

errata

[Time use of millennials and Generation X: differences across time](#)

Time use of millennials and Generation X: differences across time

Generational cohorts in the United States have long interested demographers, social scientists, researchers, and others. In 2019, millennials were the same ages—23 to 38 years—as members of Generation X in 2003. I use American Time Use Survey data from these years to examine how millennials in 2019 and members of Generation X in 2003 spent their time on an average day. Millennials were less likely to spend time doing housework, caring for and helping household members, and purchasing goods and services than were members of Generation X. On the other hand, millennials were more likely to spend time providing animal and pet care than were members of Generation X. Each generation spent nearly the same amount of time working on an average day, and the men of each generation spent more time working than their female counterparts. Each generation spent nearly the same amount of time in leisure and sports activities overall. However, millennial men spent more time playing games on an average day than did men in Generation X, and millennial women spent less time reading for leisure than did women in Generation X.



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Generational cohorts have long interested demographers, social scientists, researchers, and others. Research papers and media stories make frequent references to millennials, Generation X (Generation Xers), baby boomers, and the Silent Generation. In particular, comparisons between generations are often made when they were the same ages. In 2019, millennials were the same ages as members of Generation X in 2003. In light of this

interest, I use 2019 and 2003 data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to examine how millennials and members of Generation X spent their time when both generations were ages 23 to 38.

About the data

The ATUS provides nationally representative estimates on how, where, and with whom Americans ages 15 and over spend their time.^[1] For each activity reported, respondents are asked how long the activity lasted, and this information is recorded in a time diary. When some respondents report doing more than one activity at a time (for example, watching TV while preparing dinner) and cannot separate the activities into distinct time intervals, they are asked to identify which activity was their main activity, and this is what the interviewer records. Besides the data in the time diary, the ATUS includes information about household composition, demographics, labor force status, and more. Unless otherwise noted, all data presented in this article are from the ATUS.

Societal differences in 2003 and 2019

Before examining time use of millennials and members of Generation X, it is helpful to illustrate the important economic and technological differences between 2003 and 2019.

In 2003, factors such as the lingering effects from the late 1990s technology bubble and the 2001 recession, as well as state and local government budget crises, led to continued job losses or to rates of employment growth slower than seen in prior years.^[2] The unemployment rate rose during the first half of 2003 and then fell to 5.9 percent, ending the year about where it started.

By 2003, 3G technology was made available for cell phones, which allowed faster data-transmission speeds so that consumers could use their cell phones in more data-demanding ways. This technology would pave the way for video-calling;^[3] however, the widespread use of smartphones was still yet to come. The launch of the first iPhone would not occur until 2007.^[4] Social media was in its infancy: MySpace debuted in August 2003, followed by Facebook in February 2004.^[5]

In 2019, the U.S. labor market was strong and the unemployment rate fell to 3.5 percent—the lowest rate since 1969. Nonfarm payroll employment continued its largest period of recovery and expansion during 2019, although the annual job gain was smaller than in the previous year.^[6]

By 2019, the share of American households with access to the internet had risen to 86.4 percent,^[7] and many people communicated with each other through social media platforms. Smartphones were a common household good. Technological advances affected activities such as shopping, banking, and socializing and communicating. For example, innovations such as mobile apps and online platforms allowed more people to shop, order groceries,

video chat with family members who live miles away, and conduct financial transactions from the comfort of their homes.

Defining the generations

Following the lead of the Pew Research Center, I define millennials as individuals born between 1981 and 1996 and Generation X as individuals born between 1965 and 1980.^[8] In this article, I focus on the time use of millennials, ages 23 to 38, in 2019, with a cohort size of 69.1 million and members of Generation X, ages 23 to 38, in 2003, whose cohort size was 63.3 million. (See table 1.)

The generation of people born between 1965 and 1980 was first labeled “baby bust” because of the cohort’s relatively low birth rates compared with older generations. Eventually, however, this group would eventually be labeled “Generation X” after the publication of Canadian author Douglas Coupland’s coming of age novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*.^[9] Members of Generation X are also referred to as the “latchkey generation” because as children, they would return to an empty home after school while their parents were at work.^[10] They are characterized as being fiercely independent because they were used to taking care of themselves. Significant events that helped shape Generation X include the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic, the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion.^[11]

Millennials are the first generation to come of age in the new millennium. Significant events that helped shape them include the rise of social media and online technologies, the September 2001 terror attacks in America, and the Great Recession.^[12] Millennials came of age at a time when internet access experienced explosive growth. In the mid-1990s, the expansion of the internet affected how Americans exchanged and shared information. In particular, it represented a fundamental shift in how we connected with each other and conducted our day-to-day lives.^[13] Millennials are the first generation who regard behaviors such as tweeting and texting not as astonishing digital innovations but as everyday parts of their social lives.^[14]

Older millennials were affected by the Great Recession, which had a severe impact on job-holding and wages. After completing their education, some millennials faced a tough job market and many were saddled with high amounts of student debt. This combination of student loan debt and a tough job market prompted many millennials to take less than desirable jobs, move back in with their parents, delay buying a home, and delay getting married.^[15]

Characteristics of millennials and Generation X

Table 1. Civilian noninstitutional population of Generation X (2003) and millennials (2019), ages 23 to 38, by selected characteristics

Characteristics	Number (in thousands)		Percent distribution of population	
	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)
Total	63,299	69,137	100.0	100.0
Gender				
Men	31,089	34,477	49.1	49.9
Women	32,210	34,661	50.9	50.1
Race and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity ^[1]				
White, non-Hispanic	40,538	42,417	64.0	61.4
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	6,706	7,540	10.6	10.9
Asian, non-Hispanic	2,813	4,621	4.4	6.7
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	12,000	13,090	19.0	18.9
Employment status				
Employed	50,714	57,113	80.1	82.6
Full-time workers ^[2]	41,819	47,944	82.5	83.9
Part-time workers ^[3]	8,895	9,168	17.5	16.1
Employed men	27,606	31,023	54.4	54.3
Employed women	23,108	26,090	45.6	45.7
Not employed	12,585	12,025	24.8	21.1
Number of jobs				
Single jobholder	46,395	51,631	73.3	74.7
Multiple jobholder	4,319	5,481	6.8	7.9
Usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers (single jobholders only) ^[4]				
Earnings less than or equal to the 25th percentile	10,268	11,336	26.2	27.4
Earnings from 25th to 50th percentiles	10,452	11,848	26.7	28.7
Earnings from 50th to 75th percentiles	10,782	10,781	27.5	26.1
Earnings greater than the 75th percentile	7,688	7,337	19.6	17.8
Presence and age of own household children				
No own household children under 18	28,547	38,406	45.1	55.6
Own household children under 18	34,752	30,731	54.9	44.4
Children 13 to 17 years, none younger	1,719	888	2.7	1.3
Children 6 to 12 years, none younger	9,445	7,568	14.9	10.9
Youngest child under 6 years	23,588	22,276	37.3	32.2
Marital Status				
Married, spouse present	35,792	33,440	56.5	48.4
Unmarried, partner present	5,330	7,468	8.4	10.8
No spouse or unmarried partner present	22,177	28,229	35.0	40.8
Educational attainment, ages 25 to 38 ^[5]				
Total, ages 25 to 38	55,413	61,417	100.0	100.0
Less than a high school diploma	6,766	4,786	12.2	7.8
High school graduates, no college	15,866	14,788	28.6	24.1
Some college or associate degree	14,738	15,047	26.6	24.5
Bachelor's degree and higher	18,044	26,795	32.6	43.6

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 1. Civilian noninstitutional population of Generation X (2003) and millennials (2019), ages 23 to 38, by selected characteristics

Characteristics	Number (in thousands)		Percent distribution of population	
	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)
Bachelor's degree only	12,986	17,296	23.4	28.2
Advanced degree	5,058	9,500	9.1	15.5
Enrollment status				
Total, ages 23 to 38	63,299	69,137	100.0	100.0
Enrolled in school	7,800	7,299	12.3	10.6
Enrolled in high school	334	116	0.5	0.2
Enrolled in college or university	7,466	7,183	11.8	10.4
Not enrolled in school	55,499	61,838	87.7	89.4
Geographical Area ^[6]				
Metropolitan area	52,595	60,287	83.1	87.2
Non-metropolitan area	10,577	8,058	16.7	11.7
Region				
Northeast	11,565	11,863	18.3	17.2
Midwest	14,762	15,591	23.3	22.6
South	20,885	25,830	33.0	37.4
West	16,086	15,853	25.4	22.9

Notes:

^[1] Estimates do not sum to totals because not all race categories are shown.

^[2] Full-time workers are those who usually worked 35 or more hours per week at all jobs combined.

^[3] Part-time workers are those who usually worked fewer than 35 hours or more per week at all jobs combined.

^[4] The earnings are limited to wage and salary workers ages 23 and over. Self-employed workers—both those with incorporated businesses and those with unincorporated businesses—are excluded. Each percentile range represents approximately 25 percent of full-time wage and salary workers who held one job. For Generation X, the percentiles in 2003: Earnings less than or equal to the 25th percentile: \$0–\$440; Earnings from 25th to 50th percentiles: \$441–\$654; Earnings from 50th to 75th percentiles: \$655–\$1000; Earnings greater than the 75th percentile: \$1001 and higher. The percentiles for millennials 2019: Earnings less than or equal to the 25th percentile: \$0–\$650; Earnings from 25th to 50th percentiles: \$651–\$1000; Earnings from 50th to 75th percentiles: \$1001–\$1620; Earnings greater than the 75th percentile: \$1621 and higher.

^[5] Educational attainment is restricted to ages 25 and over. Generation X and millennials ages 23 and 24 are excluded from these estimates.

^[6] Estimates do not sum to totals because not all geographical categories are shown.

Table 1 shows selected demographic and other characteristics of millennials in 2019 and Generation Xers in 2003, when people in each of these generations were ages 23 to 38. Both generations were about evenly comprised of men and women. Millennials and Generation Xers were more likely to be single jobholders than multiple jobholders.

As shown in table 1, people in Generation X were more likely to be non-Hispanic White than were millennials (64 percent versus 61 percent).^[16] However, millennials in 2019 had a greater proportion of members who were non-Hispanic Asian (7 percent) than did Generation Xers in 2003. Both generations had equal proportions of Hispanics (19 percent) and non-Hispanic Blacks (11 percent).

In 2019, when the labor market was particularly strong, millennials were more likely to be employed (83 percent) than were Generation Xers at the same ages in 2003 (80 percent). (See table 1.) The share of millennials who were employed full-time compared with the share of Generation Xers in 2003 who were employed full-time was nearly the same (84 percent versus 83 percent).

The millennial cohort was more educated than the Generation X cohort. Among those ages 25 to 38, 44 percent of millennials held a bachelor's degree or higher in 2019, compared with 33 percent of Generation Xers in 2003. (See table 1.) Also of note, the share of millennials who held an advanced degree was higher than Generation Xers (16 percent, compared with 9 percent). However, higher education for millennials has been coupled with an unprecedented amount of student loan debt compared with older generations. According to data collected by the Pew Research Center, in 2016, the median amount of debt for millennials was 50 percent higher than for members of Generation X when they were the same ages (\$19,000, compared with \$12,800).^[17]

In 2019, the share of millennials who were married and living with their spouse was less than that of Generation Xers when they were the same ages in 2003 (48 percent, compared with 57 percent). (See table 1.) However, millennials were more likely to be living with an unmarried partner than were members of Generation X (11 percent, compared with 8 percent). Overall, millennials were more likely to be living in households with no spouse or unmarried partner present than were members of Generation X (41 percent, compared with 35 percent).

Millennials were less likely to have children under age 18 living in their homes than were members of Generation X (44 percent, compared with 55 percent). (See table 1.) This is supported by 2016 data from the U.S. Census Bureau showing that 30.8 percent of women ages 30 to 34 had never given birth to a child.^[18] This was an increase of about 4.2 percentage points from 2006, when 26.2 percent of women ages 30 to 34 had never given birth to a child. These differences could be partly explained by the fact that in 2019, millennials were more educated and more likely to be employed than members of Generation X were at the same ages. Educational attainment affords more opportunities that may not have been available to previous generations, and therefore increases the opportunity cost of child rearing.^[19] Moreover, 2012–16 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey indicated that young adults' outlook on economic security was a factor in deciding to marry and start a family. For instance, Benjamin Gurrentz found that full-time employment, median annual wages, and owning a home were associated with higher marriage rates.^[20] Among those who were full-time wage and salary workers, millennials were more likely than Generation Xers to earn less than the median amount for all workers in this group. (See table 1.)

Millennials, in 2019, were more likely than Generation Xers to live in metropolitan areas (87 percent, compared with 83 percent). Compared with members of Generation X at the same ages, millennials were also more likely to live in the South (37 percent, compared with 33 percent). (See table 1.) In addition, according to data from the

Housing Vacancy Survey, millennials in 2019 were less likely to be homeowners than were Generation Xers in 2003.^[21]

How millennials spent their time in 2019 compared with Generation X in 2003

Time use is affected by many factors, such as employment status, sex, and the presence and age of children living in one's household. In the following analysis, I compare the average time use of millennials in 2019 (when they were ages 23 to 38) with the time use of Generation X in 2003 (when they were ages 23 to 38). Table 2 presents the average hours per day millennials in 2019 and members of Generation X in 2003 spent on various activities, the percentage of people in each generation who did the activities on a given day, and the average durations of the activities for those who did them on a given day. Tables 3 and 4 present time use estimates for men and women in each of the generations.

Table 2. Time spent in various activities and percent of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)
Total, all activities	24.00	24.00	100.0	100.0	24.00	24.00
Personal care activities	9.19	9.58	99.9	100.0	9.20	9.58
Sleeping ^[1]	8.48	8.85	99.9	100.0	8.49	8.86
Grooming	0.66	0.67	81.1	82.6	0.81	0.81
Travel related to personal care	0.01	0.02	1.6	3.8	0.71	0.53
Eating and drinking	1.16	1.12	90.9	95.9	1.27	1.17
Travel related to eating and drinking	0.11	0.11	26.8	22.7	0.43	0.46
Household activities	1.65	1.58	71.8	78.2	2.29	2.03
Housework	0.60	0.50	35.8	33.4	1.68	1.49
Food preparation and cleanup	0.52	0.62	51.1	62.0	1.02	1.00
Food and drink preparation	0.40	0.48	47.0	58.7	0.84	0.82
Lawn and garden care	0.11	0.06	5.9	4.6	1.91	1.37
Household management	0.10	0.13	13.3	16.8	0.77	0.76
Animals and pets	0.07	0.11	9.6	16.6	0.70	0.65
Travel related to household activities	0.04	0.05	8.4	9.1	0.47	0.50
Purchasing goods and services	0.79	0.63	47.6	43.2	1.66	1.46
Consumer goods purchases	0.41	0.31	43.3	40.4	0.94	0.77
Grocery shopping	0.10	0.10	14.3	12.6	0.71	0.77

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Time spent in various activities and percent of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)
Professional and personal care services	0.08	0.06	9.1	5.8	0.88	1.00
Household services	0.01	0.01	2.5	1.3	0.46	0.55
Government services	[2]	[2]	0.6	0.3	0.67	[3]
Travel related to purchasing goods and services	0.28	0.25	46.5	40.9	0.61	0.62
Caring for and helping household members	1.09	0.99	45.0	39.8	2.43	2.48
Caring for and helping household children	0.94	0.84	42.2	36.7	2.23	2.29
Travel related to caring for and helping household members	0.13	0.12	21.7	19.4	0.60	0.64
Caring for and helping nonhousehold members	0.23	0.11	13.7	7.2	1.68	1.48
Travel related to caring for and helping nonhousehold members	0.09	0.04	11.7	6.4	0.74	0.69
Working and work-related activities	4.71	4.75	57.6	57.8	8.19	8.22
Working	4.24	4.33	55.0	56.0	7.71	7.73
Travel related to work	0.39	0.36	50.2	47.7	0.77	0.75
Educational activities	0.32	0.37	6.7	7.2	4.83	5.17
Attending class	0.13	0.12	3.4	2.7	3.74	4.31
Travel related to education	0.03	0.02	3.8	2.7	0.72	0.64
Organizational, civic, and religious activities	0.23	0.19	9.8	9.2	2.37	2.10
Religious and spiritual activities	0.11	0.09	5.8	6.3	1.82	1.36
Volunteering (organizational and civic activities)	0.10	0.08	4.8	3.9	1.98	2.12
Travel related to organizational, civic, and religious activities	0.03	0.03	6.9	4.9	0.43	0.52
Leisure and sports	4.32	4.30	94.6	94.2	4.57	4.56
Socializing, relaxing, and leisure	3.78	3.71	93.6	93.1	4.04	3.99
Socializing and communicating	0.78	0.64	38.8	34.4	2.00	1.85
Relaxing and leisure	2.90	2.96	88.2	87.7	3.29	3.38
Watching TV	2.19	2.03	76.4	73.5	2.87	2.76
Relaxing and thinking	0.22	0.24	21.2	16.5	1.03	1.47
Playing games	0.12	0.29	5.9	12.5	2.05	2.35

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Time spent in various activities and percent of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)	Generation X (2003)	Millennials (2019)
Computer use for leisure, excluding games	0.13	0.20	8.3	15.9	1.54	1.26
Reading for personal interest	0.18	0.12	15.8	11.8	1.12	1.05
Sports, exercise, and recreation	0.32	0.35	17.4	20.9	1.81	1.68
Participating in sports, exercise, and recreation	0.28	0.33	16.1	20.4	1.73	1.64
Travel related to leisure and sports	0.22	0.24	35.3	34.6	0.63	0.69
Telephone calls, mail, and e-mail	0.14	0.11	19.9	15.3	0.68	0.69
Travel related to telephone calls	[2]	[2]	0.8	0.6	0.29	0.41
Other activities, not elsewhere classified	0.17	0.27	11.7	21.1	1.42	1.27

Notes:

[1] Sleeping includes naps and spells of sleeplessness.

[2] Estimate is approximately zero.

[3] Estimate is suppressed because it does not meet the American Time Use Survey publication standards.

All estimates are based on an "average day" measure, which includes all people in the population of interest and averages data collected on all 7 days of the week. A primary activity refers to a person's main activity. Other activities done simultaneously are not included.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey.

Working

In comparing the time millennials spent working in 2019 with the time members of Generation X spent working in 2003, there was no significant difference observed between the two on an average day: the share of millennials who worked on an average day in 2019 was 56 percent while the share of Generation Xers who worked on an average day in 2003 was 55 percent (See table 2.) In addition, on days worked, both generations did so for the same amount of time (7.7 hours) (See table 2.) However, there were within-generation differences in the time worked by men and women. For millennials, men spent 1.7 more hours working per day on average than millennial women (5.2 hours compared with 3.5 hours). A similar difference was observed in 2003: Generation X men spent 1.9 more hours working per day than Generation X women (5.2 hours compared with 3.3 hours).^[22] (See tables 3 and 4.)

Table 3. Time men spent on various activities and percentage of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity, averages per day

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials
Total, all activities	24.00	24.00	100.0	100.0	24.00	24.00
Personal care activities	8.88	9.25	99.8	100.0	8.89	9.25
Sleeping ^[1]	8.26	8.63	99.8	100.0	8.28	8.63
Grooming	0.55	0.58	78.5	81.4	0.70	0.71
Travel related to personal care	0.01	0.03	1.6	5.2	0.61	0.60
Eating and drinking	1.19	1.13	90.7	97.1	1.31	1.16
Travel related to eating and drinking	0.12	0.10	29.1	23.4	0.41	0.45
Household activities	1.14	1.16	58.5	71.8	1.94	1.61
Housework	0.27	0.27	20.4	22.5	1.32	1.18
Food preparation and cleanup	0.24	0.40	34.0	51.2	0.72	0.77
Food and drink preparation	0.19	0.34	30.6	48.4	0.63	0.70
Lawn and garden care	0.15	0.09	6.7	5.5	2.17	1.57
Household management	0.08	0.09	11.2	13.7	0.75	0.69
Animals and pets	0.06	0.10	8.1	15.5	0.75	0.62
Travel related to household activities	0.04	0.04	6.9	8.7	0.55	0.48
Purchasing goods and services	0.70	0.50	43.5	38.1	1.60	1.32
Consumer goods purchases	0.34	0.25	39.2	36.1	0.87	0.70
Grocery shopping	0.06	0.07	10.1	9.5	0.63	0.75
Professional and personal care services	0.07	0.02	7.6	3.1	0.93	0.65
Household services	0.01	0.01	2.6	1.5	0.52	0.63
Government services	^[2]	^[2]	0.7	0.3	^[3]	^[3]
Travel related to purchasing goods and services	0.27	0.22	42.6	35.3	0.63	0.62
Caring for and helping household members	0.61	0.54	32.8	29.7	1.86	1.81
Caring for and helping household children	0.51	0.46	29.4	27.0	1.72	1.70
Travel related to caring for and helping household members	0.08	0.06	14.7	11.8	0.55	0.54
Caring for and helping nonhousehold members	0.26	0.12	13.6	6.9	1.94	1.68
Travel related to caring for and helping nonhousehold members	0.11	0.05	11.7	6.4	0.92	0.79
Working and work-related activities	5.84	5.69	66.6	65.1	8.76	8.73
Working	5.22	5.18	63.7	63.2	8.19	8.19
Travel related to work	0.52	0.44	58.9	54.8	0.88	0.80
Educational activities	0.29	0.39	5.6	6.3	5.27	6.23
Attending class	0.11	0.11	2.7	2.1	4.00	5.20
Travel related to education	0.03	0.01	3.3	2.9	0.77	0.50
Organizational, civic, and religious activities	0.20	0.18	8.1	8.0	2.49	2.24
Religious and spiritual activities	0.09	0.08	4.9	5.1	1.92	1.63
Volunteering (organizational and civic activities)	0.08	0.08	3.9	3.3	2.04	2.31
Travel related to organizational, civic, and religious activities	0.03	0.02	6.3	4.5	0.46	0.44

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 3. Time men spent on various activities and percentage of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity, averages per day

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials
Leisure and sports	4.64	4.75	95.3	95.4	4.87	4.98
Socializing, relaxing, and leisure	4.04	4.07	94.3	94.6	4.28	4.30
Socializing and communicating	0.72	0.71	35.2	35.8	2.05	2.00
Relaxing and leisure	3.21	3.24	90.2	89.6	3.56	3.61
Watching TV	2.42	2.11	78.1	76.0	3.09	2.78
Relaxing and thinking	0.23	0.25	22.1	18.0	1.02	1.39
Playing games	0.17	0.47	7.4	17.3	2.27	2.72
Computer use for leisure, excluding games	0.16	0.21	9.5	13.3	1.67	1.60
Reading for personal interest	0.15	0.14	13.4	12.9	1.13	1.08
Sports, exercise, and recreation	0.38	0.44	17.4	23.5	2.16	1.88
Participating in sports, exercise, and recreation	0.34	0.42	16.3	23.3	2.08	1.82
Travel related to leisure and sports	0.23	0.25	35.3	37.2	0.64	0.67
Telephone calls, mail, and e-mail	0.11	0.09	15.7	12.7	0.69	0.68
Travel related to telephone calls	[2]	[2]	1.1	0.7	0.33	[3]
Other activities, not elsewhere classified	0.14	0.21	10.3	16.9	1.39	1.26

Notes:

[1] Sleeping includes naps and spells of sleeplessness.

[2] Estimate is approximately zero.

[3] Estimate is suppressed because it does not meet the American Time Use Survey publication standards.

All estimates are based on an "average day" measure, which includes all people in the population of interest and averages data collected on all 7 days of the week. A primary activity refers to a person's main activity. Other activities done simultaneously are not included.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey.

Table 4. Time women spent on various activities and percentage of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity, averages per day

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials
Total, all activities	24.00	24.00	100.0	100.0	24.00	24.00
Personal care activities	9.50	9.91	100.0	100.0	9.50	9.91
Sleeping ^[1]	8.69	9.08	99.9	100.0	8.69	9.08
Grooming	0.76	0.76	83.5	83.8	0.91	0.91
Travel related to personal care	0.01	0.01	1.6	2.5	0.80	0.38
Eating and drinking	1.12	1.11	91.1	94.7	1.23	1.17

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 4. Time women spent on various activities and percentage of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity, averages per day

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials
Travel related to eating and drinking	0.11	0.11	24.6	22.1	0.44	0.48
Household activities	2.14	2.01	84.6	84.7	2.53	2.38
Housework	0.93	0.73	50.8	44.3	1.82	1.64
Food preparation and cleanup	0.79	0.84	67.6	72.8	1.17	1.15
Food and drink preparation	0.59	0.63	62.9	69.0	0.94	0.91
Lawn and garden care	0.08	0.04	5.1	3.7	1.58	1.07
Household management	0.12	0.16	15.3	20.0	0.78	0.81
Animals and pets	0.07	0.12	11.1	17.7	0.67	0.67
Travel related to household activities	0.04	0.05	9.8	9.5	0.42	0.52
Purchasing goods and services	0.88	0.76	51.6	48.3	1.70	1.57
Consumer goods purchases	0.47	0.37	47.2	44.7	1.00	0.82
Grocery shopping	0.14	0.12	18.4	15.7	0.75	0.79
Professional and personal care services	0.09	0.10	10.6	8.6	0.84	1.12
Household services	0.01	[2]	2.3	1.1	0.39	[3]
Government services	0.01	[2]	0.6	0.2	0.81	[3]
Travel related to purchasing goods and services	0.30	0.29	50.3	46.6	0.60	0.62
Caring for and helping household members	1.56	1.43	56.7	49.8	2.76	2.88
Caring for and helping household children	1.36	1.23	54.7	46.5	2.49	2.64
Travel related to caring for and helping household members	0.18	0.19	28.5	27.0	0.62	0.69
Caring for and helping nonhousehold members	0.20	0.10	13.9	7.5	1.43	1.30
Travel related to caring for and helping nonhousehold members	0.07	0.04	11.7	6.4	0.57	0.58
Working and work-related activities	3.63	3.83	48.8	50.6	7.43	7.57
Working	3.29	3.48	46.5	48.8	7.08	7.13
Travel related to work	0.26	0.28	41.8	40.7	0.62	0.68
Educational activities	0.35	0.36	7.8	8.2	4.53	4.35
Attending class	0.15	0.12	4.2	3.2	3.58	3.74
Travel related to education	0.03	0.02	4.3	2.5	0.68	0.82
Organizational, civic, and religious activities	0.26	0.21	11.4	10.3	2.28	2.00
Religious and spiritual activities	0.12	0.09	6.7	7.5	1.76	1.17
Volunteering (organizational and civic activities)	0.11	0.09	5.7	4.4	1.93	1.97
Travel related to organizational, civic, and religious activities	0.03	0.03	7.5	5.3	0.42	0.59
Leisure and sports	4.02	3.84	93.9	93.1	4.28	4.13
Socializing, relaxing, and leisure	3.54	3.36	92.9	91.5	3.81	3.67
Socializing and communicating	0.83	0.56	42.3	33.1	1.97	1.70
Relaxing and leisure	2.61	2.68	86.3	85.7	3.02	3.13
Watching TV	1.97	1.95	74.7	71.1	2.64	2.75
Relaxing and thinking	0.21	0.24	20.4	15.1	1.04	1.58

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 4. Time women spent on various activities and percentage of the Generation X (2003) and millennial (2019) populations, ages 23 to 38, engaging in each activity, averages per day

Activity	Average hours per day, civilian population		Average percentage engaged in the activity per day		Average hours per day for people who engaged in the activity	
	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials	Generation X	Millennials
Playing games	0.07	0.12	4.4	7.8	1.69	1.54
Computer use for leisure, excluding games	0.10	0.19	7.2	18.5	1.37	1.01
Reading for personal interest	0.20	0.11	18.1	10.8	1.11	1.01
Sports, exercise, and recreation	0.26	0.26	17.4	18.2	1.48	1.42
Participating in sports, exercise, and recreation	0.22	0.24	16.0	17.5	1.38	1.39
Travel related to leisure and sports	0.22	0.23	35.2	32.0	0.62	0.71
Telephone calls, mail, and e-mail	0.16	0.12	24.0	17.8	0.67	0.70
Travel related to telephone calls	[2]	[2]	0.5	0.5	0.21	[3]
Other activities, not elsewhere classified	0.19	0.32	13.0	25.3	1.44	1.28

Notes:

[1] Sleeping includes naps and spells of sleeplessness.

[2] Estimate is approximately zero.

[3] Estimate is suppressed because it does not meet the American Time Use Survey publication standards.

All estimates are based on an "average day" measure, which includes all people in the population of interest and averages data collected on all 7 days of the week. A primary activity refers to a person's main activity. Other activities done simultaneously are not included.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey.

Household Activities

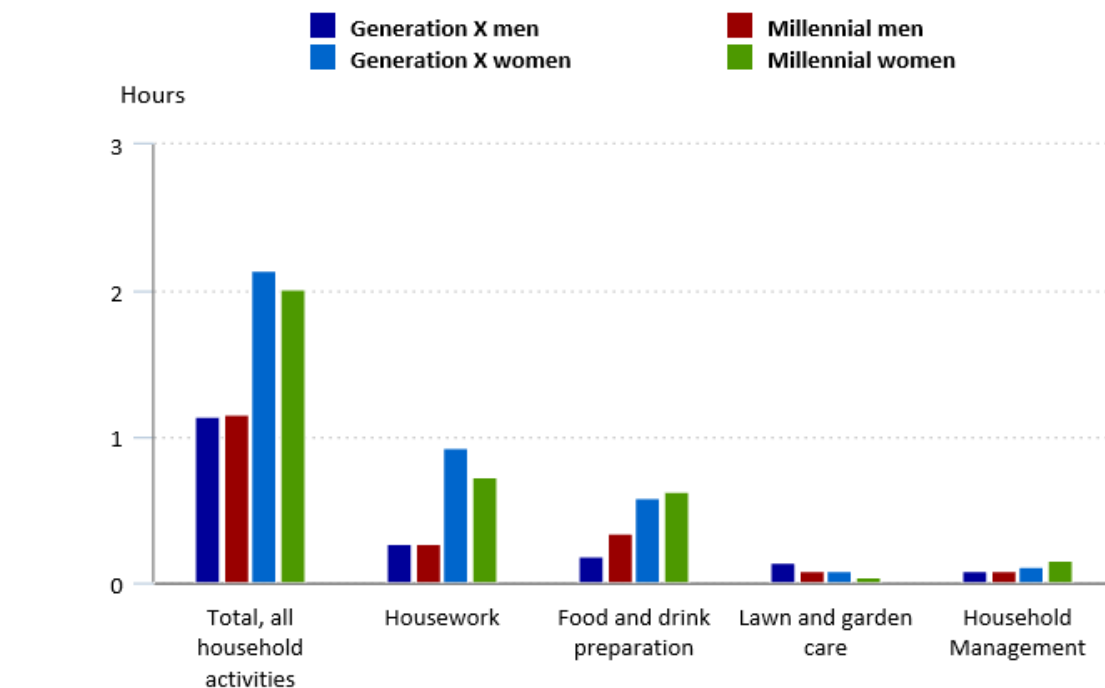
Overall, there was no statistical difference observed between millennials and Generation Xers in the time they spent on household activities on an average day. However, when observing different types of household activities, such as housework, there were differences between the generations. Millennials averaged less time per day doing housework in 2019 than did Generation Xers in 2003 (30 minutes compared with 36 minutes). (See table 2.)

However, not everyone did housework on a given day. On days they did housework, millennials also spent less time per day doing this activity than did Generation Xers (1 hour and 29 minutes compared with 1 hour and 41 minutes). The difference in time spent doing housework was driven by women in the two generations. In 2019, millennial women spent 12 minutes less doing housework per day than did Generation X women in 2003. On days they did housework, millennial women spent less time doing this activity than did Generation X women (1 hour and 38 minutes compared with 1 hour and 49 minutes). (See table 4.) Millennial men and Generation X men spent the same amount of time per day doing housework on an average day in 2019 and 2003 (16 minutes), which was far less than the amount of time women in either generation spent on the same activity. (See tables 3 and 4.)

In 2019, millennials spent less time per day in lawn and garden care than did Generation Xers in 2003 (4 minutes compared with 7 minutes). (See table 2.) On days they did lawn and garden care, millennials spent 33 minutes less per day in 2019 than did Generation Xers in 2003 (1 hour and 22 minutes compared with 1 hour and 55 minutes). Both millennial men and women spent less time on average in lawn and garden care compared with those in Generation X. (See tables 3 and 4.) These differences may reflect the fact that millennials were less likely to be homeowners in 2019 compared with Generation Xers in 2003. (See table 1.)

On an average day in 2019, millennials spent 5 more minutes per day doing food and drink preparation activities than those in Generation X in 2003 (29 minutes compared with 24 minutes). This difference is mainly driven by the amount of time men spent in food and drink preparation activities. (See chart 1.) Millennial men spent almost twice as much time doing food and drink preparation on a given day in 2019 as did Generation X men in 2003 (20 minutes compared with 11 minutes). One factor contributing to this difference is that millennial men were more likely to do food and drink preparation on a given day than were Generation X men in 2003 (48 percent compared with 31 percent). (See table 3.) Although millennial men were more likely to do food and drink preparation than Generation X men, women of both generations spent more time on food and drink preparation than did the men of their generation. Generation X women averaged 35 minutes per day doing food and drink preparation and millennial women averaged 38 minutes per day. (See table 4.) Women of both generations were more likely than men to do food and drink preparation on an average day, and on days they did the activity, women spent more time preparing food and drinks.

Chart 1. Average hours per day Generation X and millennials spent on household activities, by sex, ages 23 to 38, 2003 and 2019



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey.

Animals and Pets

In 2019, millennials spent nearly twice as much time doing animal and pet care activities on a given day than members of Generation X did in 2003 (7 minutes compared with 4 minutes). (See table 2.) This change in time spent caring for animals and pets is due mainly to the increase in the proportion of people who provided pet care on a given day. In 2019, the share of millennials who cared for animals and pets was larger than the share of Generation Xers who did so in 2003 (17 percent compared with 10 percent). However, on days each generation cared for animals and pets, both generations spent about the same amount of time per day doing so—millennials spent 39 minutes in 2019 compared with 42 minutes for Generation Xers. Data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey show annual average expenditures on pets, among individuals ages 25 to 34, increased from \$239 in 2003 to \$522 in 2019.^[23]

Caring for and helping household and nonhousehold members

Compared with Generation Xers in 2003, on an average day in 2019 millennials were less likely to spend time caring for and helping household members (40 percent, compared with 45 percent), and they spent less time doing it (59 minutes, compared with 1 hour and 5 minutes). (See table 2.) This difference between the generations is

driven by a decline in the share of women who spent time providing childcare—47 percent of millennial women spent time caring for household children on an average day, compared with 55 percent of Generation X women. Overall, millennial women spent 8 fewer minutes per day caring for and helping household children than did Generation X women. (See table 4.) These differences are not surprising considering that millennials were less likely to live in households with children than were members of Generation X (44 percent, compared with 55 percent). (See table 1.)

In 2019, millennials spent about half as much time caring for and helping nonhousehold members on a given day as did Generation Xers in 2003 (7 minutes compared with 14 minutes). (See table 2.) This reflects a decline in the share of those who cared for nonhousehold members on a given day. The share of millennials caring for and helping nonhousehold members on an average day was half the share of Generation Xers who did (7 percent, compared with 14 percent).

Purchasing goods and services

On a given day in 2019, millennials spent 9 fewer minutes purchasing goods and services than did members of Generation X in 2003 (38 minutes, compared with 47 minutes). (See table 2.) Activities in this category include purchasing consumer goods, professional and personal care services, household services, government services, and travel related to purchasing goods and services. Among these activities, the largest difference between millennials and Generation Xers was in the time they spent purchasing consumer goods. In 2019, on average, millennials spent 19 minutes a day purchasing consumer goods, compared with 25 minutes a day for Generation Xers in 2003. Compared with Generation X, millennials were less likely to purchase consumer goods on a given day (40 percent versus 43 percent), and when they did purchase consumer goods, they spent less time doing so (46 minutes versus 56 minutes). Millennials were also less likely to engage in travel related to purchasing goods and services on an average day (41 percent) compared with Generation Xers (47 percent). These differences might be explained by technological changes in how people shopped. For example, at the end of quarter 4 in 2003, e-commerce accounted for 2 percent of all retail sales. By 2019, e-commerce sales accounted for 11 percent of all retail sales at the end of quarter 4.^[24] Because of widespread use of smartphones and the internet, consumers in 2019 may have chosen the convenience of shopping online versus traditional shopping in brick and mortar establishments, which were more prevalent for consumers in 2003.

Leisure and sports activities

Chart 2 shows the average hours per day millennials and members of Generation X spent on selected leisure and sports activities. On a given day, millennials in 2019 and Generation Xers in 2003 spent the same amount of time doing leisure and sports activities (4.3 hours). (See table 2.) When comparing time spent in leisure and sports by

sex across generations, there was no statistical difference observed in the time men and women of each generation spent in leisure and sports on an average day. (See tables 3 and 4.)

In 2019, millennials spent 8 fewer minutes a day, on average, socializing and communicating than did Generation Xers in 2003. This difference was driven by women: Millennial women spent 16 fewer minutes socializing and communicating than Generation X women did (34 minutes versus 50 minutes). (See table 4.)

Millennials spent more time playing games in 2019 than members of Generation X did in 2003 (17 minutes compared with 7 minutes). (See table 2.) This difference was driven by men: Millennial men spent significantly more time playing games (28 minutes) on a given day than did Generation X men (10 minutes). (See table 3.) This increase in the time men spent playing games across generations mirrors the growth observed in the video gaming industry over time. Aguiar, Bills, Charles, and Hurst noted that technological developments in gaming, such as new generations of video game consoles, allowed more gamers to interact with others online.^[25] This ability to interact with others online while playing video games led to a large expansion of the video game industry in the early 2000s. In 2019, millennial women spent slightly more time playing games on an average day compared with Generation X women in 2003 (7 minutes compared with 4 minutes). (See table 4.)

Millennials also spent more time on a given day using a computer for leisure in 2019 than did Generation X in 2003 (12 minutes, compared with 8 minutes). (See table 2.) This difference was driven by the behavior of women in the two generations. In 2019, millennial women averaged more time per day using a computer for leisure than did Generation X women in 2003 (11 minutes, compared with 6 minutes). (See table 4.) Millennial women were more likely than Generation X women to spend leisure time on a computer on an average day (19 percent, compared with 7 percent). However, on days they used a computer for leisure, millennial women spent less time in 2019 compared with Generation X women in 2003 (1 hour and 1 minute, compared with 1 hour and 22 minutes).

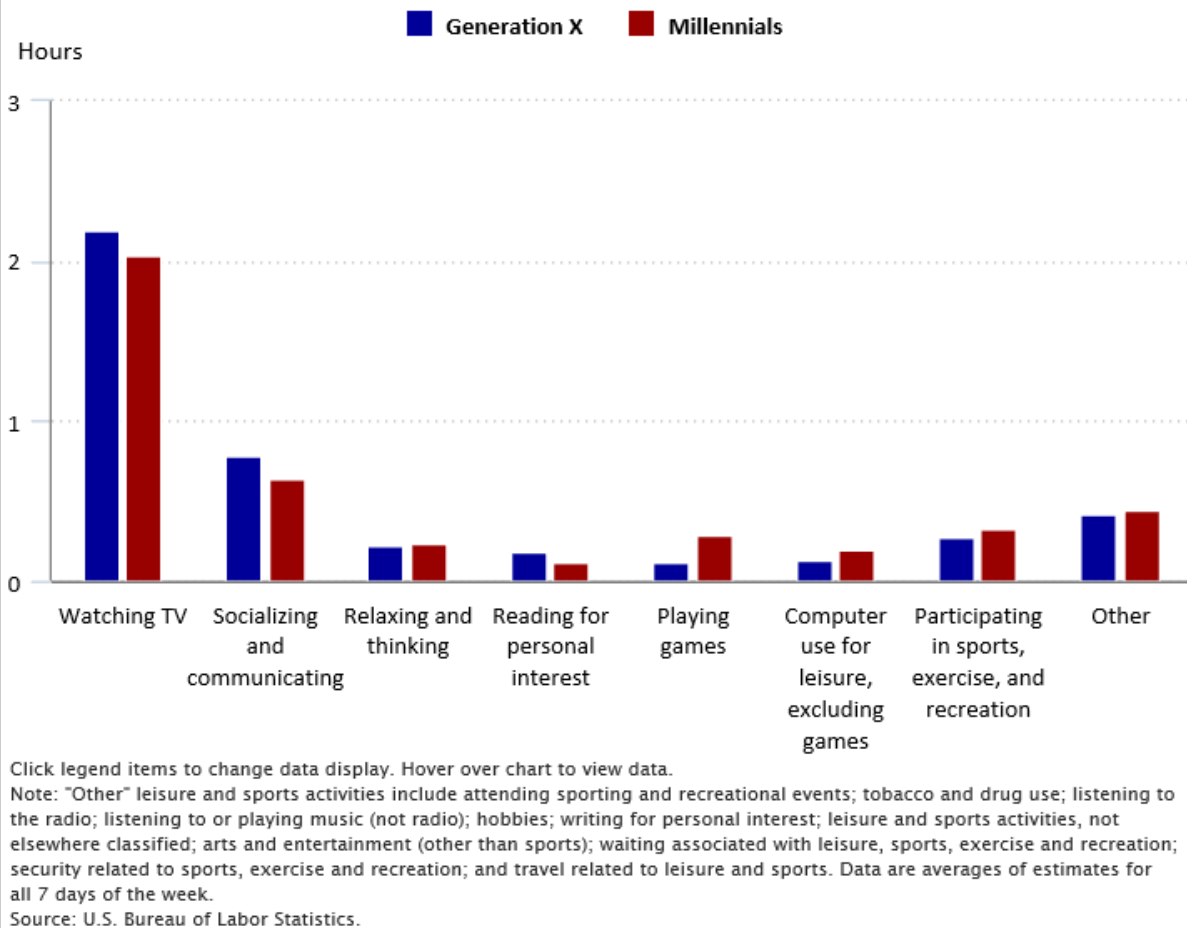
Millennials spent less time per day reading for personal interest in 2019 than did members of Generation X in 2003 (7 minutes, compared with 11 minutes). (See table 2.) This difference also was due to women's use of time. On an average day, millennial women spent less time per day reading for personal interest than did Generation X women (7 minutes, compared with 12 minutes). (See table 4.) On days they read for personal interest, millennial women were less likely to read compared with Generation X women (11 percent versus 18 percent). However, men of both generations spent nearly the same amount of time reading for personal interest on a given day (8 minutes in 2019 and 9 minutes in 2003). (See table 3). The decline in time spent reading for personal interest aligns with ATUS data for the population, which shows that individuals ages 15 and over averaged 6 fewer minutes per day reading for personal interest in 2019 compared with 2003.^[26]

Both generations spent the largest share of their leisure time watching TV on a given day—2 hours and 2 minutes for millennials in 2019 and 2 hours and 11 minutes a day for Generation Xers in 2003. (See table 2.) While there was no difference in the amount of time women of each generation watched TV, millennial men spent less time watching TV on a given day than did Generation X men (2 hours and 7 minutes versus 2 hours and 25 minutes). (See table 3.) Comparing the generations, the decrease in men's time spent watching TV is about the same magnitude as the increase in the time they spent playing games on a given day. On an average day, millennials were more likely than members of Generation X to participate in sports, exercise, and recreation (20 percent, compared with 16 percent). (See table 2.)

Personal care activities

On a given day in 2019, millennials spent 23 more minutes per day in personal care activities than did members of Generation X in 2003. This difference was largely due to a change in average sleep times. On average, millennials slept 22 minutes more per day in 2019 than did Generation Xers in 2003 (8.9 hours, compared with 8.5 hours). (See table 2.)

Chart 2. Average hours per day Generation X and millennials spent on selected leisure and sports activities, ages 23 to 38, 2003 and 2019



Conclusion

Time use is affected by an individual's life stage—whether they are focused on raising children, studying, or retired. In this article it is unsurprising that many similarities were observed in the time use of the two generations considering they were of the same age. Millennials and Generation Xers spent nearly the same amount of time on a given day working, and men of both generations spent more time on average working per day than their female counterparts.

Many differences in time use between the generations were driven by changes in the time men or women spent doing the activities. Although there was no statistical difference regarding the time millennials and members of Generation X spent in household activities overall, millennial women spent less time doing housework compared with Generation X women. Millennial men, however, spent nearly twice as much time per day doing food and drink preparation compared with Generation X men.

Millennials spent less time per day in 2019 caring for and helping household members compared with members of Generation X in 2003, primarily because millennial women spent less time on average caring for household children compared with Generation X women.

Millennials in 2019 and members of Generation X in 2003 spent nearly the same amount of time on an average day doing leisure and sports. Differences were observed when examining the time use of men and women across the generations. Millennial women spent less time socializing and communicating compared with Generation X women. Millennial men spent more time playing games and less time watching TV than did Generation X men. Notably, the decline in the time spent by millennial men watching TV was of the same magnitude as the increase in time they spent playing games compared with Generation X men in 2003. Millennial women spent more time on an average day using a computer for leisure than did Generation X women. However, on days when they used a computer for leisure, millennial women spent less time doing so in 2019 than Generation X women in 2003. Millennial women spent less time per day reading for personal interest compared with Generation X women. However, the amount of time men spent reading on average across the generations was nearly the same in 2019 and 2003.

These differences in time use of millennials in 2019 and members of Generation X in 2003 can be examined by observing the behavior of men and women across generations, keeping in mind the technological advancements and the economic conditions that were prevalent for both generations.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Michelle Freeman, "Time use of millennials and Generation X: differences across time," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2022, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2022.3>

NOTES

¹ See "American Time Use Survey," *Handbook of Methods* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/atus/concepts.htm>.

² See Rachel Krantz, Marisa Di Natale, and Thomas J. Krolik, "The U.S. labor market in 2003: signs of improvement by year's end," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 2003, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2004/03/art1full.pdf>.

³ See "Verizon launches first '3G' network," *CNN*, January 28, 2002, <https://www.cnn.com/2002/TECH/ptech/01/28/verizon.3g/>.

⁴ See "Apple reinvents the phone with iPhone," *Apple Newsroom*, January 2007, <https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2007/01/09Apple-Reinvents-the-Phone-with-iPhone/>.

⁵ See Chenda Ngak, "Then and now: a history of social networking sites," *CBS News*, July 6, 2011, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/then-and-now-a-history-of-social-networking-sites/7/>.

⁶ See Michael D. McCall, "Employment expansion continued in 2019, but growth slowed in several industries," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2020, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2020.7>.

⁷ See "Types of computers and internet subscriptions," Table ID: S2801, American Community Survey, United States Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S28&d=ACS%201-Year%20Estimates%20Subject%20Tables&tid=ACST1Y2019.S2801>

- ⁸ See Michael Dimock, “Defining generations: Where millennials end and Generation Z begins” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins>.
- ⁹ See “The whys and hows of generations research” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, September 3, 2005), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research>.
- ¹⁰ See B. Bower, “Home Alone: Latchkey Kids on Good Behavior” *Science News* 140, no. 4 (July 1991), p. 54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3976119>.
- ¹¹ Anick Tolbize, “Generational differences in the workplace” (Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota, August 16, 2008), https://rtc.umn.edu/docs/2_18_Gen_diff_workplace.pdf.
- ¹² See Dimock “Where millennials end and Generation Z begins.”
- ¹³ See, “Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 7, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband>.
- ¹⁴ See Scott Keeter and Paul Taylor “The Millennials: A portrait of generation next” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, December 10, 2009), <https://www.pewresearch.org/2009/12/10/the-millennials/>.
- ¹⁵ See Kristen Bialik and Richard Fry, “Millennial life: How young adulthood compares with prior generations,” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 14, 2019), <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/millennial-life-how-young-adulthood-today-compares-with-prior-generations/>.
- ¹⁶ The values presented in the tables are official estimates, and the values presented in the text are rounded to the nearest percent. Estimates presented in this article have been tested for statistical significance at the 90 percent confidence level.
- ¹⁷ See Bialik and Fry, “Millennial life.”
- ¹⁸ See Lindsay Monte, “Some delay childbearing, others opt out” (U.S. Census Bureau, November 2017), <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/11/women-early-thirties.html>
- ¹⁹ See Melinda Mills, Ronald R. Rindfuss, Peter McDonald, and Egbert te Velde, “Why do people postpone parenthood? Reasons and social policy incentives,” *Human Reproduction Update* 17, issue 6 (November–December 2011), pp. 848–860, <https://doi.org/10.1093/humupd/dmr026>.
- ²⁰ See Benjamin Gurrentz, “Millennial Marriage: How much does economic security matter to marriage rates for young adults?” (U.S. Census Bureau, April 2018), <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2018/demo/SEHSD-WP2018-09.html>.
- ²¹ See “Table 17. Homeownership rates by age of householder and family status for the United States” (U.S. Census Bureau, March 2020), <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/ann20ind.html>.
- ²² The estimates for the average hours per day individuals spent working reflect a uniform distribution across all people in the reference population and all days of the week. The population includes those who were employed and those who were not. In addition, employed people were surveyed about days that they worked and days they did not work. It also includes people who worked part time and those who did temporary work. For more information, see the technical note in *American Time Use Survey—May to December 2019 and 2020 results* USDL-21-1359 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 22, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf>
- ²³ Pet expenditures were an unpublished tabulation in 2003. For the total expenditure on pets, toys, and playground equipment at that time, see “Table 1300. Age of reference person: annual means, shares, standard errors, and coefficient of variation, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2003” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2004), <https://www.bls.gov/cex/2003/stnderror/age.pdf>. For pet expenditures in 2019, see “Table 1300. Age of reference person: annual expenditure means, shares, standard errors, and coefficients of variation, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2019” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2020), <https://www.bls.gov/cex/tables/calendar-year/mean-item-share-average-standard-error/reference-person-age-ranges-2019.pdf>. Values in these tables have not been adjusted for inflation.

[24](#) "Monthly Retail Trade Survey Historical Data" (U.S. Census Bureau, December 2021), https://www.census.gov/retail/mrts/historic_releases.html.

[25](#) See Mark Aguiar, Mark Bilal, Kerwin Kofi Charles, and Erik Hurst, "Leisure luxuries and the labor supply of young men," Working Paper 23552 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2017), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23552/w23552.pdf

[26](#) "Average hours per day for reading for personal interest," series I.D.: TUU10101AA01006315 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/srgate>.

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