

# HOW WE SPEND OUR TIME AND WHAT WE SPEND IT FOR

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I HAVE been at some pains to collect available statistics on how people now and in times past have spent their time. The results are rather meager. Indeed it is not certain that my estimates for men and women of this country are more accurate than those which Dr. Nissen made at my request for chimpanzees! He writes:

There is probably considerable variability in how a chimpanzee spends the day in his native habitat. Especially important is the age of the animal; sex, season, composition of the group, geographical locality and food supply, I think are also factors. My estimates, which in part at least are pretty wild guesses, are based largely on experiences during the dry season in French Guinea.

	Adolescent	Adult
Sleep (in a nest at night)	11 hours	11 hours
Resting (on ground during day)	2 "	4 or 5 "
Eating activities (includes climbing around in trees, picking fruit, peeling and shelling; intermittent rest)	6 "	6 "
Productive labor (traveling towards sources of food, water, nesting sites, avoidance of enemies; building nests)		
Social and individual play, fighting, sex courtship, auto- and heterogrooming	5 "	3 or 2 "

A very different distribution would be found for nursing mothers.

There are a number of reports concerning the time schedules of students, but their case is too special to use except as a supplement. The best data concerning adults are those given under fifty-nine rubrics by Nelson<sup>1</sup> for a large group

<sup>1</sup> "Leisure-Time Intervals and Activities of Business Girls," 1934.

(nearly 500) connected with a Y. W. C. A. The study made in 1931 was repeated in 1932. From Nelson's records I compute that 48 hours a week are used to get a living (including time of transportation to and from work), 56 hours for sleep and 3½ hours for responsibilities to the home where one lives. Twenty-four hours are spent in eating, personal care and shopping. The remaining 36½ hours include: church activities, 1½; outdoor games and sports, 3¼; automobile rides and trips, 4½; reading, including the newspaper, 7; studies and lectures, 1-; movies, theater, pageants, 3¾; sedentary games, 1¾; music, 1¾ (seven eighths of which is passive listening); radio other than music, 1-; sewing, painting, arts and crafts, 1-; parties, dances, picnics, club activities, dates with men and entertaining in the home, 9.

We may summarize the expenditures of waking hours as 48 to productive labor, 6 or less to other duties, 33½ or more to pleasure, 24 to eating, personal care and shopping, and ½ unspecified. If the 24 hours are credited half to keeping the person alive, well and presentable for her work and half to the pleasures of the palate, of sociability and of gaining the approval of others and of oneself by one's appearance, the total for work and duties is 66, not quite three fifths of waking time; and that for pleasure is 45½+, somewhat over two fifths. Of course, some of the productive labor and going to and from it may be pleasurable also.

Moralists generally, and the liberal reformers of the nineteenth century in

particular, seem to have expected that if people were enabled to obtain the necessities of life with a part of their time and energy, they would use a large fraction of the balance in the pursuit of learning, wisdom, beauty and good works. The fraction is small in these business girls. Except for the newspaper, the average reading is about 3½ hours a week, studies and lectures are less than 1 hour, and even an optimistic evaluation of the concerts, club activities, etc., would probably not sum to an hour that would have been approved by Bentham or either Mill (or for that matter, by Carlyle or Ruskin or Matthew Arnold or Cardinal Newman). Yet this group is probably much superior to the average of the population and had convenient and free access (in New York City) to science, literature and art. They had the time and were obviously not exhausted by their labors, since they resorted to resting other than sleep for less than one hour per week.

A benevolent and intelligent trustee

for the welfare of these young women should move rather cautiously in the direction of increasing the amount of their pure pleasure time. It may be better for them and for all concerned (1) to improve the health of the individuals, (2) to improve the quality of the home so that the 40 odd hours spent there in eating, dressing, reading and housework are more enjoyable, and (3) to improve the quality of the office or shop so that the 42 hours spent in productive labor are more enjoyable.

Before commenting further on the facts, let us try to translate the schedule of time spent (except in sleep or at productive labor for a wage) into a schedule of wants gratified. For example, how should the hour and a half spent in church activities be allotted among the desires for security, for the approval of others, for self-approval, for the welfare of others, for mental activity, for social entertainment and for the pleasures of sight and sound? How should the 10

TABLE 1  
THE PERCENTAGES OF THE TIME SPENT IN VARIOUS ITEMS OF ACTIVITY BY BUSINESS GIRLS WHICH GRATIFIED CERTAIN WANTS, ACCORDING TO A JURY OF PSYCHOLOGISTS

	Personal care	Home responsibilities	Automobile	Talking with family	Writing letters	Reading the newspaper	Church activities	Sum for 55 items, all except sleep, work, and transportation to and from work
1. Protection against hunger, cold, heat and wet, animals, diseases, and bad people, exercise, rest and sex relief . . . .	10.8	15.5	9.7		0.1	4.0	4.0	20.2
2. Avoidance or reduction of pain	3.2	1.9	3.0		0.1	0.8	1.1	2.1
3. Pleasures of taste, smell, sight and sound . . . . .	5.8	10.5	16.1	2.8		8.3	6.9	14.3
4. Mental activity, curiosity and exploration . . . . .		0.3	6.7	5.9	11.6	58.3	3.6	8.1
5. Manipulation and construction . .	0.8		1.6		0.1			1.0
6. Security (other than in 1) . . . .	3.8	10.5	0.3	9.3	4.7	1.7	17.4	1.5
7. Affection (to get it) . . . . .	14.1	3.7	3.5	14.8	15.1		3.6	4.7
8. Companionship . . . . .	5.3	4.1	12.6	29.6	18.3	5.8	16.7	8.5
9. Approval from others . . . . .	19.6	16.3	3.5	2.8	11.1	2.5	7.3	7.3
10. Approval from one's self . . . . .	14.2	9.2	0.3	1.9	5.3	5.8	5.8	4.3
11. Mastery over others . . . . .	5.3	1.7	0.8	3.7	3.3	0.8	1.1	1.9
12. The welfare of others . . . . .	0.5	10.2	0.8	9.3	9.7	1.7	7.3	1.9
13. Sex entertainment . . . . .	11.4	8.5	15.9	0.9	16.7	2.5	5.8	11.5
14. Social entertainment . . . . .	3.0	6.1	24.2	17.6	3.5	3.3	16.7	10.5
15. Physical entertainment . . . . .	1.1	0.7	0.8		0.1			1.5
16. Unspecified comfort . . . . .	0.8	0.7	0.3	0.9		4.2	2.9	0.7

hours for personal care be allotted? How should the 3½ hours for home responsibilities be allotted?

Table 1 shows the allotments in the case of samples from the 55 items according to a jury of six psychologists and also the summation of the allotments of all the 55 items reporting time spent other than in sleep, work for wages and transportation to and from work.

In so far as the jury's allotments are dependable, the time other than that spent in sleep, work for a wage, and transportation to and from work serves chiefly the desire for entertainment in a broad sense. Including the allotments to sensory pleasures of taste, smell, sight and sound, and half of those to mental activity, curiosity, exploration, manipulation and construction, 42 per cent. of such time is so spent, about 20 per cent. being spent for physical needs, about 12 per cent. being spent to get approval and about 13 per cent. to get companionship and affection. The results by any reasonable allotments would not differ greatly from these.

Records like these from business girls are not available for business men, farmers, factory workers, housewives or any large adult groups. We have to rely on general observation helped out by various facts of record.

The hours of sleep for adults 20 to 60 may be set at 8 per day or a bit more. The amount of mere rest (*i.e.*, rest without any accompanying entertainment) is probably under half an hour per day. In the business girls it was an eighth of an hour. In reports by professional, sales and factory workers (male and female) of a telephone company, less than 2 per cent. of leisure time was credited to mere rest. The amounts would presumably be larger for persons doing hard muscular work, but they are a small and declining minority; and few even among them are too tired to enjoy the radio.

In ordinary economic conditions the

average number of hours of work for wages or about the home, including time spent in going to and from work, is probably not far from 50 per week or 7 per day for adult men and women. The variation is of course enormous, probably from zero to a hundred, as suggested by Masters's poem.

In the hives of all the cities, high above  
The smoke and noise, where the air is pure,  
Are numberless widows, comfortable and secure,  
Protected by the watchman and God's love;  
Saved by the Church, and by the lawyer served,  
And by the actor, dancer, novelist amused.  
Some practise poetry; some, who are younger  
nerved,

Dabble in sculpture; but all are used  
To win the attention of celebrities  
At dinners, or at the opera, to imbibe  
The high vitality of purchased devotees.  
But when not modeling, or scribbling verse,  
Nor drinking tea, nor tottering forth to dine,  
They sit concocting some new bribe  
To life for soul relief; they count what's in  
their purse;  
They stare the window half asleep from wine  
Or poppy juice; they wait the luncheon hour;

And in the city there are numberless women,  
Widows grown old and lame, who scrub, or wait  
On entrance doors, or cook; whose lonely fate  
Is part of the city's pageant, part of the human  
Necessity, victims of profligate  
Or unprevisioned life! They have no spoil,  
No dividends, and no power of subsidy  
Over the world of care and poverty;  
They have but patience and a little room,  
Patience and the withered hands of toil.<sup>2</sup>

The farmer's work is a balance of the seasons; the soft-coal miners have tried for years to get 200 days of work per year; the retail dealer and his clerks may work far beyond union hours; many houseworkers add the care of their own homes to eight or more hours for wages. But these great variations are consistent with even greater uniformities. In ordinary times most workers in factories, retail and wholesale stores, railroad and utility companies, schools, the civil ser-

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Lee Masters, "Poems of People," D. Appleton-Century Co., N. Y., 1936; pp. 120, 121, 122 (Widows).

vices, banks, insurance companies, hotels, restaurants and households have regular jobs with regular hours of work and regular duties at home, summing, as stated, to nearly fifty per week.

The care of the body and personal appearance may be estimated at 5 hours a week for men and 8 for women. Routine eating takes perhaps 10 for men and 8 for women (the difference in time being spent by the women in serving and cleaning up, counted in their work records).

About 40 hours a week are left at the adult's disposal. He is free to use these to gratify any of our wants—for security, affection, companionship, approval (of himself, his fellow-men, or his God), power over things or people, the welfare of others, intellectual activity and achievement or entertainment of whatever sort we choose. I shall make a provisional estimate of how they are used by allotting the schedules of leisure time activities reported by professional, sales, and factory employees of a large telephone company to the wants they seem to serve. I shall be guided by the judgments of a jury of psychologists.

For example, games, sports and other forms of exercise (including sailing, hunting and fishing, but excluding gardening) account for 12.8 per cent., 16 per cent., and 21 per cent. of the leisure time reported by professional, sales and factory men, and for 7.6 per cent., 9.3 per cent. and 21.8 per cent. of that reported by professional, sales and factory women, respectively. I allot time so spent as follows:

to the desire for physical, and also sensory, intellectual, sex and social entertainment .....	76 per cent.
to the desire for companionship .....	10 " "
to the desire for approval .....	6 " "
to other wants .....	8 " "

Playing cards and other sedentary games account for 7.6 per cent., 4.6 per

cent., 4.5 per cent., 5.2 per cent., 5.6 per cent. and 2.7 per cent. in six groups, in the order MP, MS, MT, WP, WS and WF (M = men, W = women, P = professional, S = sales, F = factory). I allot 65 per cent. to entertainment of all sorts, 15 per cent. to companionship, 8 per cent. to approval, 5 per cent. to the enjoyment of power and 7 per cent. to all other wants.

Parties, dancing, conversation and other social gatherings account for 5.5 per cent., 13.4 per cent., 8.2 per cent., 13.3 per cent., 11.4 per cent. and 12.7 per cent. in the six groups. I allot 60 per cent. to entertainment, 25 per cent. to companionship, 5 per cent. to affection, 5 per cent. to approval and 5 per cent. to all other.

The radio, movies, talkies, theater and vaudeville account for 7.2 per cent., 23.3 per cent., 18.5 per cent., 10.4 per cent., 23.1 per cent. and 17.2 per cent. of the time reported by MP, MS, MF, WP, WS and WF, respectively. I allot 80 per cent. to entertainment, 10 per cent. to companionship and 10 per cent. to all other wants.

Reading accounts for 32.7 per cent., 31.5 per cent., 19.2 per cent., 35.6 per cent., 31.2 per cent. and 18.3 per cent. in the six groups in order. I allot 60 per cent. to entertainment, 9 per cent. to approval from others, 7 per cent. to self-approval, 20 per cent. to intellectual cravings which are too useful, fine or noble to be rated as the desire for mere pleasure or entertainment and 4 per cent. to all other wants.

So far we have about three quarters of the leisure time of these adults accounted for, with the desire for entertainment far in the lead and the desires for companionship and approval at the head of the others.

I have considered that 70 per cent. of automobiling ministers to entertainment directly or indirectly, and 15 per cent. to companionship, and 15 per cent. to all

other wants.<sup>3</sup> Time spent in making music and listening to music (other than radio) is assigned 80 per cent. to entertainment, 10 per cent. to approval and 10 per cent. to all other. Gardening time is assigned 50 per cent. to entertainment, 20 per cent. to approval, 20 per cent. to the welfare of others and 10 per cent. to all other.

Allotting the times stated by the percentages stated we have the estimates of Table 2.

Evidence of the use of leisure time for the welfare of others is rare, except in the case of the professional men. They report 9.2 per cent. of the time as "with

should be allotted to entertainment, but we may use this as a factor of safety for the conclusion that over half of the free time of adults in this country, or about 25 hours a week, is spent for entertainment. Another large fraction is spent for companionship, which is itself in part a form of entertainment.

The radio, the talkies, the automobile and the popular magazines are ready providers. They do not, however, completely fill the bill, since, by nature or training or both, people demand companionship, sociability and a chance to talk, and favor a certain amount of physical activity. The family circle and

TABLE 2

ALLOTMENTS OF LEISURE TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL, SALES AND FACTORY EMPLOYEES OF A LARGE COMPANY

	Professional		Sales		Factory	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Percentage of leisure time reported as spent in games and sports, social gatherings and conversation, radio, theatre, movies and talkies, reading, music, automobiling, and gardening..	76.0	80.9	89.8	85.2	87.2	78.0
Allotted to entertainment .....	49.2	52.3	61.4	58.3	59.6	54.8
Allotted to companionship .....	5.0	6.5	9.3	7.2	7.6	7.9
Allotted to approval .....	8.2	7.7	7.1	6.9	6.9	5.4

family or children." In the other five groups (in order) this figure is 0 per cent., 2.0 per cent., 1.4 per cent., 1.6 per cent. and 0. The other evidence is in the time spent in clubs more or less concerned with social betterment. The percentages are 3.3, 0.3, 3.4, 4.3, 0.6 and 1.4. The reports for religious activities give 1.7 per cent., 0, 0, 1.5 per cent., 1.6 per cent. and 2.5 per cent. The reports for lectures and studies give 1.4 per cent., 6.3 per cent., 5.0 per cent., 4.4 per cent., 4.3 per cent. and 5.8 per cent. The reports for sewing give 0, 0, 0, 0.5, 1.9 and 8.3 per cent.

Some of the times for family, clubs, church, lectures and studies and sewing

<sup>3</sup> If it were the use of money to buy the car instead of the use of time for riding in it, the desire for the approval of others would count heavily.

the social gathering are not and probably never will be outmoded as sources of enjoyment (certainly not the latter). They maintain their appeal; a friendly group engaged together without compulsion in almost any sort of activity will entertain itself.

The amount of time spent in physical entertainment by means of games and sports has probably increased also within the past generation. But the enormous increase has been in reading magazines, riding in automobiles, going to the pictures and listening to the radio. The time saved from wage-work and family work by reductions in hours and by gas, electricity, household appliances has gone for increased entertainment, supplied mostly by these four means.

Some students of history and sociology will credit the present flood of entertain-

ment to the great increase in the supply coupled with commercial methods of stimulating the demand. They will argue that men will, under fit environmental conditions, spend their free time in serving the state by fighting or otherwise or in serving the church by religious rites or in serving the family by labor and ceremonial. They will assert that men will follow true gods of truth or beauty or virtue or utility or the common good as readily as the false god of entertainment if they are shown the right path by example and have their feet set upon it by habit.

I hope that this is so. But I fear that the craving for entertainment is deeply rooted in man's nature and that very strong counter-attractions will be required to stem the present flood. I

prophecy that historical and anthropological research will increasingly reveal that the great majority of people have spent their free time for entertainment up to or beyond thirty hours a week, if a supply was available. The desire for approval may counteract it widely, as in waves of Puritanism or patriotism. Also, the desire to see others happy, which apparently has been held down by brutal and bigoted customs in most civilizations, may become a more and more potent alternative, at least in superior souls. The human nervous system is very adaptable and can learn to operate with satisfaction in a humdrum world. But its lines of least resistance go toward cheerful sociability, free play, sensory stimulation and emotional excitement.