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Abstract

With a focus on emerging adulthood, the data from this study provides insight into the way people use their time and how their time management skills change as they age. Past research has looked at time usage throughout life, providing evidence that age can impact how a person might use their time for different activities, such as work, school, socializing, and social media, and shown that there are patterns that certain people tend to follow in their daily life. It has also been documented that the way people use their time correlates with their well-being. I was interested in learning more about age and adulthood status and how those variables might relate to time usage, time management, and self-esteem. To gather this data, my classmates and I sent out a survey to 157 college students between the ages of 18 and 29, asking them to respond to questions regarding these topics. After analyzing the data, I found that several of the variables did have significant relationships. The data showed that older emerging adults tended to have better time management skills than younger emerging adults; it also showed that those who were better at time management had higher self-esteem. Adulthood status and time management were positively related as well, meaning that people who felt they were closer to reaching adulthood had better time management skills. Looking further into these relationships would be very beneficial, as time management and self-esteem are two essential parts of life that would make daily living better if improved.

Changes in Time Usage and Time Management During Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a time in life when people can have a variety of different responsibilities and interests. While some people are in college, some are working full-time, and others are unemployed. Typically, emerging adulthood occurs between the ages of 18 and 29, when people are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. This time is a time of change for many people and can lead to a vast difference in what people prioritize and the activities they engage in, either for leisure or out of an obligation. Because people across this age range may find themselves at different points in their lives when compared to their peers, there may be differences evident in the way they spend their time on an average day. Looking into this difference will provide some interesting information about time usage in emerging adulthood. Do people who feel closer to adulthood spend more of their time doing certain activities than their peers who do not feel close to adulthood? Do they show differences in their time management skills? By analyzing the data, we gathered we will be able to look for a pattern which would provide useful knowledge about what it means to be an emerging adult.

One aspect of this is how people of different ages differ in the ways they use the media, as well as how often they use it, and whether there is a connection between media usage and life events. Media can include different aspects of digital entertainment such as social media, the internet, and television. Callejo (2013) found that participants aged 16 to 24 and 25 to 34 spent the most time using the internet and had the highest percentage of internet usage.
users among the different age groups. They also found that media usage for the younger population was only slightly above that of the older population, at 12.8%. The moderate media usage cluster made up the highest percentage of the population, then came the television watching cluster, followed by the cluster of people who used multiple forms of media, and lastly was the cluster of heavy internet usage, who made up the smallest percentage of the population. The moderate media use cluster was mostly made up of people younger than 13 - meaning this age group used media the least. The cluster of heavy internet users contained the highest number of people who were 13 to 24 years old. This points to there being a difference not only in how much time young adults spend using media, but also in the ways that they use media when compared to other age ranges. Although age seems to play a part in how one uses media, a study conducted by Uijtdewilligen et al. (2014), found no statistically significant results that linked the amount of time one spends using media with the number of life events they have experienced throughout their life. There appears to be another connection between the reasons why a person uses media and the time of their life they are in (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020). In this study the researchers found that as people progressed into adulthood, their reasons for using social media changed. This is most likely based on having more control over their lives and the flexibility of their schedules. As people age, they tend to use media more to relieve their boredom than they did when they were younger, and this can lead to a reliance on media that has negative impacts on mental health and well-being.

The association between age, well-being, and other daily activities and stressors is further evident in past research. The study by Uijtdewilligen et al. (2014) also looked into a possible correlation between the number of daily stressors and life events, and physical activity. Daily stressors include workplace conflicts, embarrassment, and low opinions of appearance. They found that the number of daily stressors and life events peaked at age 36 and age 27, respectively. Some of the most common life events reported were changes in the amount of free time, illness, changes at work, increase or decrease in conflicts with their partner, illness in a parent, holidays, and changes in financial status. The results of the study showed that people who had more daily stressors also saw more physical activity. There was also a correlation between positive opinion of financial life events and higher physical activity levels. Before this study, most of the research in this area was done on the connections between specific life events and physical activity, but this study provided new evidence showing that the number of life events might also play a role in those connections. While the previous study showed that physical activity could be helpful in dealing with stress, in a study done by Chen et al. (2012) they were seeking to learn more about the connection between goals and time use, and well-being in general when looked at across different ages. This study showed that although it varies between the age groups, there was a correlation between time usage and well-being, with religion, recreation, and worktime having a positive correlation for both groups. They found that older adults relied less on external forces and more on themselves when creating goals whereas younger adults tended towards the opposite. Seeking to understand how coping mechanisms can help to better well-being, Jenzer et al. (2019) conducted a study that looked at the way these coping mechanisms can change from adolescence to emerging adulthood. They found that the use of avoidant behaviors decreased over time, while strategies involving social support remained the same.

Daily life activities also appear to be affected by age and one’s period of life. Wang & Gimenez-Nadal (2017), focusing on group differences between people in
the age groups of 13-19 and 20-26, found that the teenage group, both male and female, spent more time sleeping, studying, and engaging in leisure activities than the young adult group. They also found that the young adults spent more time working, eating and drinking, and doing personal care than the teenagers did. The difference in their division could be due to multiple factors, including the amount of time they must dedicate to each activity, time spent commuting to various places, obligations outside of the activities they were questioned about in the survey, and cultural differences among the participants. Similarly, younger adults tend to spend more time with schoolwork, sleep, and personal relationships, while older adults tend to spend more time on work, chores, and religious activities (Chen et al., 2012). Although there has been research done on how much time people spend doing certain activities, there has not been much done on the specific patterns and routines of these activities. Focusing on these patterns and the potential cultural differences, Vagni and Cornwell (2018) broke different activities into seven categories, including paid and unpaid work, personal care, leisure, and travel, and were able to group them into clusters based on when a person performed each activity during the day. Using these clusters, they found that there were not many differences based on country, but rather that each country had a certain percentage of each of the different cluster types. Cluster A, defined by a pattern that centers around working a paid shift from 8am to 5pm, was the most common in most countries, including the U.S. People that fall into this category typically begin their day with a period of personal time, followed by an 8.5-hour workday with a lunch break around noon, and then most spend their evenings watching television. This study provides more evidence that consistent daily patterns are important in society and that there are similar patterns that people follow globally. It shows that not only do people tend to spend similar amounts of time doing certain activities, but that there are similarities in the time of day they perform those activities.

Although research has previously been done on the topics of time use and young adulthood, there remains a lot to study about the specific time of emerging adulthood and how it might play into time use. Prior research has made it evident that age can impact how a person might spend their time, showing that young adults tend to spend more time using the internet (Callejo, 2013), and engaging in other activities such as schoolwork, personal relationships (Chen et al., 2012), and performing self-care (Wang & Gimenez-Nadal, 2017) than their younger and older counterparts in each study. Research has shown that certain groups of people follow similar patterns of daily activities, usually centered around the hours that they work (Vagni & Cornwell, 2018). It has also been documented that time usage may correlate negatively with stress when looking at how much physical activity a person participates in (Uijtdewilligen et al., 2014) and correlate positively with poor mental health when the focus is on media usage (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020). When compared across age groups, time usage and coping behaviors can also have an impact on one’s well-being (Jenzer et al., 2019).

All these observations have demonstrated a connection between age and how someone spends their time, however there is still more to be learned when it comes to this correlation in emerging adults. By having participants who are emerging adults fill out a survey detailing how they spend their time on an average day, we will be able to broaden our understanding of the activities that are most common among this age group and be able to identify any differences between the ages in this group. We can also assess their answers and see if there is a correlation between a person participating in certain activities, such as schoolwork, paid work, socializing with friends,
spending time on social media, and how close they feel they are to adulthood. Focusing only on people in emerging adulthood allows us to gain insight into how this age group spends their time and look at the intricacies and variations solely within this age range.

Method

Participants

Because this study is focused on the experience of emerging adults, my classmates and I recruited a sample of current college students between the ages of 18 and 29. This allowed me to get a broad look at the different ages in this range, while also focusing specifically on people in college and looking at trends in that population. To gather this sample of people, I relied on social media posts and direct contact through text messages and Snapchat. The social media sites I used were Instagram and Snapchat. On these sites I created a post that linked to the survey, which requested that 18- to 29-year-old college students respond to the survey to participate in this research study. On Snapchat and using text messages, I reached out to people I knew who fit into this population and asked that they fill out the survey. My classmates also posted the survey in a variety of social media places; therefore, we were able to recruit as many participants as possible for this study.

Of the 157 people who participated: 128 (81.5%) were female, 26 (16.6%) were male, and 3 (1.9%) identified as both or neither. One hundred forty-one (89.8%) were European Americans, 11 (7.0%) were Hispanic or Latinx, 3 (1.3%) were African Americans, and 2 (1.3%) were Asian Americans. Finally, 54 (34.4%) were seniors, 40 (25.5%), were juniors, 32 (20.4%) were sophomores, 21 (13.4%) were freshman, and 8 (5.1%) identified as other class rankings. The participants varied in age from 18 to 29, with an average age of 20.7. Fifty-three (33.8%) answered yes to the question asking if they felt they had reached adulthood, while 9 (5.7%) answered no and 95 (60.5%) responded “in some ways yes, in some ways no.”

Procedure

The posts that I created on the different social media sites all contained the same information. I informed the people who saw the posts that I was conducting a survey as a part of my Research Methods college course at Bridgewater State University. I let them know that the survey is focused on the experiences of emerging adults and asked anyone who is a current college student between the ages of 18 and 29 to please fill out the linked survey if they would like to participate in this study. When sending out messages directly to people I knew, I started the message by informing them that I was taking a Research Methods course and was conducting a study on emerging adulthood as a part of this course. I then provided a link to the survey and asked them to respond if they were interested in participating in this study. Once they clicked on the provided link, they were then taken to the survey and presented with a consent form. This informed the participants that they were taking part in a voluntary research study reviewed by the University Institutional Review Board, and that their information would be kept anonymous. After agreeing that they would like to continue, they were able to fill out their answers to each item of the survey.

Measures

Time spent working a paid job. This variable looked at how many hours per week the participant spends working at a job where they are paid. To measure this I asked the question, “How many hours per week do you work at a paid job?” The response options were listed in the ranges, 0, 1-15, 16-30, 31-45, and more than 45. A higher number indicated that they spend more time working.
**Results**

When I ran tests looking at the relationship between time management, demographic information, self-esteem, and adulthood status, the results showed that there were significant relationships between a few of these items. There was a significantly positive correlation between age and time management, \( r = .261, p = .001 \), demonstrating that as age increased, time management skills also increased. There was also a significantly positive correlation between self-esteem and time management, \( r = .232, p = .004 \), demonstrating that as self-esteem increased, time management skills also increased. Looking at how participants responded when asked if they feel they are an adult and comparing it to their response to the time management question also showed a significant relationship. The results of a one way between groups ANOVA revealed that there was a main effect of adulthood status on time management, \( F(2, 154) = 11.121, p < .001 \). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey’s HSD test revealed that participants who answered yes to adulthood status scored significantly higher on time management \( M = 3.04, SD = .876 \) than participants who answered no \( M = 1.56, SD = .726 \) and participants who answered, “in some ways yes, in some ways no” \( M = 2.59, SD = .962 \). This test also found that participants who answered “in some ways yes, in some ways to no” to adulthood status scored significantly higher on time management \( M = 2.59, SD = .962 \) than those who answered no \( M = 1.56, SD = .726 \). No other comparisons were significant. These results point towards the conclusion that participants who felt closer to adulthood also had better time management skills.

While there were some significant relationships found, there was no significant relationship found when analyzing the relationships between time management and the rest of the demographic information. When comparing time management with gender, female participants scored
higher on time management ($M = 2.72, SD = .972$) than male participants ($M = 2.62, SD = 1.023$), but this difference was not significant, $t (152) = .490, p = .625$.

In another test, the results of a one way between groups ANOVA revealed that there was no main effect of race/ethnicity on time management, $F (3, 153) = 1.142, p = .334$. There was also no main effect of year in college on time management, $F (4, 150) = .607, p = .658$. Based on these results, these demographic data had no significant effect on time management.

Comparing time management with the variables about how the participants spend their time also resulted in no significant relationships, except when comparing time management and time spent doing schoolwork. There was a negative correlation between time management and time spent working a paid job, ($r = -.064, p = .426$), but this relationship was not significant. There was a positive correlation between time management and time spent socializing with friends, ($r = .021, p = .796$), but this relationship was not significant. There was another negative correlation between time management and time spent on social media, ($r = -.123, p = .127$), but this relationship was also not significant. Finally, there was a significantly positive correlation between time management and time spent doing schoolwork, ($r = .194, p = .015$), demonstrating that as time management skills increased, time spent doing schoolwork increased. Although time management did not correlate with most activities, there is significant evidence showing that the more time management skills a person has, the more time they spend doing schoolwork.

Another set of relationships I looked at using statistical tests were the relationships between time spent working a paid job and time spent with friends, on social media, and doing schoolwork. As with the time management and time spent variables, no significant relationships were found, other than the relationship between time spent working a paid job and time spent doing schoolwork. There was a negative correlation between time spent working a paid job and time spent socializing with friends, ($r = -.024, p = .763$), but this relationship was not significant. There was a positive correlation between time spent working a paid job and time spent on social media, ($r = .030, p = .708$), but this relationship was also not significant. However, there was a significantly negative correlation between time spent working a paid job and time spent doing schoolwork, ($r = -.409, p < .001$), demonstrating that as time spent working a paid job increased, time spent doing schoolwork decreased.

The next relationships I ran tests for were the relationships between time spent socializing with friends and time spent on social media and doing schoolwork. Both tests I ran for these relationships showed no significant findings. There was a negative correlation between time spent socializing with friends and time spent on social media, ($r = -.051, p = .529$), but this relationship was not significant. There was another negative correlation between time spent socializing with friends and time spent doing schoolwork, ($r = -.077, p = .336$), but this relationship was also not significant.

Lastly, I ran correlation tests that looked at the relationship between time spent on social media and time spent doing schoolwork. I found that there was a negative correlation between time spent on social media and time spent doing schoolwork, ($r = -.022, p = .781$), but this relationship was not significant.

**Discussion**

By conducting this study, I sought to gain more information on the ways that emerging adults use their time when compared across the age range and look at whether there was a difference in their time management skills. By asking 157 college students between the ages of 18 and 29...
to complete a survey describing their time use habits, I was able to gather data that provided some significant results.

These results showed that age and time management have a positive relationship with each other, meaning that the older a person is the more time management skills they will have. I also found that there was a positive relationship between time management and self-esteem. This means that a person who had higher levels of self-esteem also had higher levels of time management skills. When comparing adulthood status and time management, I found that people who felt that they were closer to adulthood also had higher levels of self-esteem. Those who answered yes scored higher than those who answered, “in some ways yes, in some ways no,” and they scored higher than those who answered no. Time management and time spent doing schoolwork also had a significant relationship in the sense that the more time someone spent doing schoolwork, the better time management skills they had. There was also a significant relationship found between time spent working at a paid job and time spent doing schoolwork. Those that spent more time working a paid job, spent significantly less time doing schoolwork. The significant relationship found between time management and adulthood status supported the original hypotheses, that people who feel closer to adulthood will have better time management skills and that older people will also have better time management.

Contrary to some of my hypotheses, however, the remaining variables I compared showed no significant relationships. The data showed that, other than the correlation between working a paid job and doing schoolwork, none of the time usage variables showed any significant correlations. This means that a person who spent their time participating in one activity did not spend any more or less time participating in another. Time management did not demonstrate any other significant relationships when compared with the time use variables, nor with the demographic variables. Although these correlations were not significant, they provide interesting insights into the way emerging adults use their time and how their time usage may not affect other activities they participate in.

These findings did not support those from the study Callejo (2013) conducted on media usage. That study found that there were differences between the time spent doing daily activities and consuming media, while my findings showed no differences. This could be because of the way each of the studies grouped different activities. Callejo broke media use down into several, more specific activities, such as using the internet and reading, whereas I asked about time use in broader terms. To further understand why these differences may have occurred, future research should include a wider range of activities that are broken down into more detail.

I also did not find any results that supported the conclusions of Wang and Gimenez (2017). Again, they found significant differences between the time people spent doing different daily activities, while I did not find anything significant in this area. Their study looked at time spent on work, studying, homework, and leisure, not only as they compared with one another across ages, but also as they compared with gender. It is possible that this additional comparison caused the discrepancy in our findings. Wang and Gimenez (2017) had also used a sample that was slightly younger than the sample I used. It could be that teenagers and young adults have more variation in their time usage than emerging adults have compared with other emerging adults of different ages. Teenagers typically have a schedule that revolves around high school, whereas adults can vary in their routines, so this might explain why that variation occurs.

In the study conducted by Uijtdewilligen et al. (2014), the researchers focused on the correlation between daily stressors and physical activities, while I focused on self-esteem and time management. They found that people
who experienced more daily stressors had higher levels of physical activity and data from my study showed that people who had higher self-esteem also had better time management skills. Uijtdewilligen et al. (2014) considered embarrassment and low opinion of appearance to be attributes of daily stress, which could correspond with a low rating of self-esteem. Although we gathered different information regarding this topic, both studies showed significantly positive correlations with their respective variables. It could be beneficial to further examine the influence that self-esteem and self-image can have on daily activities, or vice versa. By comparing self-esteem and daily stress across a range of activities, we could potentially uncover more data on that connection.

Following a similar idea, previous research has shown that well-being and time use have a significantly positive correlation (Chen et al., 2012). This finding is also comparable to the result of my study showing a relationship between self-esteem and time management skills. In the study done by Chen et al. (2012), well-being is similar to my variable of self-esteem. With both studies providing evidence of a positive significant correlation between those variables and variables related to time management and usage, this further supports our hypotheses that there is a connection. More research should be conducted that looks at these relationships in order to better understand why they might exist and to provide more support behind the hypotheses.

Another study that provided evidence of similarities and differences in the time spent doing activities in daily life was that of Vagni and Cornwell (2018). Similar to the other time-use studies, I did not come across any results that supported the findings of this study. Vagni and Cornwell (2018) focused more on patterns of daily routines, rather than just the activities themselves, which could account for our different results. Future research in this area of study could focus on both daily activities and the way people connect those activities in a routine in order to learn more about behavioral patterns in everyday life. We should research not only how often people complete an activity, but also the time of day they do so.

This study provides us with many ideas on how we can look further into the ways age, self-esteem, and adulthood status can relate to time management skills. Perhaps investing more into teaching emerging adults about time management and improving their skills in that area could lead to people feeling more confident in themselves and their adulthood status. More research must also be done on the relationships between time usage, well-being, and self-esteem. Looking at which daily activities correspond with self-esteem and well-being, and advocating for more time spent doing those activities, could be used to increase people’s well-being as well. Time management and self-esteem are two aspects of life that largely impact our daily life and improving them would benefit many.

**About the Author**

Victoria Holmes is a senior at Bridgewater State University majoring in Psychology. Her research project was completed in the fall of 2020 under the mentorship of Dr. Joseph R. Schwab (Psychology) and was presented at the 2020 Bridgewater State Mid-Year Symposium. After graduating in the fall of 2021, she plans on pursuing a career in public service.

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