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## A Widening Parental Leisure Gap

Research Brief No. 8



### Summary

Who in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom have the least time for leisure? Our study finds that the distribution of leisure time today depends not only on gender, as previously found, but also on family and employment status. Since the 1960s, the amount of leisure time available to men and to women has become increasingly similar. However, parents of young children and those employed full-time are having increasingly less time for leisure than nonparents and those who are not employed. These analyses demonstrate the need to qualify accounts of over-work and the double-burden.

### Key Findings

Time-use data from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States from the 1960s to early 2000s demonstrate that:

- As expected, demographic characteristics affect leisure time. It is lower among women, those in partnered relationships, those employed full-time, and those with children under the age of five.
- Men and women are having increasingly similar amounts of free time.
- The differences in amount of leisure time for parents with young children, parents with older children, and nonparents have become more pronounced in all three countries. Parents of young children are having increasingly less leisure time than parents with older children and nonparents.
- In both Canada and the US, there is a growing difference in amount of leisure time by employment status. Those employed full-time are having increasingly less free time than part-time workers and those not in the labour market.
- In all three countries, the average leisure time for the whole adult population has either slightly increased or remained stable since the mid-1960s.

### Background

The traditional breadwinner model of the family, wherein men participate in the labour market and females do unpaid work, has changed drastically over the last few decades. Declining male wages and greater female educational achievement has led to increased female labour force participation. As time allocated to paid and domestic work is becoming less gendered, the same is expected to occur for time allocated to leisure. However, due to prevailing gender roles, many women fully involved in the labour market have not given up domestic work. The impact of this "double burden" is increasingly shared by working males, who spend more time in domestic work to facilitate the gains that their partners realize through market labour (Becker, 1981). Given that parenting young children increases the amount of unpaid work for both mothers and fathers, it is expected that the amount of leisure available to contemporary parents is much more limited than it was for parents of previous generations (Sayer, 2005). This study examines the distribution of leisure in society among parents and nonparents as an emerging source of time inequality.

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As it has been suggested that full-time employees have increased their working hours within the last few decades, this study also focuses on changes in leisure time distribution by employment status (Schor, 1992). The increase in working hours is partly caused by neoliberal labour market policies, which have eroded many protections that specify the timing and hours of work (Bittman, 1998). Another factor is that leisure time has become more polarized by socioeconomic status: today, it is no longer “noble idleness” that demonstrates social status, but rather “busyness” (Gershuny, 2005).

### Box 1: Defining Leisure Time

In the study, the term “leisure time” includes many specific leisure activities, but excludes time required for all market and domestic labour, personal hygiene, and night sleep. It is measured in minutes per day.

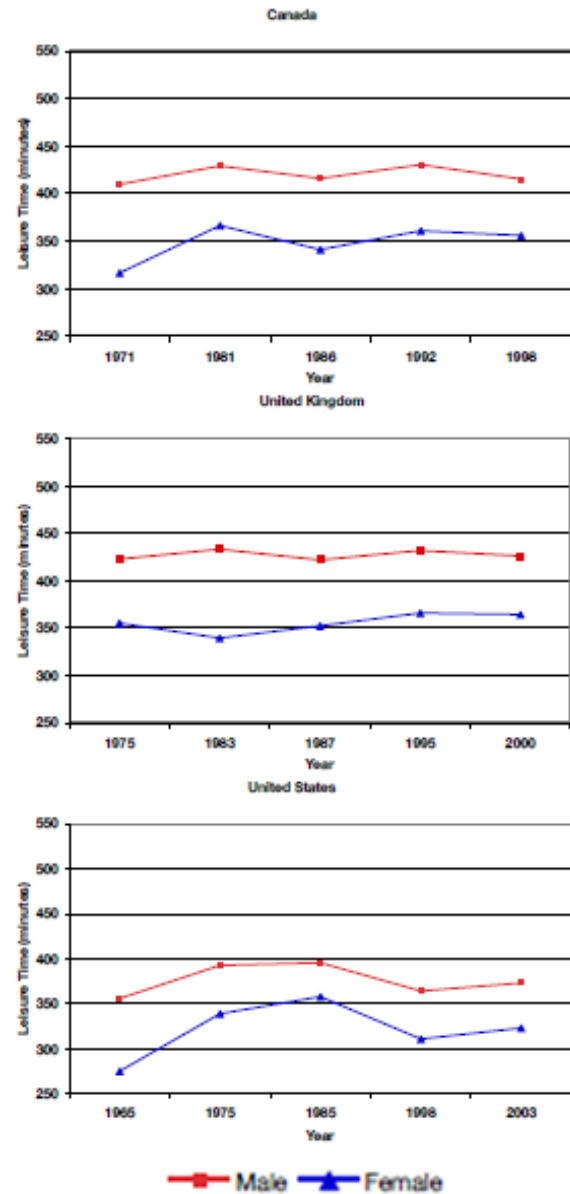
### Data

Data are from the Multinational Time Use Study, a dataset of randomly collected time-use surveys from 29 countries from the 1960s onwards. We analyzed data from Canada, the UK, and the US. These countries are comparable in that they all share a common economic system and have been classed as liberal welfare state regimes (Esping-Anderson, 1990). For each country we used time-use surveys from 5 different years during the period 1965 to 2003. Each country’s first survey is used as the reference point for evaluating change over time.

### Results

Our results confirmed a number of expectations regarding the effect of demographic characteristics on leisure time. In each country, leisure time is lower among women. Full-time employment is the greatest constraint on leisure, although more so for Americans and Canadians than in the UK. Having children under the age of five is the second largest factor leading to decreased leisure time. Being in a

Figure 1, Fitted Number of Minutes of Leisure Activity for each Country by Gender



partnered relationship also diminishes leisure time, even after accounting for gender and children within the home.

### Gender

In each national context there is a modest trend toward increasing similarity in patterns of male and female leisure time from the 1960s to the early 2000s. In the US, the difference between men and women’s leisure time



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decreased from 81 to 50 minutes, in Canada, from 93 to 59 minutes, and in the UK, from 67 to 62 minutes. Figure 1 demonstrates the shrinking gap between men and women's leisure time in all three countries. Although the gendered gap for leisure time is closing, its persistence suggests that gender roles are slow to change even under conditions of widespread female labour market participation.

### Parental Status

Data from each country demonstrates that available leisure time has become increasingly differentiated by presence and age of children within the home. Since the 1960s, the difference in leisure time available to parents of children under five and parents of children over five has increased from 23 to 40 minutes in the US and from 43 to 46 minutes in Canada. In the UK, there has been a huge jump in this difference, from 4 to 42 minutes. Figure 2 shows this growing gap for all three countries. Each country also demonstrated a considerably increased difference in leisure time between those with and without children. These results indicate that the lives of parents and nonparents have become increasingly dissimilar.

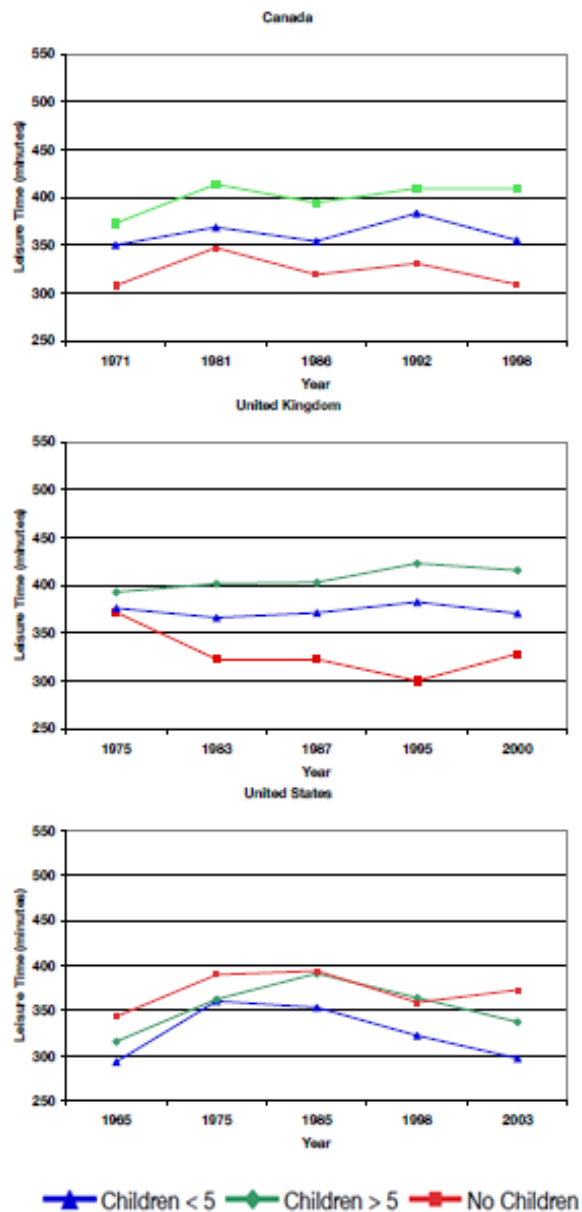
### Employment Status

Evidence of a growing difference in leisure time by employment is found in the US and Canada. In the US, the difference in the amount of leisure available to those employed full-time and those not in the labour market increased from 124 to 170 minutes from 1965-2003. In Canada, the same gap increased from 130 to 163 minutes. Canada also showed a pronounced growth in the difference in leisure time among those employed full-time and part-time. No similar significant result was found for the UK.

### Country-Wide Leisure Time

Leisure time is, overall, highest in the UK and lowest in the US. Leisure time increased slightly in the UK after 1987, while in Canada leisure time increased from 1971, then remained constant throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. American leisure time increased throughout 1965-1985,

Figure 2. Fitted Number of Minutes of Leisure Activity for each Country by Parental Status



decreased considerably by 1998, and rebounded slightly by 2003. On the whole, the average leisure time in all three countries has increased slightly or has remained stable since the first survey year.



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### Conclusion

Considering the overall balance between the time allocated to production and consumption, it is no surprise that the average leisure time in each of Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States has not changed dramatically over the last few decades (Gershuny, 2000). However, the distribution of leisure time by social characteristics has changed. Leisure time is not as gendered as it was in the past; now, it is more highly differentiated by parental and employment status.

Our results suggest that existing familial relationships are undergoing a period of reorganization, particularly due to the full economic participation of women. This reorganization is contributing to increased stress and decreased opportunities for leisure for parents of young children. Social policies

have increasingly encouraged women to enter the labour market while ignoring the high investments and costs of reproduction. Policies must now provide families with greater resources to negotiate their work in the market and within the home so that they can manage the transition toward more equal gender patterns of work and family life. Such policies might include provision of family allowance, pension contributions for care giving, extended benefits for part-time employment, affordable daycare, generous paternal leave, and/or the regulation of work hours (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004).

Further research is also needed to investigate patterns of change in different national welfare regime contexts, so as to better understand the impact of public policy on the structure of work and family life and on distribution of leisure within society.

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### About the study

This research brief is based on: Glenn J. Stalker, 2011, "A Widening Parental Leisure Gap: The Family as a Site for Late Modern Differentiation and Convergence in Leisure Time within Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States", *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 36(1). The Brief was written by Carmina Ravanera.

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