

The limits of time-use surveys:

Non-linear times as a potential development for visualizing the invisible

Time-use surveys provide valuable insights into how individuals allocate their time. The analysis of time-use surveys from 23 countries by Addati et al. (2018: xxix) shows: “Around the world, without exception, women do three-quarters of unpaid care work. There is no country where women and men take on an equal share of unpaid care work.” This shows that time-use surveys are an important tool to capture the gendered inequality concerning time allocation. Thus, feminist scholars perceive it as a measure to identify the civic and economic importance of unpaid domestic and care work (Bryson 2008).

However, this is only one side of the time-use surveys. In time research, time is not an objective and universal concept but a socially constructed and culturally specific phenomenon that varies across different societies and historical periods (Elias 1985; Thompson 1999). According to Thompson, a shift has taken place in Western societies: In pre-industrial times, non-linear time defined people's lives, based on the natural, repetitive rhythms of seasons and tasks to be done. Then, with the availability of clock towers and watches, linear time regulated the new rhythms of industrial life to synchronize work and standardize the hours and pace of work (ibid.). This is what I want to focus on in my contribution: the hegemony of clock time. The capitalist workplace shaped a time culture in which time is perceived as something that moves steadily in one direction and can be owned, measured, saved, spent, or wasted (Bryson 2016). Several feminist scholars have highlighted time-use surveys for visualizing unequal time allocations, measured in clock time units. However, care responsibilities remain challenging to conceptualize in terms of modern clock time (Doucet 2022). They are not separable linear clock time units; rather, they involve messier, circular, interconnected processes that encompass fluidity and diverse temporal dimensions (Folbre 2006; Davies 1994; Adam 1990). Davies (1994) criticizes that care tasks contain logics of rationalization and efficiency. It is difficult and not foreseeable how long some care tasks will take. Therefore, contrasting linear time, Davies introduces the concept of “process time” which emphasizes that time is enmeshed in social relations, where many processes can intertwine or where unexpected events frequently call for abandoning the linear clock-time regime. Hence, process time and other non-linear times can be seen as counter-hegemony to the linear clock time regime.

This paper investigates *how qualitative methods can inform and complement time-use surveys to take into consideration other non-linear times arising from care tasks and care responsibilities*. Methodologically, this paper conducts a mixed-method approach. Using the same concepts as time-use surveys, parents are asked in a pre-questionnaire about their time use, which is then complemented by, (1) the “Household Portrait technique”, where a couple maps gender divisions by housework as well as care tasks and care responsibilities, indicating who does what (see: Doucet 2015). And (2), by qualitative interviews. Building upon a recent publication from Doucet (2022), this paper shows that standard measures of time-use, such as time-use diaries, may not be able to capture the full range of experiences and meanings of care tasks/ responsibilities. This ensures that it is not possible to specify who takes on which tasks in couples and who bears the main burden of care responsibilities. Thus, in terms of a counter-hegemonic narrative, it is important to track which tasks carry more burdens, e.g. mental load, to pinpoint gendered time allocation, reflected by the gender time gap and non-linear times.

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