were coefficients as well as means change and they cannot be disentangled.

For the five groups of activities regression models were estimated to establish the importance of several characteristics. The data 1965 and 1975 were pooled to reach a larger sample size, allowing us to include more variables than only gender and working arrangements. Included characteristics were age and level of education of the respondent, number of children younger than five, number of children between 5 and 18, whether the

respondent was female, and household type (breadwinner, dual earner, or both unemployed). Dependent variables were the proportion of time in each of the five groups of activities that was spent in the presence of a partner. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables can be found in Tables 3 and 4. Only for two groups of activities, in-home social activities, and watching tv and listening to radio or to music, the models showed a significant fit to the data. Only for these two groups of activities the decomposition could be done. The model could not be fitted to data on the other activity groups; cultural and sports events, going out, and arts, crafts and hobbies, because the chosen characteristics did not explain changes in joint participation in these activities, yielding insignificant models.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics 1965/1975.

	Mean	S.D.	Range	N
Dependent variables				
Proportion spent in the presence of a partner in:				
Cultural and sports events	.632	.484	0-1	143
Restaurants, bars, parties, etc.	.452	.488	0-1	430
In-home social activities	.455	.468	0-1	1630
Arts, crafts and hobbies	.217	.388	0-1	390
Media use	.691	.402	0-1	3243
Independent variables				
Age	42.17	14.65	18-91	4265
Educational level	3.08	1.329	1-6	4251
Number of children under 5	.33	.654	0-4	4263
Number of children between 5 and 18	1.36	1.492	0-10	4255
Female	.488	-	0-1	4265
Dual earner household	.503		0-1	4265
Single earner household	.434		0-1	4265
Both unemployed	.063		0-1	4265

Table 3. Descriptive statistics 2003.

	Mean	S.D.	Range	N
Dependent variables				
Proportion spent in the presence of a partner in:				
Cultural and sports events	.711	.453	0-1	396
Restaurants, bars, parties, etc.	.659	.460	0-1	2620
In-home social activities	.638	.444	0-1	4524
Arts, crafts and hobbies	.201	.389	0-1	160
Media use	.662	.417	0-1	8251
Independent variables				
Age	46.385	14.914	18-80	10295
Educational level	4.024	1.304	1-6	10295
Number of children under 5	.289	0.596	0-4	10295
Number of children between 5 and 18	.937	1.167	0-9	10295
Female	.483		0-1	10295
Dual earner household	.529		0-1	10295
Single earner household	.320		0-1	10295
Both unemployed	.151		0-1	10295

The models that did show an acceptable fit to the data were still not very satisfactory, with very low explained variance (see Table 4). Apparently, even though the amount of time spent on these activities may be strongly influenced by these variables, the proportion of which is spent in the presence of a partner is more difficult to predict based on this. This suggests that the extent to which these characteristics changed over the last decades (more women in the workforce, more childless couples, etc.) are not very influential on changes in shared leisure time by partners.

Table 4. Regression coefficients for proportion of shared time in in-home social activities and media use

In-home social		Media use	
'65/'75	2003	'65/'75	2003

	B	sig. b.	B	sig. b	B	sig. b.	B	sig. b
intercept	0,610	***	0,571	***	0,824	***	0,795	***
age	-0,002		0,000		-0,001		-0,002	***
educational level	0,010		0,026	***	-0,009		-0,003	
children < 5	-0,031		0,025		-0,011		-0,013	
children 5-17	-0,041	***	0,000		-0,023	***	-0,028	***
female	-0,115	***	-0,074	***	-0,091	***	-0,010	
single earner household	0,014		0,000		-0,006		0,011	
both unemployed	0,076		-0,036		0,075	*	0,071	***
R2	.033		.016		.023		.007	

Yet, there is some effect of these characteristics and some changes in them over the years. Table 5 shows for the same three models (going out, in-home social and media use) the result of the decomposition into changes in coefficients, changes in means (changing proportions in the population) and an interaction component. Columns referring to coefficients show the percentage change in the importance of the characteristics (i.e. changes in behaviour), whereas the columns referring to the means (M) show the percentage change in the composition of the group for the specific characteristics. The interaction column shows the percentage of change of both coefficients and means, where their separate effect cannot be disentangled. The row showing the total percentages for change in coefficients, means and the interaction between the two add up to 100% for each activity group (i.e. for in-home social  $88.38 + 15.15 - 3.52 = 100$ ). Interaction effects can be understood in the following way. For instance, the importance of having children for the proportion of shared time of partners in in-home social activities shows a negative interaction. People in 2003 had on average fewer children than people in 1965 and 1975 and there is a negative effect of having children over both years on the proportion of shared time and this negative effect has become

less negative over time. The interaction picks up on the fact that as people have fewer children, the negative effect to spent time together on in-home social activities has decreased less for those people who have fewer children relative to those who have more.

Table 5. % change in coefficients, means and interactions<sup>a</sup>

	In-home social			Media		
	Coef.	M	Interact.	Coef.	M	Interact.
age, education, female	75,44	75,44	12,04	79,75	79,75	16,70
Children	41,63	10,35	-10,84	-14,23	-11,81	5,68
couples' employment	-7,14	2,90	-4,72	-34,05	-8,61	18,13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>88,38</b>	<b>15,15</b>	<b>-3,52</b>	<b>66,32</b>	<b>-6,83</b>	<b>40,51</b>

<sup>a</sup>) The combined data of 1965 and 1975 are used as the standard for the decomposition.

Decomposition is based on the following equation:

$$\bar{E}_{03} - \bar{E}_{65,75} = b_{003} - b_{065,75} + \sum_{i=1}^n \bar{X}_{i65,75} (b_{i03} - b_{i65,75}) + \sum_{i=1}^n b_{i65,75} (\bar{X}_{i03} - \bar{X}_{i65,75}) + \sum_{i=1}^n (b_{i03} - b_{i65,75}) (\bar{X}_{i03} - \bar{X}_{i65,75})$$

For both groups of activities it shows that changes can be attributed to changes in coefficients more than to changes in means. 88% of the change in proportions in time spent with a partner on in-home social activities can be attributed to changes in the importance of especially age, education, gender and the presence of children in the household. Thus, it is not the case that changes in time spent with a partner on in-home social activities are a result of compositional differences between the groups in characteristics such as age, education and the presence of children, but rather the importance of these characteristics change, suggesting changes in behaviour. For media use 66% of the change in proportions is attributable to changes in coefficients, for the largest part changes in age, education and gender. Here also 40% of the change is attributable to an interaction between coefficients and means, as the composition of the groups changed with respect to especially age, education, gender and couple's employment so did the importance of these variables.



## **Conclusion**

To find support for Giddens' idea that there has been a 'transformation of intimacy' in marriage over the last decades (Giddens, 1990), this paper explored whether couples have spent more leisure time in each other presence over the last forty years. Our large-scale survey based evidence is consistent with the growth of intimacy within marriage. The proportion of leisure time spent in the presence of a partner increased between 1965 and 2003 for social activities, such as visiting cultural and sports events, going out to restaurants, and in-home social activities. This change is persistent even after controlling for changes in composition over the years. The finding supports theoretical work on how marriage has changed, claiming that psychological gratification is more central (Bellah et al., 1985) and that partners over time have come to construct their own form of togetherness (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

It should be noted, however, that the change in the nature of marriage is also related to changes in divorce rates. Perhaps the 'leisure-incompatible' partners are more likely to divorce in present times whereas they would have remained married in the 1960s. But this is not incompatible with the argument that the nature of marriage has changed, since divorces of couples who do not spend much leisure time together supports the idea that this is important in marriages these days, where it was less so a couple of decades ago. Further research can help to distinguish between changes in marriages that are formed and changes in marriages that 'survive', by investigating differing divorce propensities between high- and low-copresence couples in panel studies.

Several scholars have expressed their concern that couples nowadays may have more difficulty in organising shared time than in earlier days (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). Our results show that not only in proportions but also in absolute minutes partners spend more time together now than in the past in several leisure activities.

This is in line with findings that people have a growing amount of free time (Gershuny, 2000). Even though there is an increased inequality in the growth of leisure time for men and women (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Sayer, 2005), couples do still seem to find ways to spend (an increasing amount of) leisure time together. Furthermore, our study suggests that, at least for in-home social activities and media use, women report a smaller difference with men in the proportion of shared time now than several decades ago.

This study only explored the increase of shared leisure time of couples and raises several interesting new questions. Decomposition of the changes showed that the proportion of time spent on most groups of activities together with a partner cannot be explained by age, education, gender, the presence and age of children, and working arrangements of the couple (most models did not fit the data). Only for in-home social activities and media use were these characteristics influential, and even then the model showed a poor fit to the data. This raises the question of how to explain changes in behaviour for in-home social activities and media use as well as lack thereof for the other activities. Especially educational level and the presence of children has become more influential on shared leisure time of couples. Hill's (1988) finding that the presence of children in the household diminishes leisure time is confirmed by our study for the '65/'75 group, but is not found for the 2003 data. Opposed to this, higher educated people spend an increasing amount of their time in in-home social activities in the presence of their partner now than in the past. How these changes in behaviour can be understood needs further exploration, as does the finding that for other forms of leisure these factors did not seem to have an influence on shared time at all.

There are several limitations to this study that can be improved upon in future research. First, we use an indirect measure of intimacy, which does not include how the marriage is experienced. To further investigate this, measures of how leisure time with a partner is experienced should be incorporated, also because activities may not be equally

enjoyable for both partners (Crawford et al., 2002). A further limitation is that the analysis is on individuals and not on couples. Although information on whether or not a partner was present is valuable, knowledge of what both partners were doing would be better. For this, information on time use by both partners is necessary which for the current study was not available. Finally, future research should not only look at aggregate number of minutes spent in certain activities, but should also include the sequencing of activities. This may help to explain better the proportion of time partners spend in each other's presence. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has provided a first insight into joint leisure of couples over the last four decades, which has supported the idea that there is indeed a transformation of intimacy in marriages.

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