

Few social changes since World War II have aroused such emotion as the large-scale entry of women, especially married women, into the paid labour force. In his recent book *Portrait of the Family within the Total Economy* the economic historian Graeme Snooks (1994: 14–15) sees change in women's labour force participation as the fulcrum of 'the new economic revolution', comparable in scale and significance with the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

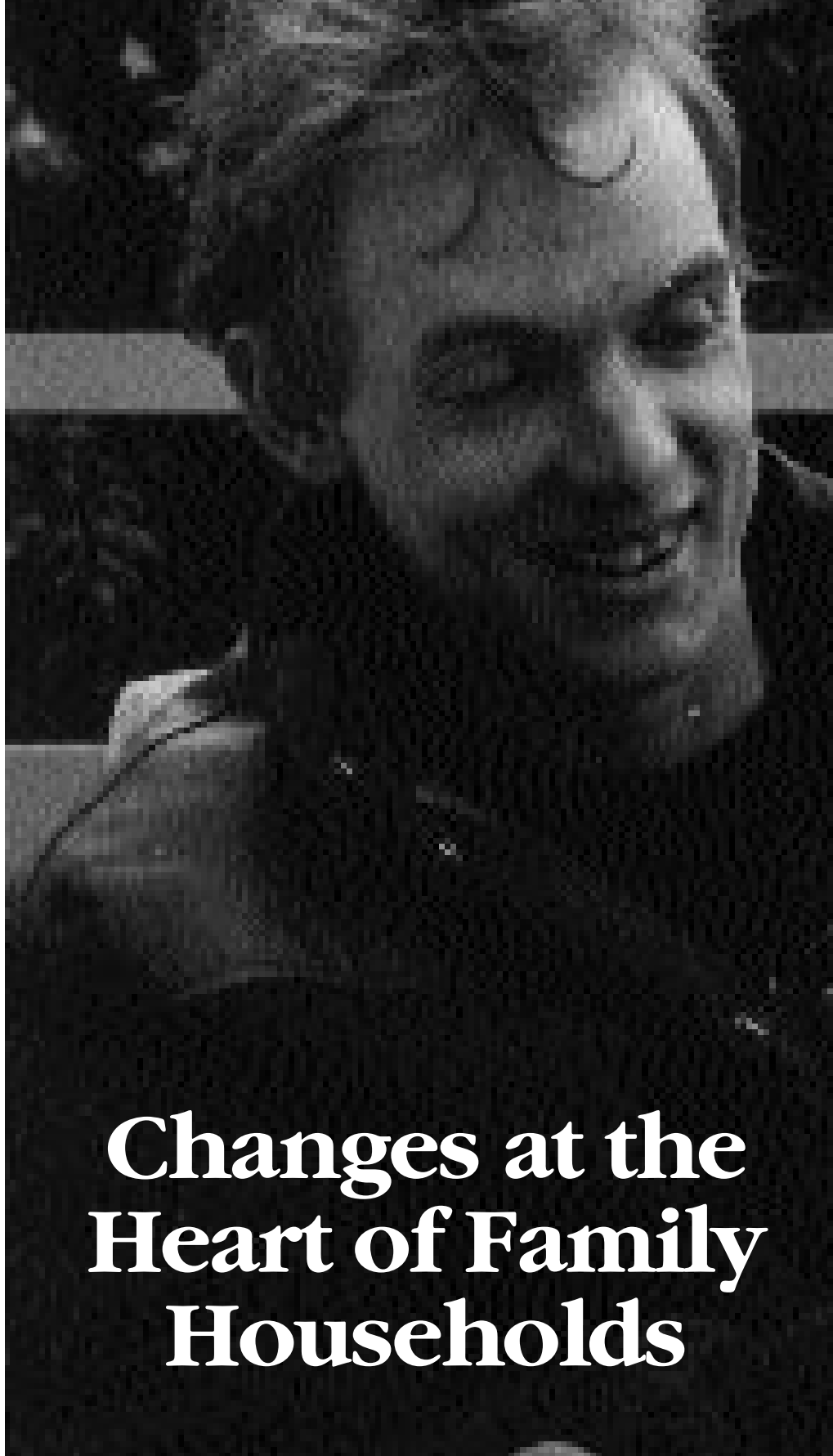
The popular commentator Hugh Mackay (1993) lists five profound social changes in recent times, but comments that of all these changes the shifting balance between men and women is probably the most important. Like Mackay, the American sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) linked the revolution in women's earnings to the problem of the division of domestic labour. This researcher is one of the many who believe that the traditional family division of labour by gender – which assigned men and women into the segregated roles of breadwinner and homemaker – is a thing of the past. She argues that women are now sharing the breadwinning, but coined the phrase 'the stalled revolution' to describe men's failure to participate more fully in the activities of home-making. (Research into how a belief in the value of equally sharing housework, child care and shopping can be combined with a failure to do so in practice – a situation called 'pseudomutuality' – can be found in Bittman and Lovejoy 1993.)

There is even a literature about how it is possible to re-negotiate successfully the domestic division of labour (see for example, Jacqueline Goodnow and Jennifer Bowes: *Men, Women and Household Work*).

All of this discussion, however, has run ahead of information available. Until now all we have had on the domestic division of labour in Australia has been cross-sectional information – that is, information about one point in time (Bittman 1992; Baxter 1993; ABS 1993b; ABS 1994). Cross-sectional material does not tell us about change over time; to talk confidently about change we need information from at least two points in time.

New Data Resource – An Opportunity to Study Change

In 1992 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducted its first ever national Survey of Time Use – a major new information resource that provides accurate and comprehensive information about the unpaid work (housework, child care, gardening, repairs and shopping) that takes place at home. Time use information comes from detailed diaries in which the respondents record their all daily activities. When processed, these



Picture: Rhonda Millner

Changes at the Heart of Family Households

F a m i l y R e s p o n s i b i l i t i e s

diaries tell us how much daily time Australian women and men devote to domestic and other activities. The final 1992 sample contained 13,937 diary days of respondents aged 15 years and over, collected at four separate times of the year with the aim of representing seasonal variation in time.

By analysing the 1992 Time Use Survey in conjunction with earlier, non-national time

use surveys collected in 1987 and 1974, it is possible to study just how the time that women and men allocate to unpaid work has changed. This offers an unparalleled opportunity to study change at the heart of family households; it is the sociological equivalent of the Hubble telescope. Unfortunately, like the Hubble it needs some correction to its lens before a clear picture can be obtained.



in Australia 1974 - 1992

Neither the 1987 nor the 1974 time use survey was national in scope not collected all year round. So when we compare the raw results of these surveys we are never sure whether to attribute any differences to regional variation, seasonal variation, or to historical change.

To alleviate this difficulty, in conjunction with Duncan Ironmonger and Sue Donath of

the Households Research Unit, University of Melbourne, I have developed a method of mathematically standardising the three surveys so that all results are given in terms of Sydney, May-June.

For more details about this procedure see Bittman 1995.

Another fact which also needs to be taken into account when considering change

There has been much discussion of how men's and women's family responsibilities have been changing, but little solid evidence. Here for the first time **MICHAEL BITTMAN** has put together information from large scale surveys to show how the domestic division of labour has been changing in Australian families since 1974.

is that over time the composition of the population alters. The population of Australia has become significantly older in the past two decades. We know that age affects time use, so by comparing change within narrow age bands we remove this source of confusion. A by-product of the division of the population into five-year age bands is that it opens the way for analysis by birth cohorts.

Types of Change

Any observable change may be the compound of three logically distinct effects (Gershuny and Brice 1994: 34). The simplest kind of effect is the change that occurs within a single generation over a person's life course. In the course of her life an individual may leave her parents' home, marry, become a parent, divorce, become a single parent, see all her children leave home, retire, and become a widow. All these life course changes have large effects on the time spent in unpaid work, especially for women.

Another kind of change results from a cohort effect. When a whole group enters a particular state (being born, starting work, getting married) at the same historical point there is a relatively constant effect on each member of this cohort. Birth cohort effects, or generational change, occurs when a daughter's experience is different from her mother's experience at a similar stage in life.

The third type of change can be called a period effect, which occurs when all respondents, irrespective of life course phase or generation, experience a change because of the year of the survey.

The example of a person's savings illustrates the distinction between these three

effects. A person's savings may vary with their position in the life course, so that those who are mid-career and have no children find it easier to save. There may be a cohort effect on the savings; those who reached their prime earning years during the Great Depression, for example, may have saved less. In a period of economic recession everyone, regardless of life course phase or generation, may be able to save less; this is a period effect.

Gender, Segregation and Change: Mean Time Spent in Unpaid Work 1987–1992

Labour economists have long known that industries and occupations are sex segregated (Mumford 1989; Power 1975a; Power 1975b). Because men and women are disproportionately represented in particular industries and occupations it is meaningful to talk about 'men's jobs' and 'women's jobs'. The time devoted to tasks which comprise household productive activities can be analysed in a similar fashion.

In 1992, Australian women were responsible for the bulk of 'indoor' housework such as cooking, laundry, cleaning and the physical care of children, while men were responsible for the 'outdoor' tasks like lawn, garden, pool and pet care, and for maintaining the home and the car. Shopping and playing with children are the activities most likely to be gender-neutral, although in both

these cases women spend more time in these activities than men. The unpaid work tasks that men specialise in occupy substantially less time than those in which women specialise. Home maintenance and car care, although heavily 'masculine', occupy less than a third of the time women devote to cooking. The time men spend on garden, lawn and pool care is less than the time women spend on laundry. The time men spend playing with their children is less than a sixth of the time women spend in the physical care of children (ABS 1993b: 8)

With all the breathless talk about 'revolutionary changes' in gender roles, the extent of this gender segregation and the pace of change might be considered disappointing. Under the circumstances it might have been expected that the distinction between 'women's tasks' and 'men's tasks' would have become more blurred than the rate at which this change was occurring would be rapid. Men's share of indoor housework tasks is still small. Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that most of the improvement in the relative shares of housework comes from women *reducing* the time they spend in unpaid work rather than men increasing the time they devote to housework, child care or shopping.

Table 1 sets out the change in the mean time devoted to household productive activities, with the national data standardised to Sydney, May-June.

The most conspicuous change has come in the amount of time women give to housework, which in five short years has fallen by nearly three hours per week. Any convergence in time spent by men and women doing housework since 1987 has occurred because women are behaving more like men rather than as a result of 'new' men having discovered how fulfilling housework can be.

The next largest change is the increase in women's time spent in child care. Smaller increases are found (0.35 hours per week) in the average time men devote to child care and child minding and in the average time women devote to home maintenance and car care. Only the increase in time spent with children is a bilateral change, otherwise the apparent dilution of sexual segregation comes from changes in the average activity time of women. Apparent changes in the

time devoted to other activities are not statistically significant and could be due to sampling error.

A closer, more disaggregated examination of the data reveals that the main arenas of change are cooking, laundry, home maintenance and car care, shopping, and child care. Let us examine each of these in turn.

Time devoted to cooking

Our examination of time use survey data shows that the phrase 'stalled revolution' describes, more aptly than Hochschild could have guessed, the changes in men's domestic participation over the last two decades. Practically all the change in men's cooking patterns occurred in the 13 years between in the 1974 and the 1987 surveys; since that time there is no evidence of significant change. This finding of 'no change' between 1987 and 1992 not only applies to the aggregate of all men, but also to men in each and every age group. A physicist contemplating the change in the rate of change in the time men allow for cooking would describe it as moving acceleration to deceleration. In lay language we would describe the change as moving from 'slow motion' (Segal 1990) to 'no motion'.

As Figure 1 shows, most of the change that has occurred happens as a result of the period effect rather than a cohort effect. For all men born in 1953 or earlier there has been increase in the time they spend cooking between 1974 and 1987 and either no increase or a very small decrease over the five years from 1987 to 1992. The picture is considerably more complicated for those born in 1953 or after, showing as it does traces of generational change together with evidence of changes in the timing of life course transitions. Cohorts born after 1957 exhibit an average time devoted to cooking that is slightly higher than those born before 1952 at similar ages. However, more recently there is little evidence that successive age cohorts have started from a higher plane. Indeed, the 'stalled revolution' is nowhere more evident than in the failure of younger men, raised in 'post-feminist' households, to increase their contribution to cooking.

In contrast to the changes in the amount of time men devote to cooking, the change in the time that women devote to cooking has never been more evident than in the last few years. Strangely, while much has been written about women's expectations of men, the actual change in women's own domestic labour times, independent of the actions of men, has gone largely unnoticed.

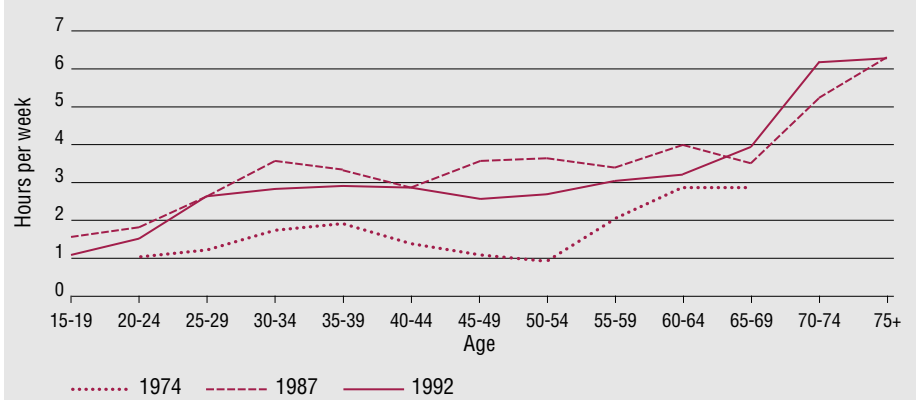
Not only is the magnitude of the change in women's cooking time the largest of any the changes in housework activities, but also the rate change has increased markedly (Figure 2). While no one can confidently claim there has been change at the extremes of the age distribution, across the broad span of adult women's life course, from age 25 to 64, there has been a significant ($p < .01$) reduction over the last five years in the amount of time women spend cooking. The magnitude of this change has been smallest

Table 1. *Changes in mean time use Sydney, May - June 1987 - 1992 (Hours per week)*

	Difference: Males	Difference: Females
<i>Domestic activities</i>	0.00	-2.57***
Housework	-0.35	-2.92***
Garden/lawn/pool & pets	-0.35	-0.23
Home maintenance & car care	0.23	0.35**
Miscellaneous domestic work	0.93	-0.23
Child care/minding	0.35*	1.40*
Purchasing goods and services	-0.12	0.35

* When age is held constant, the difference in mean times is statistically significant at $p < .005$
 ** significant at $p < .005$
 *** significant at $p < .0001$

Figure 1. *Men's time spent cooking - 1974, 1987 and 1992 (Hours per week)*



among young women aged 25–29 years (1 hour 37 minutes per week) and greatest among 30–34-year-olds and 50–54-year-olds (3 hours 31 minutes and 3 hours 37 minutes per week respectively). For women aged 35–49 and 55–64, the average cooking time fell by at least 2 hours 19 minutes in the five years between 1987 and 1992. With the exception of women aged 25–29 and 35–39, the extent of this reduction is double that which occurred in the 13 years between 1974 and 1987. In what is historically speaking a short period of time, both the order of magnitude and the acceleration of these changes in women's cooking behaviour has been extraordinary.

The analysis of the age cohorts of women uncovers a pattern which in many respects is the opposite of the pattern for men. Once again it is the result of a combination of period effects, cohort effects and life course effects. For women born in 1947 or earlier, there appears to be no pattern of generational change but a powerful period effect in the last five years. Among these women there has been a sharp fall in time spent cooking over the period from 1987 to 1992, regardless of age. For those born 1948 or after there may have been a generational change. After this date each younger cohort has a lower cooking time than women of an equivalent age in the cohort before.

The pattern is complicated by the effects of a dramatic rise in secondary education retention rates among women, greater participation in tertiary education, and a continuing pattern of postponed marriage and childbirth (ABS 1994: 32, 90). Continuing study lowers women's time spent in housework, and marriage increases it (ABS 1994: 121–122; ABS 1993a: 58; Bittman, 1992: 53–55, 108–109). All these factors contribute to fewer hours devoted to cooking for those born after 1947.

Nevertheless, there is continuing evidence that young women at home spend more of their time cooking than their brothers (ABS 1994: 124; Bittman 1992: 38, 108–111). If sex roles were predicted to dissolve among the younger generation it has not happened yet, not even among groups whose mothers were

young enough to have their child rearing practices influenced by feminism. On the other hand, in more recent times it makes sense to talk about all women's behavioural rejection of the idea that 'their place is in the kitchen'.

A number of possible explanations spring to mind for this steep decline in the time women (and therefore households in aggregate) devote to cooking. Perhaps the most commonly offered explanation is the diffusion of the microwave. There were practically no households with microwave ovens in 1974, but by 1987 more than a third of Australian households owned a microwave, and between 1987 and 1992 the proportion of households owning a microwave oven had risen to more than two thirds (Ironmonger, forthcoming). Presumably the microwave oven yields greatest time savings in cooking when combined with food purchases tailored to maximise the advantages of the appliance. Analysis of the patterns of expenditure on food items shows there has also been a shift from raw foods to convenience foods that require minimal preparation (Bittman and Mathur 1994). Of course, many of these food purchases would reduce meal preparation time even using conventional food preparation appliances.

This observation immediately raises the possibility that food preparation time can be reduced by greater resort to the market, in effect substituting the labour of an employee for that of the unpaid 'homemaker'. Certainly the same analysis of expenditure shows that households are increasing their outlay on restaurants, take-away meals and school lunches (Bittman and Mathur 1994).

All these tendencies may take place within the framework of changing norms about what constitutes nutritious home cooking, or who decides what should be eaten. This would not only licence the purchase of more convenient foods, especially if stir-fry and prepared vegetarian pasta is seen as healthier than home-made suet pudding, but also alters the idea that a mother's love and devotion is judged by the hours she commits to preparing home-made meals. Perhaps the modern parent can demon-

strate affection by sanctioning the purchase of a pizza!

Time devoted to laundry

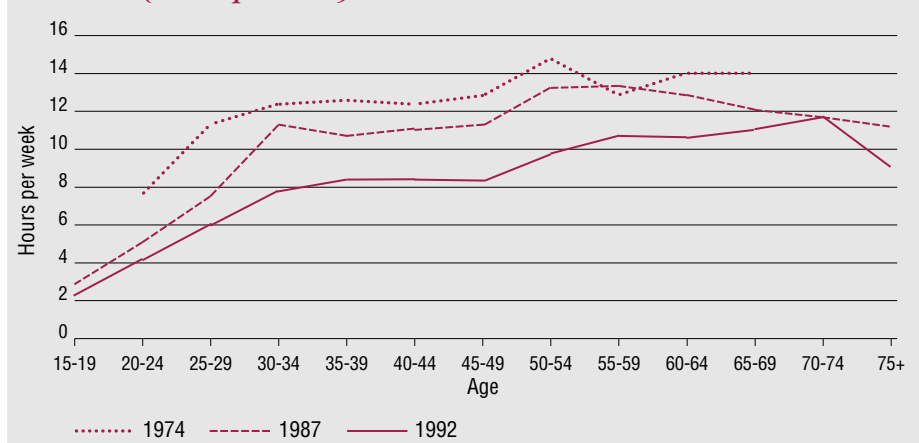
One of the most astonishing findings reported in the celebrated article 'Time Spent in Housework' (Vanek 1974) was the claim that the time spent in laundry work had not decreased since the late 1920s. Of all the domestic tasks to which technology has been applied, the tasks of washing, ironing and clothes care would seem to be the one where appliances had saved most labour. Most people would agree with the American social historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1985: 186) when she says 'the change from the laundry tub to the washing machine is no less profound than the change from the hand loom to the power loom'. It is therefore not surprising that Vanek's finding that women's time spent in laundry initially *increased* slightly in response to each technological innovation associated with laundry produced widespread shock (p.117). Much ink has been expended in seeking to refute these findings or to explain them (Gershuny and Robinson 1988; Cowan 1985).

Paradoxically, in a period in which there has been little technological innovation, the recent Australian evidence shows that there have been some significant changes in the time spent doing laundry. Once again these changes are largely due to the significant alteration of women's activity patterns and not from the appearance of a new generation of eager 'laundry capable' men. In fact, laundry remains the touchstone of sexual segregation. It is a task performed in 1992, as in 1974, predominantly by women. While men's laundry time has increased since 1974, it is still a small fraction of the average time spent on it by women. Life course events outside of employment – marriage, the birth of children, the departure of children from the parental home – have remarkably little influence on the quantity of time men invest in laundry tasks. The exceptional influences seem to be independence, employment and loss of spouse. There is as yet no detectable cohort or period effect for men's laundry activities.

Before 1987 it was not unusual for women to spend between five or even six hours a week doing the laundry. In recent times, however, as Figure 3 shows, there has been a reduction in women's laundry time of up to two hours a week – and this has been the second major reason for the decrease in women's overall housework time. Across all age groups women's time spent in laundry activities has decreased (by 44 minutes per week). The distribution of women's mean laundry time by age shows a progressive diminution of an early adult peak, which was quite a pronounced feature of women's laundry pattern in 1974. The general pattern of the change over the 18-year period has been for this peak to be postponed and lowered until ultimately becoming a plateau stretching from the ages of the mid-thirties into the fifties.

This pattern of decline is consistent with the reduction in family size and the post-

Figure 2. *Women's time spent cooking - 1974, 1987 and 1992 (Hours per week)*



ponement of childbirth that has occurred between 1974 to 1992. The effects of this change in the time women devote to laundry activities are distinctly age-specific. The largest changes occurred first among 20–29-year-old women (a reduction of more than a third between 1974 and 1987) and then among 30–44-year-old women (a reduction of 10–20 per cent between 1987 and 1992).

The analysis of women's laundry time by birth cohorts shows a pronounced period effect, which leads to fewer hours spent in laundry activities from 1987 for women of all ages. This has been combined with a gradual generational shift which compresses the age range of peak laundry times. This is evident at both ends of the age distribution with each younger cohort taking more years to reach the age of peak laundry time and beginning their descent from peak times at an younger age. For example, women born in 1948–52 did less laundry than older cohorts in their twenties, reached their peak of laundry activity in their thirties, and their laundry time declined in their forties. The mothers of these women did a similar amount of laundry into their fifties.

In many ways the generational changes, which mirror the shrinking of child rearing years, are more easily comprehended than the period effect. It is difficult to think of an event or an innovation in the years 1987–1992 which should so affect the time of women of all ages. Washing machines were found in more than 90 per cent of households in the state of Victoria between 1980–1987, and the proportion of these machine that were not automatic was small. A further 8 per cent of Victorian households acquired clothes dryers between 1980 and 1987 (Lewis, Nicholas and Smith 1987: 27; Electricity Services Victoria and Gas and Fuel Corporation of Victoria 1987).

Perhaps the most promising explanation of this change is a normative one – that is, one that relies on more relaxed standards of clothes care. If one were to believe fashion magazines, the 1980s was a period of change in fabric preferences, with a return to natural fibres, especially cotton and linen (fabrics that crush and require ironing). This development was perhaps offset by the growing popularity of tracksuits as all-purpose leisure wear, especially for children. All this may have been accompanied by normative changes about presentability – that is, by changing ideas about what garments and manchester required ironing.

Time devoted to home maintenance and car care

Home maintenance and car care remains the most 'masculine' category of all the household productive activities, with men on average spending much more time in this category of activities than on laundry and cleaning put together.

As shown in Figure 4, the time women devote to these activities is small and readily comparable to the time that men devote to laundry. However, there has been a statistically significant ($p < .005$) 21 minutes per

week increase in the time women devote to home maintenance and car care activities. This seems to be spread thinly across all ages, since the only significant ($p < .05$) age specific increase is among women aged 70–74 years. By 1992 the gender gap in home maintenance and car care had narrowed to 1 hour 36 minutes per week.

Does this reflect a 'feminisation' of Do-It-Yourself home renovations? This is certainly an area where individuals can substitute their own labour for market services (especially painting). Such substitution could either be the product of the response of households to recession, or it could be part of a long-term change. The cohort analysis of changes is not particularly revealing because the mean time for these activities is small and the measurement error is relatively large.

Time devoted to shopping

Shopping is one of the less sex-segregated unpaid work activities. Although men's mean shopping time is only two thirds the mean shopping time of women, men spend more time on average in this unpaid work activity than any other. Australian men spend almost as much time (4 hours 5 minutes per week) on average in shopping than they do in cooking, laundry and cleaning combined (4 hours 19 minutes per week). The time men devote to shopping is also greater than that spent either in yard work (3 hours 30 minutes per week) or in home maintenance and car care (2 hours 20 minutes per week) (ABS 1993a: 8).

Some have argued that while the aggregate time spent in housework had remained constant since the 1920s, the allocation of time between the tasks had changed (Vanek 1974; Cowan 1985). As Vanek suggests, 'perhaps trends affecting the household have created as much work as they have saved' (p.117). Although preparing food and meal clean-up continues to be the most time-consuming aspect of housework, time allocated to these tasks has fallen tangibly over the century. However, Vanek found a compensatory increase in time spent in shopping and household managerial tasks. On the basis of this reasoning we would expect that, because food preparation time has fallen so dramatically, time spent shopping would have markedly increased. This study



Picture: Howard Birnsfihl

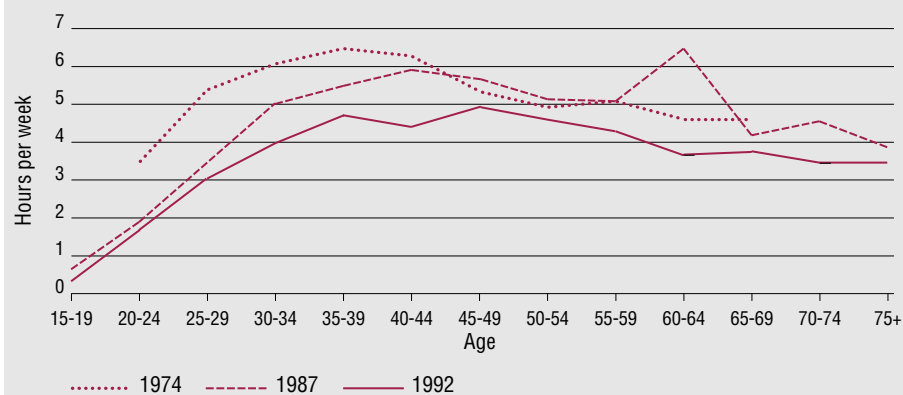
did not find an overall rise in time spent shopping but it did find that an increasing proportion of shopping time is spent travelling to and from the shopping complexes and finding parking space.

Time devoted to child care

A small but nevertheless startling change has been the increase in time that Australian mothers and fathers devote to the care of their children. The modest increase in child care time is startling because, first, it goes against the predominant trend to reduce time spent in unpaid work and, second, it flies in the face of the expectation of increasing neglect of children that has been created through the mass media.

The decline in fertility, the growth in women's paid employment and the increasing use of child care might all be expected to lead to reduced time devoted to child care. The views of commentators (for example, Penelope Leach) who suggest that working mothers must be careful to ensure that they give their children their personal attention, seem to be based on the assumption that parents' time spent with children is shrinking.

Figure 3. Women's time spent in the laundry - 1974, 1987 and 1992 (Hours per week)



Yet the data from the time use surveys suggest that women's time spent caring for children has risen for all age groups by an average of 1 hour 24 minutes per week between 1987 and 1992, with almost all of this increase coming from time devoted to the physical care and minding of children rather than from teaching or playing with children.

The age at which mean child care time peaks for women has shifted from 25–29 years in 1974 to 30–34 years in 1992. An analysis of cohort effects shows that it is especially among women born after 1948 that the tendency to spend more time with young children has taken hold.

The story is similar for fathers, with a small but measurable increase of up to 2 hours per week in the five years between 1987 and 1992. Again almost all of the change comes from extra time devoted to the physical care and minding of children. There are clear indications that men are taking greater fatherly interest in very young children. In 1974 the age at which fathers' engagement with their children was most demanding was 35–39 years, whereas in 1992 it was 30–34 years – a full five years earlier. There is a progressive trend among men born after World War II to devote more time to child care among younger men; however, this appears to be reversing among men born after 1959, revealing the effects of postponed childbirth.

Given this unambiguous evidence of rising time devoted to fewer children it is tempting to think of the concerns about children being deprived of their parents' attention as moral panic, perhaps occasioned by the large-scale entry of women into the labour force. Another explanation is that, perhaps under the influence of popular psychology, expectations about how much time parents should devote to their children are rising faster than the actual increase in parental care. According to overseas studies, time spent caring for children has been increasing for most of this century and these Australian findings should not come as a surprise (Vanek 1974:117).

Conclusion

This analysis of time use surveys shows that there have been some important changes in the organisation of domestic labour – not the changes that are anticipated or debated in most discussion about these issues. On the whole, the process has been one of women 'doing it for themselves', reducing the time spent in the kitchen and doing the washing, ironing and clothes care. Women are also increasing their activity in the traditionally masculine area of home maintenance and car care. These changes have been purchased at the cost of increased 'travel to shopping' time. The only area where men have increased their activity has been in child care. Both fathers and mothers are spending more time with their children.

It seems justifiable to conclude that many of the theories we have used to understand change in the domestic division of labour need some significant revision. Perhaps policy-makers also need to concentrate on the supports which allow women to have domestic responsibilities similar to men rather than expect that men will assume the domestic burdens of women.

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Figure 4. *Men's and women's time spent in home maintenance - 1974, 1987 and 1992 (Hours per week)*

