shared their households with at least one other person (that is, this set ignores respondents who lived alone), the trend is nevertheless quite clear: downward.17

Other surveys have been more precise, asking respondents how many days a week they usually eat as a family or how often they did so in the previous week. But these surveys cover many fewer years. Figure 3.2 presents the results from Gallup’s question about respondents’ usual practice— “How many nights a week out of seven does

**Figure 3.1  Respondents Whose Families Usually Eat Dinner Together— DDB Needham**

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from DDB Needham, variable name “famdin.”

Question: “Our whole family usually eats dinner together,” with six-point response scale: (1) definitely disagree, (2) generally disagree, (3) moderately disagree, (4) moderately agree, (5) generally agree, and (6) definitely agree.

Notes: (1) I show here and elsewhere a line for the total sample, 1985 to 2003, and a line for only respondents in two-person households, 1977 to 1998, for two reasons. First, before 1985, DDB sought only married respondents. Later, starting in 1985, it sought a full sample, including the unmarried, and asked all respondents this question, even those who lived alone. Second, the two-person household series cannot be continued beyond 1998 because the microdata are not available for analysis (at least not to me) and I had to rely on published marginals. (2) From 1985 to 1998 about 52 percent of respondents in one-person households “agreed” with the statement, compared to 73 percent for other respondents. It is not clear what that answer means in a one-person household and what it implies for the answers of other respondents.
your family eat dinner together at home?”—and figure 3.3 presents
the results from the CBS/New York Times poll’s question—“In the last
seven days, how many evenings did most of your family eat together?”
Finally on this point, figure 3.4 presents a series that asked parents
about whether they and their children ate the “main meal” on week-
days “as a family unit—that is, parents and some or all of the children.”
Although all the polls shown in this set (and the next ones through fig-
ure 3.11) were conducted by the Roper organization, we have differ-
ent samples taken at different times in somewhat different ways, so
multiple lines are displayed.

The results in figures 3.1 to 3.4 are “noisy,” but there is a downward
trend. All of the data here—and results reported by others—point
toward at least a moderate decline since 1970 in families having meals
at home together (even as the number of people who would have to be
corralled to the table declined). A 2009 survey pursued this topic by ask-
ing respondents why they sometimes did not eat as a family. The most

Figure 3.2  Respondents Whose Families Eat Together at Home,
by How Often—Gallup

Sources: Author’s compilation based on data from iPoll, USGALLUP97FB24.R35; Kiefer
(2004).
Question: “How many nights a week out of seven does your family eat dinner together at
home?”
Note: This sample includes only respondents from households with children under age
eighteen.
common explanations were that “people are working late” and, among parents, that “kids have activities that conflict with dinner.”

In 1998 about half of Americans polled predicted that “families sitting down to eat dinner together” will have “pretty much disappeared” by 2028. Although the trends we see do not imply disappearance—and other fragmentary data suggest that the trend flattened out in the 2000s—they are consistent with that sentiment. Another set of results from the Roper polls, however, provide a different perspective on eating together—how often did families eat out together (figure 3.5)? The same caution about the varying samples applies. Between 1974 and 1990, more American parents reported that they ate out frequently or often as “a family unit.” The point for 1994 reverses the trend, but it is a particularly atypical poll. It would seem, then, that the decline in the number of family meals applied only to meals at home.

A handful of surveys conducted by the Roper organization between 1974 and 1991 asked about several sorts of family activities. Figures
3.4 and 3.5 show answers to the questions specifically about meals. Figures 3.6 to 3.11 show the patterns for some other questions. As before with these polls, we have a variety of ways of matching them up. A gloss on the results suggests that frequently doing activities “as a family unit” at home declined, while trends for doing other activities were roughly flat. The 1990s data—in particular, Putnam’s reports of the 1997 points—stand out in showing notable drops. (Generally, respondents shifted from saying “frequently” to saying “fairly often”; the proportions saying “not too often,” “seldom,” or “never” changed little.) The trends are neither uniform nor dramatic, but taken together, they point to a moderate decline in reports of families doing activities together.26
Yet time-budget studies suggest that American parents were spending more time with their children after 2000 than they had spent in the decades before.27 (In time-budget studies, researchers ask a representative sample of people to keep track of their activities, who they do them with, when they do them, and for how long.) How can these two sets of findings be reconciled? It is likely that, with more mothers working longer hours and with more children engaged in extracurricular activities outside the home, parents less often coordinated common “family activities” such as meals, visits, or even television-watching—but nonetheless spent more time accompanying their children to their playdates, sports practices, and so forth, as well as taking them along on parental trips such as grocery shopping. In fact, a few of the Roper polls (not shown here) also asked about
shopping for food as “a family unit”; reports of frequently doing so rose substantially from the mid-1970s to 1990. Changes may also depend on the age of the children. One study compared surveys of high schoolers in “Middletown” (Muncie, Indiana) in 1999 to those in 1977; the more recent cohort reported spending less time with parents than did the 1977 respondents, a decrease that the authors attributed to divorce and mothers’ employment. Americans’ perceptions of what has changed are in line with the evidence from time-budget studies. In a 1987 Gallup poll, 65 percent of respondents said that “parents spending more time with their children” was “gaining favor and popularity.”

Finally, spouses: Paul Amato and his colleagues report major declines in spouses doing various activities together—although no decline in marital happiness or stability. Suzanne Bianchi and her colleagues found that American parents spent 20 to 25 percent fewer minutes a day...
Figure 3.7  Respondents Who Frequently Visit Friends or Relatives
As a Family—Roper

Sources: For full source information see chapter 3, note 18.

Question: “I’m going to name some different kinds of things, and for each one, would you
tell me how often you do it as a family unit—that is, parents and some or all of the
children? . . . [How often do you] visit friends or family together?”

Notes: See notes to figure 3.6.

Figure 3.8  Respondents Who Frequently Do Fun Things
As a Family—Roper

Sources: For full source information see chapter 3, note 18.

Question: “I’m going to name some different kinds of things, and for each one, would you
tell me how often you do it as a family unit—that is, parents and some or all of the
children? . . . [How often do you] do things together for fun and recreation (go to movies,
events, picnics, etc.)?”

Note: See notes to figure 3.6.
with their spouses in 2000 than in 1975, and they argue that this was a major way, along with letting housework slide, that parents in 2000 were able to spend more time with their children while working longer hours.31

In sum, the fragments of evidence we have point to nuclear families doing less together as a family group, especially at-home activities (eating meals, entertaining, watching television, talking), but doing out-of-the-home activities as a group (eating out, visiting, doing “fun things”) as often as in the past, or perhaps more often (with the exception of attending religious services). Given the time-budget evidence, it appears that family schedules were bending to mothers’ work and children’s extracurricular activities.

**Contact with Kin**

This section presents the evidence on how often Americans reported getting together with relatives outside of the nuclear family. In 1986 and 2002, the GSS asked roughly comparable specific questions: “How
Sources: For full source information see chapter 3, note 18.
Question: “I’m going to name some different kinds of things, and for each one, would you tell me how often you do it as a family unit—that is, parents and some or all of the children? . . . [How often do you] watch TV together?”
Note: See notes to figure 3.6.

Sources: For full source information see chapter 3, note 18.
Question: “I’m going to name some different kinds of things, and for each one, would you tell me how often you do it as a family unit—that is, parents and some or all of the children? . . . [How often do you] sit and talk together?”
Note: See notes to figure 3.6.
In 1994 the GSS asked about mothers only, and in a slightly different format. Figure 3.12 shows the percentage of respondents in 1986 and 2002 who said that they saw their parents at least once a week (including parents who lived with the respondents or slicing the response categories in other ways makes little change in the results). One noteworthy methodological difference between the surveys is that in 1986 interviewers directly posed the question to respondents, but in 2002 the question was part of a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) that respondents filled out privately. We might speculate that in 1986 respondents would have been more embarrassed about directly telling interviewers that they

Figure 3.12 Respondents Who See Parents Weekly or More Often, by Which Parent—GSS

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS items “mavisit,” “mavisit1,” “pavisit,” “pavisit1.”

Questions: Mothers, 1986 and 1994, for respondents who report that their mothers are alive: “How often do you see or visit your mother?” Mothers, 2002, after questions about other relatives: “And what about your mother? How often do you see or visit her?” (Mother not being alive is one answer.) Father questions were similar in 1986 and 2002, but the 1994 survey did not ask about fathers.

Notes: (1) Respondents who lived with the parent are excluded. (2) For the 1986 to 2002 comparisons, note that the sequence of relatives asked about differs, with parents coming toward the end in 2002. (3) In 1986 the questions were preceded by a question asking if the parent was alive, but not in 2002. (4) The 1986 questions were asked face-to-face, while the 1994 and 2002 questions were on self-administered questionnaires (SAQs). (5) The 1994 survey asked only the mother question.
rarely saw their mothers. Survey researchers typically assume that respondents are more forthcoming on sensitive topics in an SAQ.\textsuperscript{33} I have no direct evidence, however, of that happening in this case.\textsuperscript{34} Respondents reported visiting with their parents about as frequently in both years. The five-point decline in weekly visits with fathers—which is not statistically significant—is largely accounted for by the greater proportion of respondents in 2002 had not lived with their fathers when they were sixteen.\textsuperscript{35}

The GSS has for most of four decades asked a set of vaguer questions about getting together with kin, asking respondents how often they spent a “social evening” with “relatives,” “your parents,” or “a brother or sister.” The GSS asked about parents and siblings only between 1978 and 1994. (Interspersed in this set of questions were probes about evenings with nonkin, to which I turn in chapter 4.) Respondents who said that they spent many social evenings with relatives tended to also say that they saw their mothers and fathers often—a reassuring consistency.\textsuperscript{36} Figure 3.13 displays the trends (actually, the nontrends): thirty-four...
years passed, and Americans were consistent in how often they (said that they) saw their relatives. A 1964 survey asking the same question about relatives allows us to add an observation ten years before the first point displayed in figure 3.13: 53 percent of respondents in 1964 said that they saw their relatives for a social evening several times a month or more—a bit lower than the average for the 2000s.

These questions are about face-to-face contact. What about contact through other means? In 1986 the GSS followed up the questions about visiting mothers and fathers (figure 3.12) with questions about other contact: “How often do you have any other contact with your mother (father) besides visiting, either by telephone or letter?” In 2002 the GSS expanded the question to: “. . . either by telephone, letter, fax, or email?” The percentages of respondents who had weekly or more frequent contact are shown in figure 3.14. Respondents’ reports of contacting their mothers increased a bit—most notably for those who lived over an hour away from their mother—but essentially, little changed. GSS respondents were just about as likely to say either that they saw
Figures 4.1 through 4.4 present the results for survey questions about numbers of close friends that were replicated (or approximately replicated) over at least a five-year span. The best series we have uses a simple question asked by Gallup from 1976 through 2003, displayed in figure 4.1: “Not counting your relatives, about how many close friends would you say you have?” I have simplified the results into three categories: six or more close friends; zero to two close friends; and three to five close friends, which I do not show for ease of reading. Even here, however, a complexity arises: the 1976 survey included fifteen- to seventeen-year-olds, who, other data suggest, tend to report many friends.

Note, first, that none of these four figures separately displays the zero category—the percentage of respondents who claimed no close friends. The reason is that the percentage who reported being friendless is tiny—almost always 5 percent or less—and displays no “action” (no real trend) in any of the four data sets.

Sources: Author’s compilation based on data from iPoll, Gallup Brain.
Question: “Not counting your relatives, about how many close friends would you say you have?”
Notes: (1) Respondents could nominate as many friends as they wished. The iPoll summaries provided collapsed categories. (2) The 1976 poll was conducted by Gallup for the Kettering Foundation with a sample age of fifteen and older. (3) We can expect, from other data, that the youngest respondents gave the highest numbers. (4) This poll seems unavailable for further analysis.
Figure 4.2  Respondents Claiming Fewer Than Three or More Than Six “Close Friends”—GSS

Sources: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS items “frinum,” “friends,” “num-frend,” “cowrkfnd,” “niefrd,” “othfrd.” Analyzed online via SDA, University of California–Berkeley, weight = “compwt.”

Questions: (A) 1986, “frinum”: “Thinking now of close friends—not your husband or wife or partner or family members, but people you feel fairly close to—how many close friends would you say you have?” (B) 1998, “friends” and “numfrend”: “Do you have any good friends that you feel close to?”; [if yes:] “About how many good friends do you have?” (C) The 2002 measure was added up from a three-question sequence: (1) “cowrkfnd”: “Now we would like to ask you about people you know, other than your family and relatives. The first question is about people at your workplace. Thinking about people at your workplace, how many of them are close friends of yours?” (recoded to zero for those not working) (2) “niefrd”: “Thinking now of people who live near you, in your neighborhood or district, how many of these people are close friends of yours?” (3) “othfrd”: “How many other close friends do you have—apart from those at work, in your neighborhood, or family members? Think, for instance, of friends at clubs, church, or the like.”

Two other studies are relevant to this point. In comparing a 2000 survey to a 1980 survey of married Americans under the age of fifty-five, Paul Amato and his colleagues found an identical 13 percent reporting no “close friends” outside their families.17 Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, analyzing matching surveys done in 2002 and 2007, found that 5 percent in each year reported no “friends outside of your household . . . that you see or speak to at least once a week.”18 In sum, the data in figures 4.1 to 4.4 and in published work suggest that there was no change in the
Figure 4.3  Respondents Naming Three to Five or Fewer Than Two “Good Friends” They Are “Close To”—GSS

Sources: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS items “frndcon1” to “frndcon5.” Analyzed online via SDA, University of California–Berkeley, weight = “compwt.” Question: “Many people have some good friends they feel close to. Who are your good friends (other than your spouse)?”

Note: No explicit variable for the number of friends that respondents named in 1988 and 1998 appears in the GSS archives, because the question displayed in the figure was used only as a lead-in to questions about whether the named friends were members of the respondents’ congregations. So, I had to reconstruct the number as follows: Interviewers wrote down the names respondents gave—up to 3 names in 1988 and up to 5 in 1998—and then asked, for each one, “Is [NAME] a member of your congregation?” The variable “frndcon1” codes whether the first named was or was not in the respondent’s congregation, whether the respondent did not know the answer, or whether the respondent was not a member of the congregation. The missing-data code “IAP” (inappropriate) presumably indicates that the respondent had not given any names in answer to the lead-in question, “Who are your good friends?” The percentage coded “IAP” mounts from the first to the last name, from variable “frndcon1” to variable “frndcon5.” (Another missing data code, NA, not applicable, does not seem a plausible indicator that the respondent gave no name because the number of respondents coded NA remained constant across the frndcon1–5 measures. NA may really indicate a refusal to address the question at all.) I interpret the percentage of respondents (excluding the NA respondents from the base N) who were coded IAP on “frndcon1” as those who said, explicitly or implicitly, that they had no close friends. Those who had a valid code on “frndcon1” but were IAP on “frndcon2” are assumed to have named only one close friend, and so forth through the third name in 1988 and the fifth name in 1998. This yields an estimate of respondents’ close friends from zero through three or more in 1988 and from zero to five or more in 1998. I consulted Tom Smith of NORC on these questions (personal communication, November 27, 2009).
percentage of Americans who reported having no “close friends.” Moreover, that percentage remained, despite variations in questions and methods, typically in the single digits.\textsuperscript{19}

Turning away from the issue of total friendlessness to the question of many versus few friends, we see no consistent trend on either the high side or the low side; only figure 4.3 shows a change, a drop in the percentage who reported three or more close friends. Other fluctuations in the figures tell no consistent story.\textsuperscript{20} In Amato and his colleagues’ comparison of married respondents under the age of fifty-five in 1980 and 2000, the number of “close friends” aside from kin declined from a mean estimate of 6.0 to 5.4.\textsuperscript{21} In the Wang and Wellman study, the mean number of friends that respondents estimated having went up, from about nine in 2002 to about eleven in 2004, but the median did not.\textsuperscript{22} The findings are clearly mixed and do not allow us to infer any time trend.

A couple of studies point to cohort effects on American friendships. That is, rather than compare across time periods, we can compare across
social scientists have exhaustively analyzed the time trends in these two items. Robert Putnam is skeptical about the “friends who live outside the neighborhood” item, saying that it is the only series of friendship questions in several data sets that does not trend downward.27 I make such comparisons between data sets later, but for now I note only that respondents who reported spending more social evenings with friends also tended to list more nonkin in answer to the “important matters” question28 and to estimate larger circles of friends in answer to other questions.29 As measures of social life go, the “social evening with friends outside the neighborhood” item is a reasonable indicator.

Figure 4.6 shows a startlingly flat trend line for the percentage who reported spending several social evenings a month with friends outside the neighborhood: 41 percent over the 1970s and 44 percent over the 2000s. (Nor is there any trend at the extremes among those who said that they never spent such an evening or for those who claimed to have several such evenings a week.30) We can also add an earlier point to this series: when the question was asked in a 1964 survey, 35 percent said
that they spent a social evening with friends at least several times a month—a figure lower than in any subsequent year.31

In contrast, the bottom line in figure 4.6 shows a steady decline in the percentage of GSS respondents who said that they spent at least several social evenings a month with “someone who lives in your neighborhood”: from about 40 percent in the 1970s to about 32 percent in the 2000s. The percentage of GSS respondents who said that they never spent a social evening with neighbors rose a bit, from 24 percent in the 1970s to 29 percent in the 2000s. The 1964 point—at 41 percent, higher than in any subsequent year—confirms that the slow decline was long-lasting.32

(Another item in this GSS series, a question about how often respondents went to a bar or tavern, is not particularly associated with having social ties. Nonetheless, Putnam and others have used it as a marker of social life. It shows trivial change, from 18 percent reporting going to a bar several times a month in the 1970s to 15 percent doing so in the 2000s.33)
Figure 4.7 reports respondents’ answers to a sociability question asked by other survey organizations, one that lumps kin and nonkin together: “About how often do you socialize with close friends, relatives, or neighbors?” From 1983 to 1995, respondents were about as likely—around 50 percent of them—to say that they did so at least monthly.

Similarly, there was no substantive change from 1994 to 2000 in the percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to a Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) question on whether they had visited “with family or friends” the day before the interview; “yes” answers bounced around 66 percent, plus or minus seven points (not shown here). These two series together suggest that there was no net change in socializing or visiting with “friends or family” from 1983 to 2000.


Question: “About how often do you socialize with close friends, relatives, or neighbors?” Response categories: more than twice a week, twice a week, once a week, two to three times a month, once a month, less than once a month, and never.

Notes: (1) Between 1991 and 1992, the “house” changed from Harris to PSRA. (2) In 1995, PSRA experimented with alternative wording—“About how often do you visit or spend time with close friends, relatives, or neighbors?” The shift from “socialize” to “visit or spend time” raised the percentage of “twice-weekly or more” answers from 53 to 75 percent. The 1995 point in the figure draws from the poll with the original wording (“socialize”).
Figure 4.8 shows the results of two questions asked by the DDB Needham organization; for technical reasons I discussed earlier (see figure 3.1 note), answers to each are represented by a pair of overlapping lines. The top pair display the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement “I spend a lot of time visiting friends.” There is effectively no trend. In sharp contrast, the proportion of DDB respondents who said that they “entertained people” in their home at least twelve times in the past year dropped from about two in five to fewer than one in five at the start of the new century. In a related DDB question, the proportion who reported “often”—or even “ever”—giving or attending a “dinner party” in the previous year dropped at least as precipitously. These results suggest that Americans got together with friends in someone’s home less often, but overall got together with friends just as often.

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from DDB Needham items “enthome,” “visfrd.”

Questions: (1) “enthome”: Respondents were asked how often they had done various activities in the previous twelve months, including “entertained people in my home,” with seven response categories ranging from none, one to four times, up to fifty-two or more times. (2) “visfrd”: “I spend a lot of time visiting friends,” with six response categories ranging from definitely disagree to definitely agree.

Note: See notes to figure 3.1 for an explanation of the dual lines and discussion of the unusual nature of the sample.
Finally, figure 4.9 presents two Roper questions that the organization asked in sequence: “Which of these things, if any, have you done during the past week when you went out for entertainment? (1) Went to the home of friends for dinner, to play cards, to visit, etc. (2) Went to a restaurant for dinner.” “Yes” answers to the first question show a clear decline of about ten points from 1982 to 1993, consistent with the DDB trend of less entertaining in the home.38 I include the second question in the display (and there is no trend), even though that question does not explicitly refer to friends, because it seems to echo an emerging pattern: decline after the 1970s in how often people saw friends in a home setting, but no decline in overall reports of seeing friends. We can assume that a good deal of dining out is done with friends (or family). We can also assume that visits or even simple conversations with neighbors—as in figure 4.6—take place in the home or near the home. Thus, a tentative conclusion might be that meeting friends in home settings declined, but that total meetings did not.39

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from Roper polls collected by Brady et al. (2000).

Questions: Respondents were asked how often they had gone out for entertainment in the past week. If respondents gave any number more than “once,” they were then asked: “Which of these things, if any, have you done during the past week when you went out for entertainment? (1) went to the home of friends for dinner, to play cards, to visit, etc. (2) went to a restaurant for dinner.”
Figure 4.12 covers an earlier part of the period, 1975 through 1992, and displays responses to Roper’s question, “Thinking of the mail you send out, aside from bills and things like that, about how many personal letters have you written to friends or relatives in the past month?” followed by “And how many phone calls to friends or relatives over one hundred miles away have you made in the past month?” While reported rates of letter-writing remained essentially flat—about 30 percent had written three or more times—reported long-distance calls to friends or relatives increased substantially after 1984 (coinciding with a steep drop in the cost of long-distance calling), from under 40 percent saying that they made three such calls a month to nearly 60 percent doing so. To these two parallel Roper questions, I added a third. Interviewers asked respondents to look at a list of activities and to call off the ones they had “done in the last week, either at home or at work,” including “made a long-distance phone call (more than one hundred miles) at home or work.” The trend for call-
Counting People: Friends and Others

Figure 4.11 Respondents Who Called a Friend or Relative the Day Before—PSRA


Notes: (1) In 2001 respondents to the 2000 survey were reinterviewed; 61 percent said “yes,” but that data point is not included in the figure. (2) Notes to the 1998 survey specifically say that respondents interviewed on Sunday were asked about Friday. It is not clear if similar instructions were given in other years. (3) In 1997, PSRA conducted two waves, one being a special, “rigorous” survey that raised response rates from 42 to 71 percent. The result for the “standard” survey is shown in the figure; the result for the “rigorous” survey was one point higher.

The calling question with the steeper trend specifically refers to relatives and friends, but it is also less exact and perhaps more prone to exaggeration.

One more series on calling can be added to our canvass (not shown). The 1990 to 1992 and 2001 to 2003 National Comorbidity Studies mentioned earlier asked, “How often do you talk on the phone or get together with friends?” In both the earlier period and the later one, 56 percent of the eighteen- to fifty-four-year-old sample said “at least a few times a week” or “almost every day.”

These questions about contact are vague; people could be calling to have conversations about important matters or just to say hello. The
American National Election Survey allows us to focus on one particular kind of conversation with friends and relatives—those specifically about politics. Admittedly, this is a limited topic for personal relationships. And whether people have such conversations is influenced by the political climate—say, by whether it is the year of a presidential election. Nonetheless, the ANES measures have the advantage of covering many years and also of providing some substance to “talk.” (When respondents are asked open-ended questions about what they talk about, the topics that come to their minds vary and can be idiosyncratic.47) The top line in figure 4.13 shows the percentage of respondents who said “yes” to “Do you ever discuss politics with your family or friends?” The second line from the top displays the percentage—among those who said that, yes, they did discuss politics—of those who then said that they had done so on at least three days in the previous week. Both lines show moderate upward trends in discussing politics, even setting aside the
anomaly of the 2000 election. (This question was asked in the post-election part of the ANES, and we can presume that the 2000 surge in talking had to do with interest in the Bush-Gore deadlock after election day. A remarkable 40 percent reported discussing politics every day of the week during that month, about triple the rates of the prior and following presidential elections.) And the upward trends are robust after controlling for other attributes—including the respondents’ interest in politics.48

The lowest, sawtooth line tracks respondents’ affirmative answers to the question of whether they tried to talk others into voting their way. That up-and-down pattern reflects differences between presidential and off-year elections. (The ANES asked this question starting in 1952; the

Figure 4.13  Respondents Who Discussed Politics—ANES and Roper

![Figure 4.13](image-url)
Figure 5.1 Respondents with Fewer than Two Personal Helpers and Those with Relatives As Helpers If Sick—GSS

![Graph showing percentage of respondents with fewer than two personal helpers or both helpers being relatives, with trends from 1970 to 2010 for married and unmarried respondents.]

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS items “sick1,” “sick2,” “sick1a,” “sick2a.”

Questions: 1986: “Suppose you had the flu and you had to stay in bed for a few days and needed help around the home, with shopping and such. (a) Who would you turn to first for help? (b) Who would you turn to second?” 2002: “Now we would like to ask you how you would get help in situations that anyone could find herself or himself in. First, suppose you had the flu and had to stay in bed for a few days and needed help around the house, with shopping and so on. (a) Who would you turn to first for help? (b) Who would you turn to second?” The 1986 response categories were “spouse, mother, father, daughter, son, sister, brother, other relative, closest friend, other friend, neighbor, coworker, clergy, family doctor, professional counselor, no one” (and “no answer”). The 2002 response categories were “husband-wife-partner, mother, father, daughter, son, sister, brother, other blood relative, other in-law relative, close friend, neighbor, someone you work with, priest or member of the clergy, family doctor, a psychologist or other professional counselor, a self-help group, someone else, no one” (and “don’t know” and “no answer”).

Notes: (1) I recoded the roughly three dozen “no answers” that had been coded missing data to “no help,” assuming that respondents who did not answer included many who would have had answered that they lacked help if pressed. That decision had negligible effect on the trend. (2) In both years, the questions appeared on a self-administered questionnaire. (3) Note that the 2002 version included a longer list of relatives and also replaced “spouse” as an option with “husband-wife-partner.” Note also that in 2002, but not in 1986, some respondents named “husband-wife-partner” twice, which I took to mean a current spouse and an ex-spouse. (4) The contexts of the questions differed. The 1986 help questions—if sick, if needed money, if “down”—were part of a longer set of such questions; in 2002 they stood alone. In 2002 the three help topics followed a long battery of questions asking about how often respondents got together with and contacted various relatives and friends, and also questions about organizational memberships.
We have two relatively similar points in time from the National Comorbidity Studies cited earlier—the large-scale national health survey conducted from 1990 to 1992 and then replicated in 2001 to 2003. One set of questions dealt specifically with the support—and demands—that respondents reported receiving from their spouses. Table 5.1 displays the results specifically of the support items. (Only eighteen- to fifty-four-year-olds are covered because the first wave did not interview people over fifty-four.)

The table shows, in the statistics for answers to the first four questions, either no changes or changes in a positive direction over the decade. The last row shows results from an additional question: Did respondents regularly turn to their spouse with their worries? Again, no change.  

The same pair of surveys also contains a battery of questions about support and emotional engagement with friends and relatives, displayed in table 5.2. One item presents a notable decline in perceived supportiveness: fewer respondents in 2001 to 2003 said that they could rely on their
percentage of Americans who had discussed important matters with no one—that is, who lacked confidants. Whatever the outcome of the debate over the 2004 GSS, it is clear that the 23 percent is anomalous. No other contemporary data point measuring confidants is anywhere close to that level, and no other data set shows a trend anything like it.

Just as there are few over-time data sets that allow us to answer the question of whether Americans’ social support has changed (or reports of their social support), there is little published research on time trends. Replications in 1976 and 1996 of a 1957 national mental health survey provided a nearly half-century comparison of Americans’ answers to the question of whether they had ever felt that they were going to have a nervous breakdown and, if so, how they had dealt with it. The percentage who reported turning to friends and family rose from 6 percent in

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS item “numgiven.”
Question: “From time to time, most people discuss important matters with other people. Looking back over the last six months, who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you?” Interviewers record up to five names (three in 1987).
Notes: (1) As discussed in text, the 2004 points are in error, exaggerating isolation; how much is under dispute. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears (2006, 2009) agree that the zero estimate of 23 percent is too high, but contend that the population value is higher than my estimate (Fischer 2009) of about 10 percent. (2) The figure accounts for forty-one originally miscoded cases in 2004. (3) In 1985 and 2004, interviewers were supposed to encourage respondents to provide at least five names, and in 1987 at least three.
brought back to the rise in dating, cohabitation, and romantic turnovers.
(Perhaps the trouble respondents had was with different friends, not the
departed boyfriend or girlfriend, but the friendships were stressed by the
romantic breakup.) The emerging pattern in the “serious trouble”
questions is that there was overall no increase in partner or friendship
problems, but there were more breakups of romantic, nonmarital ties.

Finally, the GSS also asked about “serious trouble” with a child (see fig-
ure 5.6). On the whole, the 1991 versus 2004 difference is not statistically
significant, but there was again one subgroup for whom 2004 reports
of trouble were slightly more common than they had been among 1991
reports—parents who had no children under age twenty-five living with
them. In 2004, 5 percent of these respondents complained about serious
trouble with a child—probably about an adult child living elsewhere—
compared to 2 percent in 1991. We know nothing else about these ties,
so I can only speculate that in 2004 parents experienced more difficulty

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS items “famper1” through
“famper3.”
Questions: “What about family and personal relationships? During the last year, did you . . .
(1) Have serious trouble with your husband/wife/partner; (2) Separate from your
husband/wife/partner; (3) Break up with a steady boyfriend/girlfriend or fiancé(e)?”
Notes: (1) The variable in figure 5.4 measures whether respondents reported a breakup in
answer to questions “famper2” or “famper3,” whether or not they reported trouble in
“famper1.” (2) In 2004 respondents were also asked specifically whether they had gotten
a divorce (“famper6”), but that had not been asked in 1991. In 2004, 60 percent of those
who reported a breakup in “famper6” had also reported one in “famper2” or “famper3.”
with their independently living children—perhaps because of that child’s romantic relationships.\(^{32}\)

I have been unable to find published studies that report trends in Americans’ experiences of social demands or tribulations.

A closing note on the topic of tribulations: I have treated them here as the “loss” side of the social ledger. But another view of this topic is that the key distinction we need to draw is not between positive and negative relationships, but between being socially engaged or not. Socially isolated people lack both support and demands from others; socially integrated people have plenty of both. In any event, little seems to have changed in this regard over the years covered here.

**Conclusions**

Without dwelling (yet again!) on the thinness of the data, they suggest that:

- From 1970 to 2010, few American adults—well under one in ten is a rough estimate—reported a lack of personal material or psychological support.\(^{33}\)
• Americans later in this period were about as likely as Americans earlier in the period to report having social support. If there is a trend, it was probably toward people reporting or expecting more emotional help.

• Overall, Americans became no more likely—and in some situations less likely—to say that they suffered tribulations from their spouses, relatives, or friends.

• Americans’ reports of problems and breakups with romantic partners (but not spouses) increased and may have disrupted other relationships.
Table 5.1  Responses to Spouse Support Questions—National Comorbidity Studies, Eighteen- to Fifty-Four-Year-Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1990 to 1992</th>
<th>2001 to 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Respondents answering “a lot” to the question:\n\n. . . does your (husband/wife/partner) really care about you?”</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . does (he/she) understand the way you feel about things?”</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . can you rely on (him/her) for help if you have a serious problem?”</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . can you open up to (him/her) if you need to talk about your worries?”</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Respondents answering “always” or “most of the time” to the question: “When you have a problem or worry, how often do you let your (husband/wife/partner) know about it?”</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: The weights are P2WTv3 for 1990 to 1992 and NCSRWTLG for 2001 to 2003, although different weights seem to make little difference. The sample is restricted to eighteen- to fifty-four-year-olds to make the two surveys comparable. The (weighted) sample sizes for these questions are about 3,500 for wave 1 and about 1,000 for wave 2 (although the numbers of actual cases is over 5,000). It appears that the smaller number of respondents in the second survey was a result of subselection—apparently at random—for a “couples sample” (ICPSR, personal correspondence, December 2009 to January 2010). The variables that match up are, from the 1990 to 1992 study, “v201,” “v202,” “v204,” “v205,” “v207,” “v210,” “v211,” and “v212,” and correspondingly from the 2001 to 2003 study, “MR41_1A” through “MR41_1D” and “MR41_2A” through “MR41_2D.” (Several questions in this realm were asked only in the first survey.)

\(a\) The response categories were: “a lot,” “some,” “a little,” and “not at all.”

\(b\) The response categories were: “always,” “most of the time,” “sometimes,” “rarely,” and “never.”

relatives “a lot”; the percentage who said that they could rely on them only a little or “not at all” rose from 11 percent a decade earlier to 18 percent. However, the wording of this question changed, probably critically: the 1990 to 1992 version asked about relatives; the 2001 to 2003 version asked about relatives “who do not live with you.” Otherwise, the results show little change in how much support respondents expected.

To these data we can add some additional survey results that shed light on the emotional support question. First, the Louis Harris organization twice asked the same question: “Now, I’d like to read you some more
statements. Please say for each one if it expresses the way you yourself feel, or not . . . ‘I have someone I can share my personal problems with when I need to.’” In both 1978 and 1990, 7 percent of respondents said that they did not have such a confidant or that they were “not sure.”

Second, in 1950, twenty years before the period we are focused on, Gallup asked respondents, “When you have personal problems, do you like to discuss them with anyone to help clear them up, or not?” At that time, 37 percent—over one-third—said “no” or “don’t know.” About forty years later, Gallup asked a few related questions, although none of them

### Table 5.2 Responses to Relatives and Friends Support Questions—National Comorbidity Studies, Eighteen- to Fifty-Four-Year-Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990 to 1992</th>
<th>2001 to 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support from relatives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Respondents answering “a lot” to the question: “(Not counting your husband/wife/partner), how much . . .
  . . . can you rely on [1990 to 1992: ‘your relatives’; 2001 to 2003: ‘relatives who do not live with you’] for help if you have a serious problem?” | 74% | 62% |
| . . . can you open up to [1990 to 1992: ‘them’; 2001 to 2003: ‘relatives who do not live with you’] if you need to talk about your worries?” | 45 | 46 |
| **Support from friends** |              |              |
| Respondents answering “a lot” to the question: “How much . . .
  . . . can you rely on [1990 to 1992: ‘them’; 2001 to 2003: ‘your friends’] if you have a serious problem?” | 51 | 48 |
| . . . can you open up to [1990 to 1992: ‘them’; 2001 to 2003: ‘your friends’] if you need to talk about your worries?” | 47 | 49 |


*Notes:* For details see notes to table 5.1, with the variation that the weighted n for 1990 to 1992 is about 5,300 and for 2001 to 2003 about 5,700. The variables used from the 2001 to 2003 survey are numbers “SN2” through “SN10”; they correspond to these variables in the 1990 to 1992 survey: “v217,” “v218,” “v220,” “v222,” “v230,” “v231,” “v233,” “v235.” The response categories were: “a lot,” “some,” “a little,” and “not at all.”
As cohabitation becomes increasingly accepted, cohabitations may include a greater proportion of couples with less serious commitments. . . leading to . . . higher dissolution rates.”29—and probably greater turnover in dating relationships as well. Recall that the delay of marriage means that today’s “emerging adults” have more time in the dating period of their lives.

The GSS also asked respondents whether they had had “serious trouble with a close friend” in the past year. Overall, 5 percent said “yes” in 1991 and 6 percent said “yes” in 2004—no change. However, close inspection shows one particular subgroup for which time made a difference: those who had also said “yes” to the previous question asking whether they had broken up “with a steady boyfriend/girlfriend or fiancé(e)”—45 respondents in 1991 and 109 respondents in 2004 (see figure 5.5). The 2004 respondents who had reported a breakup in part 2 of the GSS question were much more likely than the 1991 respondents who had reported a breakup to also report trouble with “a close friend” in part 4 of the question.30 If we assume that for many in this particular group the “close friend” they said they had trouble with was the same “boyfriend/girlfriend or fiancé(e)” they had broken up with, then we are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.3</th>
<th>Responses to Demands and Stress Questions—National Comorbidity Studies, Eighteen- to Fifty-Four-Year-Olds</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990 to 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Respondents answering “often” or “sometimes” to the question: “Does your (husband/wife/partner) . . .
  . . . make too many demands on you?” | 45% | 29% |
| . . . criticize you?” | 28 | 22 |
| . . . let you down when you are counting on (him/her)?” | 17 | 15 |
| . . . get on your nerves?” | 47 | 46 |
| Friends   |                                                         |               |
| Respondents answering “rarely” or “never” to the question: “How often . . .
  . . . do your friends make too many demands on you?” | 25 | 14 |


aThe response categories were: “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely,” and “never.”

As cohabitation becomes increasingly accepted, cohabitations may include a greater proportion of couples with less serious commitments . . . leading to . . . higher dissolution rates”29—and probably greater turnover in dating relationships as well. Recall that the delay of marriage means that today’s “emerging adults” have more time in the dating period of their lives.

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Feelings About Relatives

Americans continued to affirm their commitment to family. The WVS asked, from 1990 through 2006, how important various “aspects” of life—including family, friends, and work—were to respondents: “very important,” “rather important,” “not very important,” or “not at all important.” Table 6.1 shows the results. With little variation, over 92 percent of Americans rated family as very important. (I will discuss friends later.) We are with this measure at a “ceiling effect,” unable to detect any mean-
Figure 6.2 Respondents Who Said They Were Lonely in the Last Month or That Loneliness Was a Problem—Varied Sources

Sources: Author’s compilation. (1) Lonely in last month: Harris via iPoll, USHARRIS.102885.R09, USHARRIS.102500.R1J, USHARRIS.121802.R1M; (2) loneliness a problem: varied, all via iPoll, Chilton Research Services for ABC News/Washington Post, USABCWASH1982-763250; 1994: FGI Research, for AARP, USFGI.94AGE.RC06C; 1999: Harris Interactive, for National Council of the Aging, USHARRIS.00AGING.R420C; 2004: FGI Research, for AARP, USAARP.06AGING.RH06C; (3) lonely in past few weeks: WVS online, question A013.

Questions: (1) Harris: “(Now I’d like to read you a list of things that may have affected you in the last month. For each, please tell me if it’s affected you in the last month, or not) . . . being lonely.” (2) Varied: 1982: “(I’m going to read you some health-related problems that people sometimes have. For each, will you please tell me how much of a problem it is for you personally: a very serious problem, a serious problem, a minor problem, or no problem at all.) . . . loneliness.” 1994: “(I’m going to read you some problems that other people have mentioned to us. For each, would you tell me if it is a serious problem, somewhat of a problem, or not a problem for you personally?) How much of a problem is . . . loneliness . . . for you personally?” 1999: “(I’m going to read you some problems that other people have mentioned to us. . . . Would you tell me whether it is a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a problem at all for you personally?) . . . loneliness.” 2004: “(Now I’m going to read you some problems that other people have mentioned to us. For each, would you tell me if it is a serious problem, somewhat of a problem, or not a problem for you personally?) How much of a problem is . . . loneliness?” (3) WVS: “We are interested in the way people are feeling these days. During the past few weeks, did you ever feel . . . very lonely or remote from other people?”

Notes: (1) The Harris “lonely” question is embedded in a long list of conditions, such as frequent noise, hassles from a boss, and not enough money. (2) WVS: In the online database, the 1990 results were coded 18.5 percent “yes” and 81.5 percent “system missing.” I assumed that this was an error and treated the 81.5 percent as “no.”
ingful upward movement. Such consistency may seem trivial and clichéd, but it contrasts with Americans’ ratings of work: In 1990, 62 percent said that work was very important, but by 2006 only 33 percent did. Americans’ emotional attachment to family stayed high and drew increasingly ahead of that major competitor, work.5

From 1973 through 1994, the GSS asked respondents how much satisfaction they got from various “areas of life.” Figure 6.3 shows the results for family: with about 43 percent, plus or minus 6 percent, saying that

Table 6.1 Respondents Who Rate Aspects of Life As Very Important—WVS

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation.

Figure 6.3 Respondents Who Get a Very Great Deal of Satisfaction from Family Life—GSS

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS item “satfam.”

Question: “For each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area . . . your family life.” Answers range from 1 (very great deal) to 7 (none).
answers into categories, and Gallup’s categories shifted over the years, at least until recently. Nonetheless, gross trends can be seen in figure 6.6, which displays those “favorite ways” of greatest interest to us: watching television, being home with the family, and one of the answers that entailed seeing friends or relatives. (Other noteworthy response categories are: reading—averaging 13 percent in the 1960s surveys and 10 percent in the two surveys of the 2000s; “resting” or “relaxing”—11 percent and 8 percent, respectively; and going out to dinner, movies, or theater—8 percent and 10 percent.) Because the results are so erratic, I fit “smoothers” for each of the three series in figure 6.6 to highlight the general trends.

The numbers indicate that over the years fewer respondents said that watching television or videos was their favorite way to spend an evening,
and more respondents said that they preferred being home with their families. Fewer offered visiting or entertaining friends or relatives, which would be consistent with the decline in entertaining we saw in previous chapters.

However, these data do not necessarily tell us how Americans actually spent their evenings; for example, actual television watching did not decline. Similarly, chapter 3 presented mixed evidence about whether Americans in fact spent more time in the evenings with their families. Survey respondents reported fewer events with their children, for example, and even less time spent watching television together, although the time-budget studies suggest that parents spent somewhat more “quality time” with their children. Overall, the surge in favoring evenings with the family that we see in figure 6.6 does not seem to be matched in the data about behavior. What should we make of that? Perhaps it indicates guilt—respondents in effect saying, “I can’t, but I should spend more time with my family”; or perhaps it reflects an increasingly strong social

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**Figure 6.5** Respondents Who Say It Is a Good Idea for Older People to Live with Grown Children, by Marital History—GSS

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS item “aged.”
Question: “As you know, many older people share a home with their grown children. Do you think this is generally a good idea or a bad idea?”
Note: About 16 percent of all respondents over all the years volunteered, “it depends,” with the percentage growing over time. I treated that answer as a “no” for purposes of this analysis, thereby understating the affirmative trend.
norm for family time—"I can’t, but I want to spend more time with my family"; or perhaps it means that family time became more rewarding—"I can’t, but I enjoy spending time with my family." Interpretations such as these, at minimum, suggest that Americans’ feelings toward their families strengthened, as did the value they put on family time.

**Feelings About Friends**

Americans value friendships less than family, according to Gallup polls, but about as highly as they value religion, work, and money (and more than they value leisure, hobbies, or community activities). The WVS surveys displayed in table 6.1 suggest that over the course of the 1990s and 2000s Americans’ valuing of friends stayed at roughly the same high level. Although no one seems to have asked Americans if they were satisfied with the number of relatives they had, between 1990 and 2003 Gallup
Figure 6.7 Respondents Who Say They Are Satisfied with Their Friendships—Gallup, Roper, GSS

Sources: Author’s compilation. (1) Gallup: Gallup polls, except for 1993 (PSRA), all via iPoll, USGAL\(\text{LUP.90FRND.R03}, \text{USGAL\(\text{LUP.93JUN1.R47}, \text{USGAL\(\text{LUP.01DC06.R44}, \text{USGAL\(\text{LUP.03DBR11.R22}; (2) Roper: Roper and Roper Starch Worldwide Polls, via iPoll, USROPER.76-7.R37F, USROPER.82-7.R61F, USROPER.87-7.R61F, USROPER.94REC.R01C; (3) GSS: GSS item “satfrnd.”

Questions: (1) Gallup: “Are you satisfied with the closeness of your relationships with your friends, or would you like to have closer relationships?” (2) Roper: “Now here is a list of a number of different things. (Card shown to respondent.) Would you go down that list and for each one tell me how satisfied with it you are or whether it doesn’t apply to you? . . . The friends you’ve made . . . are you completely satisfied with [the friends you’ve made], fairly well satisfied with [the friends you’ve made], not too satisfied with [the friends you’ve made], or not at all satisfied with [the friends you’ve made]?” (3) GSS: “For each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area . . . your friendships.” Answers range from 1 (very great deal) to 7 (none).

Note: PSRA was established in 1989 by a group from Gallup, so we can assume continuity in procedures.

question that addressed respondents’ satisfaction with the closeness of their friendships. The rates of reported satisfaction were very high and hardly budged from 1990 to 2003. Two of the three sources, including the one that scholars trust most, show no change.

Finally, we can look at the GSS question about wanting to spend more time with—in this case—“your friends.” Two lines appear in figure 6.8 telling slightly different stories. The lower line is the percentage of respondents who said that they would like to spend “much more” time with friends. Unlike their responses about wanting more time with their
families (figure 6.4), the percentage saying that they wanted much more
time with friends barely changed. The higher line adds together wanting
“much more” time with friends and wanting “a bit more” time. That per-
centage dropped six points between 1998 and 2006, after rising by three
points from 1989. The simple gloss is that there was little change in
respondents’ expressed desire to spend more time with friends.21 In
both 1989 and 2006, just over half of respondents wanted to spend
more time with both family and friends; the rest, especially in 2006, pre-
ferred to get more family time over getting more friend time.22 The
upshot is that Americans clearly expressed more interest in family
time—either because they valued it more or because they felt time con-
straints more—while their interest in friends probably did not change
(the evidence is mixed).

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS item “timefrnd.”

Question: “Suppose you could change the way you spend your time, spending more on
some things and less on others. Which of these things on the following list would you
like to spend more time on, which would you like to spend less time on, and which
would you like to spend the same amount of time as now? . . . time with your friends.”
Answers range from 1 (spend much more) to 5 (spend much less).

Note: In 1989 and 1998, the question was asked in a SAQ, in a battery that included
questions about time spent on “paid work” and “household work” before asking about
family and friends. In 2006 interviewers asked respondents the same order of questions
while presenting each with a card listing the response categories.
them: question by saying that the following description sounded "not at all" like them rose moderately, from 44 to 51 percent. The bottom line shows that the percentage answering that this sounded "not at all" like them rose moderately, from 44 to 51 percent.

Finally, the line with diamonds displays those who answered the third question by saying that the following description sounded "not at all" like them:

I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that people who I care about do not love me or won’t want to stay with...
declined about ten points. The thick line in the middle of figure 6.10 derives from combining the three questions and then “smoothing” the trend. Trusting answers clearly declined after the early 1980s. Closer analysis of the data reveals that the trend is a result of later-born cohorts giving more suspicious answers than earlier-born cohorts.

To what extent does this trend reflect the average American becoming a more distrustful personality type and to what extent does it reflect Americans’ reactions to changes in the world around them—to crime, social unrest, greater ethno-racial diversity, and so on? The research literature provides no clear answer. But the trend probably has more to

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**Figure 6.10 Respondents Giving More Trusting Answers to Three Trust Questions—GSS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author’s compilation based on data from GSS items labeled “helpful,” “fair,” and “trust.”

**Questions:** (1) “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?” (2) “Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?” (3) “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in life?”

**Notes:** (1) Respondents who volunteered something like “it depends”—about 5 percent—were so coded. (2) The summary “smoother” is the result of this process: Each respondent received a one for each of the three questions he or she answered in the affirmative—helpful, fair, trustworthy—and a zero for any other answer, yielding a scale from zero to three. I plotted the time trend for the percentage of respondents each year who scored two or three—not shown, for readability—and then fit a quadratic equation to that line. The heavy smoother is that quadratic fit.
ingful upward movement. Such consistency may seem trivial and clichéd, but it contrasts with Americans’ ratings of work: In 1990, 62 percent said that work was very important, but by 2006 only 33 percent did. Americans’ emotional attachment to family stayed high and drew increasingly ahead of that major competitor, work.5

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<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation.

Figure 6.3 Respondents Who Get a Very Great Deal of Satisfaction from Family Life—GSS

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from GSS item “satfam.”

Question: “For each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area . . . your family life.” Answers range from 1 (very great deal) to 7 (none).