

# Introduction

Every day each of us gets 24 hours to accomplish what we need to do and enjoy what we want to do. The activities we choose to do during those 24 hours and the amount of time we allot to each activity determines the quality of our family life, the unique features of our culture, and the driving forces of our economy.

Several years ago, the federal government initiated a survey to collect data on how Americans spend their time during an average day. Called the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), this ongoing collection of data allows economists, policy makers, and sociologists to better understand our economy and lifestyle and how policy decisions affect our lives. Through telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of Americans aged 15 or older, ATUS collects information in minute detail about what survey respondents did during the previous 24 hours—or “diary day” (For more about ATUS methodology, see Appendix A).

*American Time Use: Who Spends How Long at What* is your window into the vast collection of American Time Use Survey data. Presented here are detailed tables and analysis of results from the 2008 survey.

If you have ever wondered while watching TV why advertisers are so intent on selling snacks or sleep aids or cleaning products—or even why they spend so much money on television advertising itself—time use data has the answer. On an average day, eating ranks fourth in our priorities, behind only sleep, work, and watching television (which is why advertisers spend so much money on television spots). Cleaning the house ranks eighth among our most time-consuming activities. And on an average night, millions of Americans are sleepless, time-use statistics reveal.

*American Time Use* presents detailed time use data for the single most important demographic characteristic for determining how people spend their time—their age. A person’s age determines his or her lifecycle stage, and lifecycle stage determines whether he or she is in school, in the work force, married, or a parent. Lifecycle stage sets our priorities, determining how we spend our 24-hour allotment of time. *How Americans Spend Their Time* puts you in the know, showing you what others are doing—from teens (15-to-19-year-olds) to young adults (20-to-24-year-olds), from parents (25-to-34- and 35-to-44-year-olds) to empty-nesters (45-to-54- and 55-to-64-year-olds) and from the go-go elderly to the slow-go elderly (65-to-74-year-olds and those aged 75 or older).

The detailed time use data presented in *American Time Use* are not available on any government web site. They were obtained by special request from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The comparisons of time use by lifecycle stage contained in this book are also not available from the federal government. New Strategist’s statisticians analyzed the raw time use data—number of people, average time, and participant time—to produce the per-

centages of people participating in activities, the indexes, and the rankings—each of which reveals significant differences in time use by lifecycle stage. Government web sites are useful for obtaining either general information (summary data) or for tapping into enormous databases that require analysis by statistical programs. New Strategist has done the work for you, providing analysis and comparisons, placing the important American Time Use Survey at your fingertips.

### **How to analyze time use data**

To analyze time use data, you need to understand three simple concepts: primary activity, average time, and participant time. An examination of the amount of time people spend sleepless will help explain these three concepts.

- **Primary activity** ATUS collects data on the amount of time people spend engaged in “primary” activities on an average day, meaning the main activity a respondent is doing at a given moment. For example, if a respondent is watching television and eating, one of those activities will be recorded as the primary activity, and the fact that the respondent is also doing the other activity at the same time will not appear in the data. This is an important concept to keep in mind because the amount of time people spend doing some activities might appear to be low because the activity is rarely a primary activity—such as listening to the radio. Sleeplessness is a primary activity if a respondent reports trying to go to sleep but is instead tossing and turning, lying awake, counting sheep, or otherwise experiencing insomnia.

- **Average time** Data collected by the 2008 American Time Use Survey found that people aged 15 or older spent an average of 0.06 hours—or about 4 minutes—sleepless on diary day. (To convert decimal hours to minutes, multiply 60 by the decimal. In this case, multiply 60 by .06 and the result is 3.6—or nearly 4 minutes) This doesn’t sound like much time spent sleepless, but that is because the percentage of people who experience sleeplessness is small, and the average time spent sleepless includes both those who tossed and turned on diary day (or night) and those who slept like a log. Average time is an artificial measure based on two factors—the percentage of people who engaged in an activity and the amount of time participants spent doing the activity. Because average time calculations include both those engaging in an activity and those who did not, average time figures will be less than the actual time participants spent doing an activity—particularly for activities in which few people participate or which take little time. But the average is a most valuable number, because it allows researchers to compare time use by demographic characteristic, revealing differences in priorities.

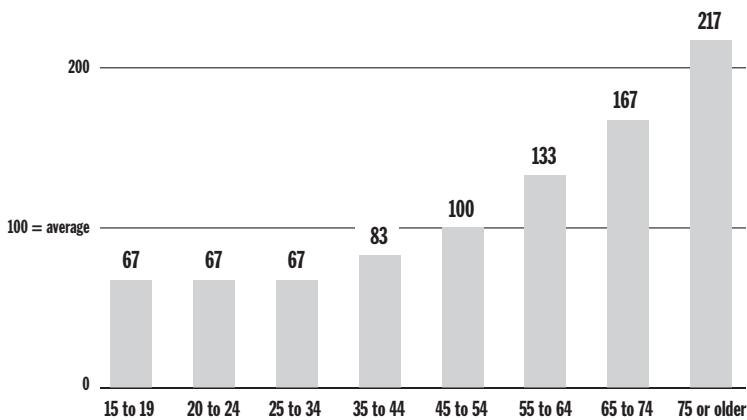
- **Participant time** During an average day in 2008, a substantial 5.2 percent of people aged 15 or older experienced sleeplessness. Among those who were sleepless, the average amount of time they spent counting sheep was a significant 0.85 hours—or 51 minutes. This is participant time, which tells you how much time people who engaged in an activity on diary day spent doing the activity. Participant time provides an important reality check,

revealing how much time people devote to activities. But because participant time includes only those engaging in an activity, it does not allow for the comparison of time use across demographic segments.

This analysis of the time people spend sleepless shows sleeplessness to be a big problem for some—which may explain why television advertisers spend so much money on marketing sleep aids. The problem gets worse with advancing age. The percentage of people experiencing sleeplessness rises above average in the 45-to-54 age group and peaks at 8.1 percent among people aged 75 or older. The amount of time spent sleepless by “participants” also increases with age, to more than 1.5 hours for those aged 65 or older. These two factors—the percentage of people experiencing sleeplessness and the amount of time spent sleepless by those experiencing it—are statistically combined and result in average time spent sleepless. By indexing average time, you can see at a glance how sleeplessness varies by age in this chart:

### Sleeplessness

*(indexed average time spent per day in sleeplessness as a primary activity, by age, 2008;  
100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



### How time use differs by lifecycle stage

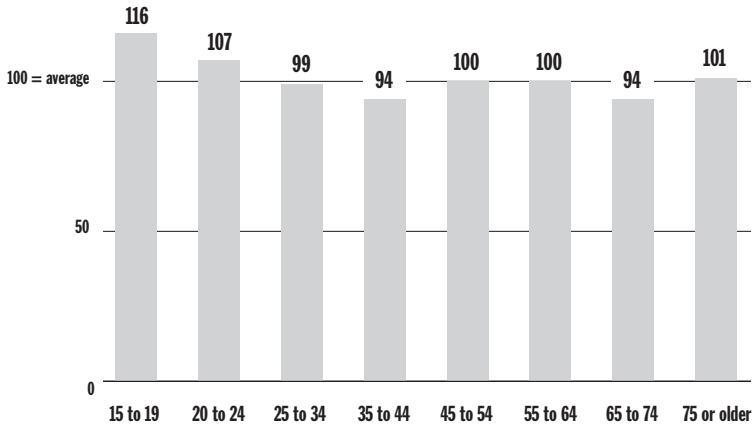
Teenagers go to school, the middle-aged go to work, and the elderly have the most leisure time. These characteristics of time use by lifecycle stage are well known. But going beyond the generalities reveals the surprising priorities of Americans at every stage of life. In some cases, time use data confirm stereotypes. In other cases, they disprove common knowledge. In every case, however, a more thorough understanding of how Americans spend their time can be the key to better business and policy decisions.

Let's start with teenagers. Anyone who has ever lived with teens knows they spend a lot of time in the bathroom. The time use statistics confirm this stereotype. People aged 15 to 19 spend more time grooming as a primary activity than any other age group, an average of

0.78 hours per day (or about 47 minutes). When those figures are indexed to the average, grooming patterns by age look like this:

### Grooming

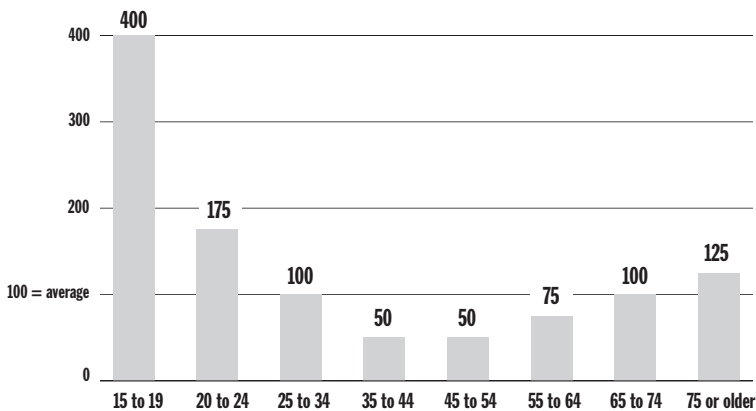
*(indexed average time spent per day grooming as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



Teens are also known for being on the phone too much. Again, time use statistics uphold the stereotype. People aged 15 to 19 spend more time on the phone with friends as a primary activity than any other age group.

### Telephone calls to or from friends

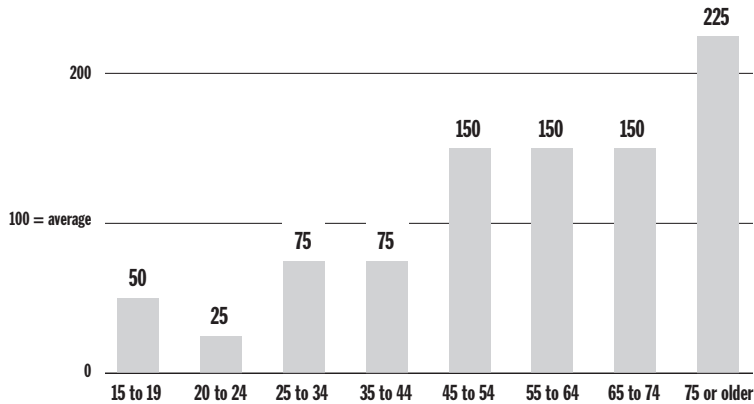
*(indexed average time spent per day on the telephone with friends, neighbors, or acquaintances as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



But teens are not the ones most likely to talk to family members on the telephone. Older Americans spend more time than younger ones talking to family members on the phone.

### Telephone calls to or from family members

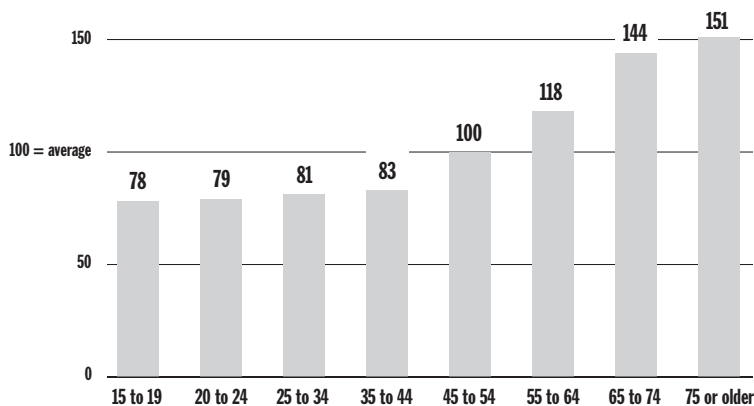
*(indexed average time spent per day on the telephone with family members as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



Older Americans spend more time than younger ones at a variety of activities because they have more free time. Interestingly, they spend much more time than younger adults watching television as a primary activity. In fact, people aged 75 or older spend more than one-quarter of their waking hours watching television as a primary activity.

### Watching television

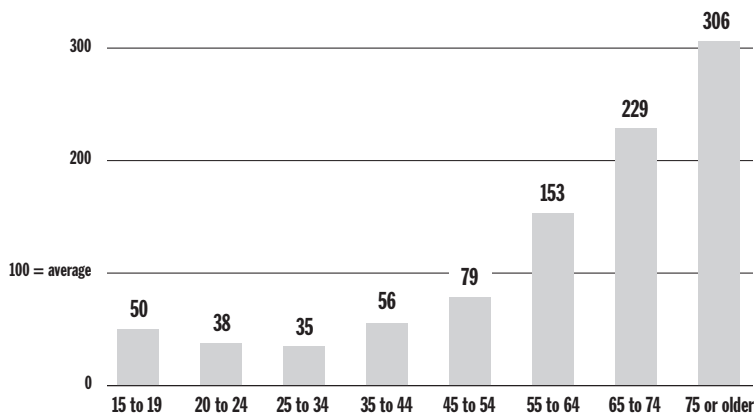
*(indexed average time spent per day watching television as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



Older Americans spend much more time than younger adults reading. In fact, among people aged 55 or older, reading for personal interest ranks among the ten most time-consuming daily activities. Among those aged 75 or older it ranks fourth, behind only sleeping, watching television, and eating.

### Reading

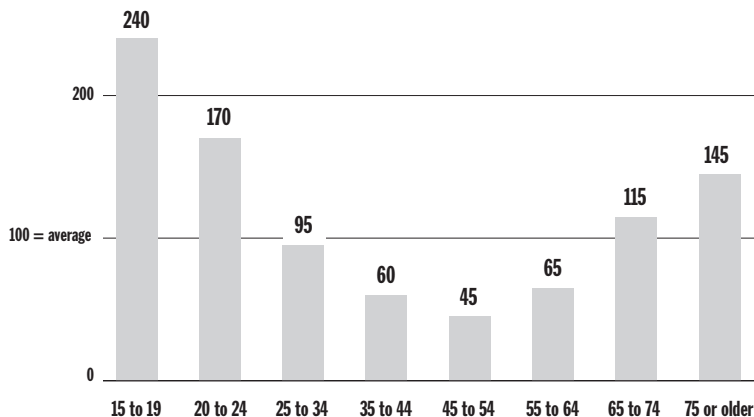
*(indexed average time spent per day reading for personal interest as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



Playing games is an interesting category in the ATUS survey because it includes computer games as well as board games and card games such as poker or bridge. Because the category spans such a variety of activities, time spent playing games as a primary activity peaks in two age groups—among teens and young adults, and among people aged 65 or older. The younger group is mostly playing computer games. The older group is more likely playing board games or bridge.

### Playing games

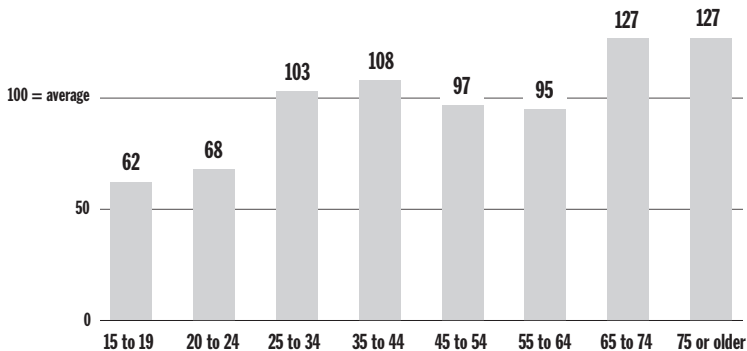
*(indexed average time spent per day playing games as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



The middle-aged, and specifically people aged 45 to 54, spend the most time working. In fact, men aged 45 to 54 who worked on diary day spent as much time at their main job as they did sleeping. Surprisingly, however, the middle-aged do not spend the most time on household chores—despite the fact that they have the largest households. Older Americans spend the most time doing chores, People aged 65 or older spend more time than any other age group cleaning house and preparing meals.

### Housecleaning

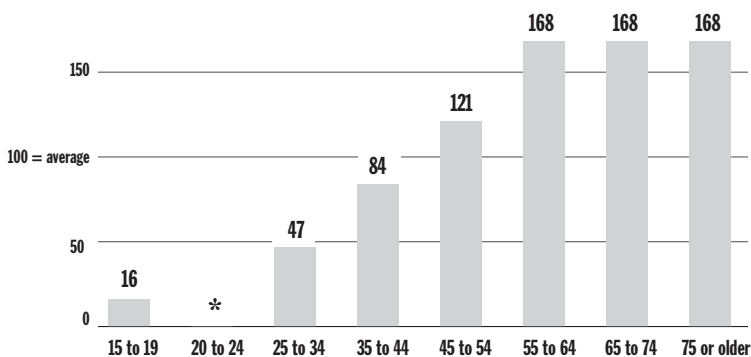
(indexed average time spent per day cleaning the interior of the house as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)



People aged 65 to 74 spend the most time grocery shopping. People aged 55 or older spend the most time on lawn care. The observation that work expands to fill the time available helps to explain these facts. Older Americans have much more free time than younger adults (even more than teenagers). They spend much of their free time puttering around cleaning, fixing, and improving.

### Lawn, garden, and houseplant care

(indexed average time spent per day in lawn, garden, or houseplant care as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)

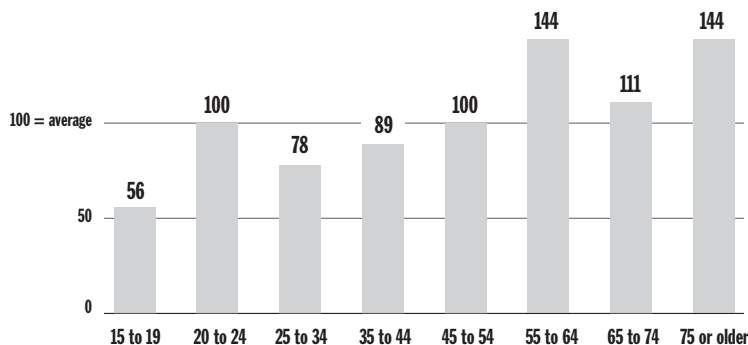


\* Data for 20-to-24-year-olds are unavailable.

Not surprisingly, the time spent caring for household children peaks among people with young children at home—in the 25 to 44 age groups. Time spent caring for children in other households (i.e. grandchildren) peaks in the 55-to-74 age groups. The average time spent caring for pets is greatest among people aged 55 or older.

### Pet care

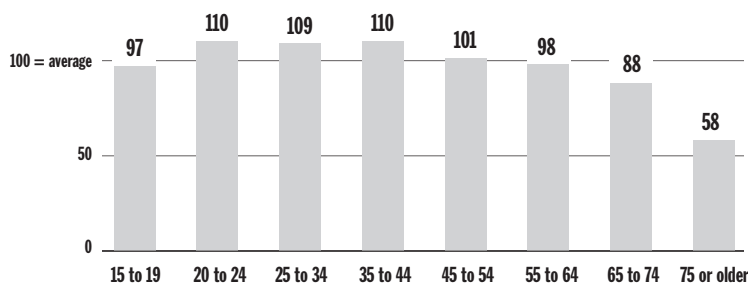
*(indexed average time spent per day caring for animals or pets as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



Time use statistics reveal the defining elements of our culture, and no element defines us more than the automobile. The time use survey data show “traveling” to be one of our most time consuming daily activities. On an average day, people aged 15 or older spend 1.20 hours (or 1 hour, 12 minutes) traveling. The category “traveling” is defined as going from one destination to another. While any mode of transportation is included in the category, the automobile by far is the dominant mode of transportation in the United States. The average amount of time spent traveling does not vary much by lifecycle stage, except for a decline in the oldest age group.

### Traveling

*(indexed average time spent per day traveling as a primary activity, by age, 2008; 100 equals the time spent by the average person doing the activity)*



The time use data also show the most important reasons for daily travel at each lifecycle stage. Overall, travel related to work (i.e. commuting) is the most time-consuming travel subcategory. But among teenagers, travel related to education is number one, followed by travel related to socializing. Among people aged 65 or older, travel related to shopping is the most time-consuming travel subcategory.

Regardless of lifecycle stage, however, we all spend a good portion of our day in automobiles. This explains why advertisements for cars are so common on television and in newspapers. Cars are one of our top priorities. To learn more about our other priorities, dive into *American Time Use: Who Spends How Long at What*.

### **A step-by-step guide to using the tables**

Each chapter of *American Time Use* includes 20 tables (except for the Total Population chapter, which has only 14 tables because it does not include tables indexing time use and participation to the average). Each table reveals how an age group spends its time in the following ways.

- **Tables 1 to 3: Average Time Use** The first three tables in each chapter present the entire range of time use information for the age group. Table 1 presents data for total people in the age group, Table 2 for men in the age group, and Table 3 for women in the age group. Tables 1 through 3 present data in four columns:

1. Column one shows the estimated number of people in the age group participating in the primary activity on an average day. Among men aged 45 to 54, for example, 13.3 million worked at their main job on diary day.
2. Column two shows the percentage of people in the age group who participate in the primary activity on diary day. (Note: Activities in which fewer than 2 percent of people in an age group participate are not shown because of small sample sizes.) Those 13.3 million men who worked at their main job on diary day represented 61.7 percent of men in the age group.
3. Column three shows the number of hours per day the average person in the age group spent doing the primary activity. The amount of time spent by the average person on many activities will appear low because it includes everyone—both those participating in the activity on that day and those not participating in the activity. The average man aged 45 to 54 spent 5.03 hours working at his main job on diary day, for example. This is well below the usual eight-hour workday because it includes both men who worked on diary day and men who did not work on diary day.
4. Column four shows the hours spent by participants doing the primary activity on diary day. Among men aged 45 to 54, those who worked on diary day spent 8.16 hours at their main job, significantly more than the 5.03 average.

• **Tables 4 to 6: Indexed Time Use** The next set of three tables compares the average amount of time people in an age group spend doing a primary activity with the average for the total population aged 15 or older. Table 4 presents data for total people in the age group, Table 5 for men in the age group, and Table 6 for women in the age group. Tables 4 through 6 present data in three columns.

1. Column one shows the number of hours per day the average person in the age group spends doing a primary activity. (This information also appears in column 3 of Tables 1 through 3.)
2. Column two shows the number of hours per day spent by the average person aged 15 or older doing the primary activity.
3. Column three compares time use in the age group with time use by the total population aged 15 or older. The comparison is accomplished by creating an index—dividing the number of hours people in the age group spend doing an activity by the number of hours total people aged 15 or older spend doing the activity and multiplying by 100. The average man aged 45 to 54, for example, spent 5.03 hours on diary day working at his main job. The average man aged 15 or older spent 3.96 hours on diary day working at his main job. The index is calculated by dividing 5.03 by 3.96 and multiplying the resulting figure by 100. If you subtract 100 from the index figure, the result is the percentage difference between the age group and the average. In this case, the index is 127. The difference between the index figure of 127 and 100 is 27. This means men aged 45 to 54 spend 27 percent more time working at their main job on an average day than all men aged 15 or older.

• **Table 7: Indexed Time Use by Sex** Table 7 compares the time use of men and women in an age group. The table presents data in three columns.

1. Column one shows the average hours per day men in the age group spend doing primary activities.
2. Column two shows the average hours per day women in the age group spend doing primary activities.
3. Column three indexes women's time use to men's. The average man aged 45 to 54 spent 5.03 hours working at his main job on diary day. The average woman aged 45 to 54 spent 3.75 hours working at her main job on diary day. The index of women's time to men's ( $3.75/5.03 * 100$ ) is 75. When you subtract 100 from the index figure of 75, the result is -25, which means women aged 45 to 54 spend 25 percent less time working at their main job on an average day than their male counterparts. In another example, the average woman aged 45 to 54 spent 0.33 hours on diary day doing the laundry. The average man in the age group spent 0.08 hours on diary day doing laundry. The index is 413 ( $0.33/0.08*100=413$ ), meaning women aged 45 to 54 spend far more time doing the laundry on an average day than their male counterparts.

• **Tables 8 to 10: Indexed Participation in Activities** The next three tables, 8 through 10, offer another perspective on time use, comparing the percentage of people in an age group participating in a primary activity on an average day with the percentage of total people aged 15 or older participating in the primary activity. Table 8 presents data for total people in the age group, Table 9 for men in the age group, and Table 10 for women in the age group. Tables 8 through 10 present data in three columns.

1. Column one shows the percentage of people in the age group doing a primary activity on an average day. (This information also appears in column 2 of Tables 1 through 3.)
2. Column two shows the percentage of total people aged 15 or older doing the primary activity on an average day.
3. Column three compares the percentage of people in the age group who participate in the activity with the percentage of total people aged 15 or older who do. Among men aged 45 to 54, for example, 14.6 percent participated in lawn, garden, and houseplant care as a primary activity on diary day. Among all men aged 15 or older, a smaller 11.0 percent participated in this activity on diary day. Dividing 14.6 by 11.0 and multiplying by 100 results in an index of 133. Subtracting 100 from 133 shows that men aged 45 to 54 are 33 percent more likely than all men aged 15 or older to participate in lawn, garden, and houseplant care on an average day.

• **Table 11: Indexed Participation by Sex** Table 7 compares the percentage of men and women in an age group participating in an activity. Table 7 presents data in three columns.

1. Column one shows the percentage of men in the age group doing the primary activity on an average day.
2. Column two shows the percentage of women in the age group doing the primary activity on an average day.
3. Column three indexes women's participation to men's. For example, 32.5 percent of women aged 45 to 54 did the laundry as a primary activity on diary day. Among men in the age group, only 7.7 percent did the laundry on diary day. The index of women's participation to men's is 425 ( $32.5/7.7*100$ ) and means women aged 45 to 54 are more than four times more likely than their male counterparts to do laundry on an average day. In another example, 79.8 percent of women aged 45 to 54 watch television as a primary activity on an average day. Among men aged 45 to 54, the figure is a larger 84.3 percent. The index of 95 ( $79.8/84.3*100$ ) means women aged 45 to 54 are 5 percent less likely (95 minus 100 = -5) than men aged 45 to 54 to watch television on an average day.

• **Tables 12 to 14: Ranking, Average Time** Tables 12 through 14 rank the number of hours per day people in an age group spend doing a primary activity on an average day. Table 12 ranks average time use for everyone in the age group, Table 13 for men in the age group, and Table 14 for women in the age group.

- **Tables 15 to 17: Ranking, Percent Participating** Tables 15 through 17 rank the percentage of people in an age group doing a primary activity on an average day. Table 15 ranks the percentage of total people in the age group doing the primary activity on an average day, Table 16 ranks the percentage of men doing the activity, and Table 14 ranks the percentage of women doing the activity.

- **Tables 18 to 20: Ranking, Participant Time** Tables 18 through 20 rank the number of hours participants spend doing a primary activity on an average day. Table 18 ranks the time all participants in an age group spend doing an activity on an average day. Table 19 ranks the time male participants spend doing the activity, and Table 20 ranks the time female participants spend doing the activity.

### **For more information**

For more information about the history and methodology of the American Time Use Survey, see Appendix A at the back of this book. For more information about the time use categories themselves and what activities they include, see Appendix B: Time Use Category Examples. A brief perusal of the examples will assure you that just about any possible activity has been considered and categorized by Bureau of Labor Statistics researchers. Caring for an orphaned animal, shoveling snow, going to a wedding, taking vitamins, singing karaoke--it is all included in the American Time Use Survey. Also at the back of the book is the Glossary, which defines the survey's commonly used terms. The index there will help you see at a glance which time use categories are available for each age group and the pages on which the information is located.

*American Time Use: Who Spends How Long at What* is certain to make you stop and think about how you spend your day and arrange your priorities. It will have you comparing yourself to friends and neighbors. Most important, it will reveal how your clients, customers, and constituents value their time and allow you to better meet their needs.