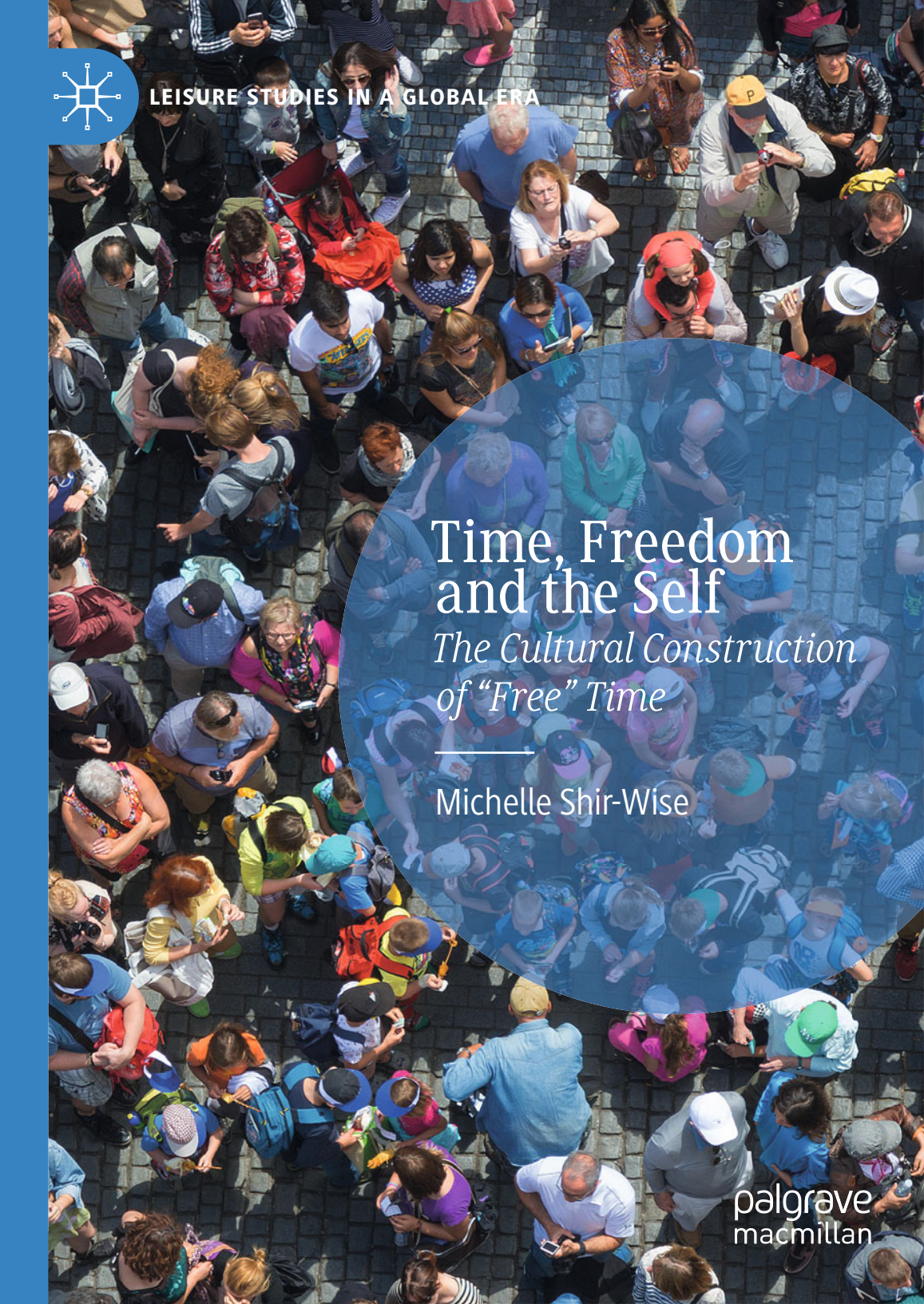
LEISURE STUDIES IN A GLOBAL ERA
Time, Freedom and the Self
The Cultural Construction of "Free" Time
Michelle Shir-Wise
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About the Author

Michelle Shir-Wise holds a Ph.D. from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Past projects have examined representations of self in television commercials. Her research interests include time use, culture, the self, consumption, media, class, gender, youth and ageism.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It is a Saturday morning in spring as the sun shines generously through the burgeoning leaves of the trees that rejuvenate the park. In the wavering patchwork of light and shade, a father helps his son climb the ladder up to the slide, shoulder hunched, cellphone nestled habitually in the crook of his neck. When the child reaches the bottom, he emits a shriek of glee, searching his father's face, which discloses obliviousness to the boy's excitement. The father is now absorbed in a text message demanding his prompt attention.

There appears to be nothing particularly unusual about the above scene. Yet, this potentially ideal snapshot of free time, much like others that I have observed, has made me wonder about the way in which people use and experience free time and to what extent it is indeed "free." I often hear people complaining about their crammed schedules saying, "I don't have time." But what is meant by this commonly heard phrase? Does it mean time for the family, time for oneself or simply an opportunity to do what one chooses? And is our free time really a matter of free choice?

I asked myself how people feel about their free time and why they perform certain practices. Perhaps free time is not simply aimed at pleasure. Could it also be a site for self-management? I frequently see people walking or jogging energetically, checking their watches or phone apps as they do so. I wonder, is sport considered part of their free time or is it treated as yet another chore on a long list of daily requirements? Why are we constantly rushed, and lured to a plethora of devices promising

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to save time though they may actually consume more and more of our time? People seem to be forever time-pressured, yet watch television for hours. How can these contradictions be explained?

These questions led me to embark on the research on which this book is based. I wanted to gain deeper insight into how people experience and evaluate free time, what motivates practices in that regard, and how cultural repertoires available to them are related to the way they talk and think about free time. What do people feel about that time? Do they think about it in terms of freedom? And if so, by investigating free time, could we learn what people consider worth doing? I hoped that the exploration of free time would thus reveal what is highly valued in our culture and how free time is related to the self. Put differently, if people decide to pursue certain activities during that part of the day they consider to be "free," could their choices reflect cultural ideals of self or notions of worthy time use?

We are all caught in the flow of everyday life, putting little thought into why we spend our time as we do, whether it is a daily ritual that seems mundane or other activities that feel more meaningful. What motivates us to perform certain free time practices? Why are some activities more highly valued than others? To what extent is free time culturally constructed? *Time Freedom and the Self* seeks to illuminate questions concerning individual agency in the face of cultural and discursive constructs, which are likely to shape, not only the way we use our time, but also how we perceive and experience it. In other words, while I use the term "*free* time," I do not mean that the individual is entirely free to make choices. Rather, I recognize the role of sociocultural influences that may direct one's actions and shape subjective meanings despite the common association of free time with freedom.

In order to explore the above, I interviewed 43 men and women living in an upper-middle class town located in central Israel. Since I, myself, am a resident of a satellite town of Tel Aviv, the sample of the study may seem somewhat too close for comfort. Indeed, as I embarked on the current journey into free time, I wondered about the extent of my ability to examine the field from the point of view of a researcher looking in on the subject of interest from the outside. However, much like a participant-observer in ethnographic studies, I believe that my intimate familiarity with the field helped me better understand the social reality of my participants. Moreover, the fact that I have raised children and been involved in the communal and cultural life of a suburban community in Israel is likely to have given me extra insight into widely

accepted practices in everyday middle class life. Nevertheless, hoping to shed light on meanings behind taken-for-granted free time routines, I, as researcher made a conscious effort to take on an outsider's perspective.

My challenge was to give voice to people's thoughts and feelings, and address the question of freedom without assuming preconceived ideas of the individual as utter cultural dope, nor presupposing a fully autonomous agent. As a sociologist, my intent was to listen with a critical ear, aiming at digging deeper, beyond taken-for-granted conceptions and practices of free time. This book presents the insights resulting from this search. It is shaped by the voices of 43 individuals who willingly shared their thoughts and feelings about their experience and perceptions of free time so as to allow a deeper understanding of questions related to time, freedom and selfhood in the context of culture.

* * *

When we think and talk about time, we relate to it as though it is tangible, something that we can spend, save or put away for another day. We treat it as a rare commodity as we do money. There never seems to be enough of it and what we have, is expected to be used wisely. Yet we are constantly afraid of wasting time so we attempt to regulate it in order to utilize it efficiently. Time-management is thus considered commendable, a means of control over this ever-elusive element in our lives. However, time does not behave as a concrete substance and the more we try to contain it, the less we are able to do so, resulting in a heightened sense of frustration and time pressure.

In order to control and manage our time, modernity has provided us with a wide array of inventions and technology. Domestic time-saving machines and devices, from pressure-cookers and washing machines to vacuum cleaners and microwaves, were all intended to give us greater control over our time and allow us more free more time for pleasure or activities of our choice. Indeed, much of modern technology promises to make our lives easier precisely by saving time, speed being a central selling point. We are coaxed into upgrading our mobile phones and computers to the latest models so as to save ourselves only fractions of seconds. However, all these inventions have not necessarily contributed to a more relaxed lifestyle. On the contrary, multitasking, time-management, busyness and productivity have become the catchwords of contemporary life. We seem to be constantly rushing around trying to squeeze as much as possible into our heavy schedules.

Perhaps then, time cannot really be managed at all. Neither can it be saved. It seems to me that the concept of time calls for metaphoric descriptions that are amorphous, not countable or concrete. Time may be more like gas that dissipates in the air, or, possibly, like a vacuum that constantly needs to be filled. It is like the seeds of a dandelion, ironically called clocks, that scatter in the wind, some of which may prove to be productive but some of which, may not. Although we want to think about time as containable, it is difficult to find a satisfactory metaphor, precisely because it is obscure and full of contradictions.

We have become obsessed with time management, but rather than calming us by satisfying our need to control, it seems to have exacerbated the inner tensions brought about by the expectations of productivity and busyness, of constant activity and movement. It is no longer legitimate to just sit at a bus stop and observe passersby, or stand in line at the supermarket looking around. The fear of idleness and, perhaps, being perceived as being idle, makes us busy ourselves on our smartphones, constantly checking and rechecking our messages or simply browsing through our phones so that we feel as though we are doing something with our time. Every minute must be utilized and managed. It is no wonder then, that a Google search of the words *time management*, gives us millions of results. These include articles, study guides, lectures, training workshops, videos and self-help books that promise to provide tips on how to "manage your time better,"[1] "achieve more and be more effective"[2] or "work less and play more."[3] Books with intriguing names like "*Eat That Frog*," offer "*ways to stop procrastinating and get more done in less time*,"[4] while other books promise to teach us "*How to Be a Productivity Ninja*,"[5] or "*The Art of Stress-Free Productivity.*"[6]

Is this need for efficiency and productivity a new phenomenon or is it simply becoming more pronounced because of modern technology that places so much emphasis on speed and results? I remember when I was a teenager, my grandmother, a widow in her late 70s, used to spend time in our home. She would say repeatedly, "please give me something to do." It was not a hobby or pleasure that she sought. She simply wanted to do something she considered useful, like sewing, folding washing or chopping vegetables. She would say, "I'm not going to just sit here with my arms crossed." Only when my mother succumbed to her request and gave her something *productive* to do, did she finally feel better. So, perhaps a need for productivity and busyness is not anything new. My grandmother had always been a busy person, running a household and

caring for her large family. However, unlike today, she did not have all the modern conveniences, which supposedly allow us more time. This brings us to the widely discussed question of time pressure, which we read and hear about in the media, as well as in time use research. Why do we seem to be so rushed despite modern technology designed to save us time? What makes us feel time-pressured even though studies indicate that we work less than in the past? And why do people say that they have very little free time despite evidence from time use reports that suggest otherwise? Indeed, after beginning the study, when friends asked what I was researching and I told them that the subject of my work was "free time," the most common reaction, said facetiously, was "What's that?" Another response, expressed by many in a wistful tone was, "I wish I had free time." Why did people react this way? What causes us to feel we don't have enough time and why do people wish for free time?

Perhaps it is the very notion of scarcity as compared to work and other committed time that makes that time particularly appealing. Using a more tangible metaphor after all, free time is like diamonds that are rare and precious. And the less there is of something, the more we seem to want it. But is the valorization of free time only due to its scarcity? In this book, I suggest that there may be an additional, and possibly even more significant factor that makes free time so widely desired and valued. It seems to me that it is the notion of freedom that contributes greatly to its elevated status. In contrast to time use in general that is associated with efficiency and productivity, free time is perceived as a realm of freedom where we can choose to simply relax, pursue pleasure or invest in the self. If free time is considered a matter of choice, it may also be an integral part of how we define ourselves, reflecting sociocultural standards, which have been internalized, and which we use in the management of our daily lives.

Time, Freedom and the Self thus seeks to explore how free time is used, experienced and valued, focusing on the relationship between time, the construction of selfhood and cultural repertoires. I treat time use, specifically free time, as a tool with which to gain a deeper understanding into the ways individuals manage the self, as I direct my attention to the meanings of actions and how culture shapes these meanings in everyday life. The need to research free time is becoming more and more compelling due to changes in contemporary life. The increase in the amount of free time in recent decades is a trend that is likely to continue into the future, given the advancement of technological devices that save time, the rise of technological unemployment and an increase in life expectancy.

The current exploration of free time hopes to offer insight into the intricate nexus between time use, freedom, culture and the self, by addressing a number of questions. What is defined as free time? When is time considered well spent and what is deemed a waste of time? What do our pastimes reveal about contemporary discourses concerning how we manage our selves and our time? What motivates our free time practices? To what extent do they serve the individual's need for pleasure, or search for happiness, and what is their role in the construction of the self? *Time, Freedom and the Self* presents an examination of free time in the Israeli context, uncovering how individuals perceive, interpret and experience free time, while addressing broader questions about selfhood and how culture works in everyday life.

Overview of the Book[7]

Chapter 2 of the book provides a theoretical background and presents a review of the literature relevant to the central issues with which the book is concerned. By positioning my research within the framework of literature on time use, the self, freedom, culture and discourses, I present my own perspective and how it is hoped to add to existing scholarship in these fields. In addition, I introduce the terms the *hierarchization of free time, disciplined freedom, and conspicuous busyness*, theoretical concepts that I offer in order to analyze various aspects of free time. The chapter briefly describes the methods used (a detailed explanation is provided in the appendix), discusses the context of the study and concludes with the rationale and objectives of the book.

The following chapters present the findings, beginning with Chapter 3 that outlines the central characteristics of the town Topaz, as well as its free time activities and dominant narratives, as these emerged in interviews with key local figures and in local texts. This chapter is intended to give the reader a sense of the town and the lifestyle of its residents. This is followed by Chapter 4, a *Conceptual Mapping* of free time based on participants' definitions. It explores how participants differentiate free time from other time, what characterizes that time and how they feel about the way they spend their time. The chapter reveals the centrality of freedom in their conceptions of free time, distinguishing between *freedom from* external constraints and *freedom to* choose to do as one wishes. Chapter 5 is divided into two sections. The first section ("Quantitative Mapping: What, Where, When and with Whom?") presents the

quantitative findings from the questionnaires, showing how and with whom participants spend their free time, the frequency of these activities, and the amount of time spent on each. The chapter presents tables with descriptive data regarding the various types of activities, serving to provide the reader with an overall picture of participants' free time use. The second section ("Subjective Mapping: The Hierarchization of Free Time") focuses on subjective meaning relating to the *hierarchization of free time* as described by participants. This term refers to the ways in which individuals assess and classify their free time according to the perceived value of a practice. The chapter inquires into the experience, motivation and evaluation of free time, exploring positively valued and desired free time practices. It looks at why certain activities are experienced as such as well as examining responses to hypothetical questions related to potential, imagined free time.

The following chapters move from the conceptual and subjective mappings of free time to an exploration of various facets of self that emerged in relation to free time. Chapter 6 focuses on the link between free time and discourses of productivity, questioning the traditional distinction between work and free time. It examines the language and activities related to time management and the self-project. The concept, *disciplined freedom* is offered here as a conceptual tool with which to explore the contradictory nature of self-management practices that were seen as *freedom to* invest in the self, yet guided by ideals of hard work and self-discipline. The chapter also offers the term, *conspicuous busyness* to refer to the display of busyness as an integral part of self-presentation as a productive individual. Chapter 7 examines consumption in free time, investigating various practices and what motivates participants to perform them. The first section ("The Commercialization of Free Time") explores *The Commercialization of Free Time*, looking at the consumption of services, many of which are related to self-work, as well as other practices, such as shopping or outings. It focuses, not only on what participants do, but also on how they feel about various types of consumption. The second section ("Media and Free Time") looks into the consumption of media. It investigates the subjective experience of media practices as a dominant part of daily routine, revealing participants' motives and paradoxical evaluations. It also presents modes of resistance, indicated by participants.

Chapter 8 looks at *The Social Self*, as it explores free time associated with family, friends and community. The first section ("The Family Self")

focuses on family time, including everyday time, weekends and special occasions, and uncovers participants' conceptions of relationships, parenting and values. The chapter also addresses gender roles and the notion of *quality time*. The second section ("The Sociable Self") relates to social interaction, friendships and social outings. The chapter looks at sites for socializing as well as the meanings attached to social relationships and practices. Chapter 9 ("The Meaningful Self") addresses the question of meaningfulness. It explores arenas of happiness, such as family or volunteering, indicated by participants. The chapter distinguishes between *pleasure* and *happiness*, the second found to be linked to values and meaning. The final Chapter 10 ("Contradictory Free Time, Culture and Freedom") summarizes and discusses the findings of the study, which suggested the impact of conflicting discourses and cultural scripts, competing in shaping participants' subjective understandings and experience of free time as well as conceptions of the self. The discussion puts special emphasis on discursive contradictions and the question of freedom in free time, looking at how culture is used to direct actions and shape meanings related to free time and the self.

Notes

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUk6LXRZMMk.
2. https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm.
3. https://toggl.com/time-management-tips.
4. Tracy, Brian. 2007. *Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
5. Allcott, Graham. 2014. *How to Be a Productivity Ninja: Worry Less, Achieve More and Love What You Do*. London: Icon Books.
6. Allen, David. 2015. *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*. New York: Penguin.
7. Regarding the structure of the book, even though the chapters follow one another in logical progression, they are modular in so far as they can also be read individually. The last chapter, however, draws conclusions that are based on the findings presented throughout the book. Additionally, unlike many books that interweave their findings with past literature, I have attempted, as much as possible, to present the findings without the "interference" of references. Instead, I refer to the literature in the summary and discussion at the end of each chapter, so as to allow a "clean" presentation of the findings in a more narrative style.

CHAPTER 2

Free Time, Culture and the Self

Leisure and Time Use

There seems to be no area of contemporary life that is associated with individual freedom as much as that part of the day we generally call "free time." Yet the link between leisure and freedom is not a modern notion. Plato (in Laws, Book 7) and Aristotle (in Nicomachean Ethics) viewed leisure as freedom from work or other necessities, but also as a time when one is free to pursue activities of the soul and engage in contemplation. Sebastian De Grazia (1962) suggests that leisure was "discovered" in classical Greece, and that it had not existed before. The term *leisure* originates from the Greek *schole*, the idea of freedom being central to its meaning (Hunnicutt 1990; Pieper 2009; Russell 2013; Sager 2013). Leisure was conceived as a time that could and should be devoted to valuable activities for both the mind and the body and Plato advocated education in order to prepare citizens for such a life (Hunnicutt 1990; Sager 2013). Indeed, the Greek word *schole* is also the root of the modern word *school*. In his well-known essay entitled, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Joseph Pieper (1952/2009) refers to this common root of the words leisure and school as evidence that leisure is one of the foundations of Western culture (p. 19). Yet, he says, its original meaning has been almost forgotten in modern life, which overvalues work. While work is thought of as *activity*, leisure is generally considered *non-activity*, having taken on the negative connotation of idleness, which, Pieper suggests, is in fact the "opposite of leisure." He argues that leisure is not

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simply free time, but a "condition of the soul," "a mental and spiritual attitude." Echoing the classical ideal of leisure as a space of freedom, Pieper claims that it is precisely the absence of activity that allows the individual to let go and reflect upon reality (p. 46).

Today we relate to leisure as residual time that is free from work or other commitments such as childcare or domestic chores. However, the classical Greeks, who considered leisure worthy for its own sake, defined work as *askolia*, the absence of leisure, which was a desirable goal to be pursued (Hunnicutt 1990; Sager 2013). The Greek ideal of leisure had a moral quality and its aim was virtuous action (Hemingway 1996; Hunnicut 2006). Plato was critical of those who worked more than necessary, seeing this as an obstacle to leisure, which he considered to be freedom, so that working too much would be like refusing to take freedom when it is available (Hunnicutt 1990). For Plato and Aristotle, leisure was not idleness, but rather the freedom to maximize human potential and achieve authenticity (Hunnicut 2006). This privilege was exclusive to the male upper classes to whom, unlike slaves, workers and women, leisure time was more readily available (Russell 2013; Sager 2013). De Grazia (1962) argued that, unlike the modern conception of leisure as time left after duties and necessities, the classical idea of living a higher life saw leisure as a sin qua non for the good life, whereas work was seen as a necessity to survive. Contemplation, he pointed out, was the ultimate in leisure so that anything that hindered the freedom to contemplate truth and meaning in the world, also prevented achieving the greatest good.

The Greeks differentiated between leisure, amusement (paidia) and recreation (anapausis), the first involving activities that are considered valuable in themselves, whereas the latter two served as respite (Sager 2013). The modern concept of leisure or free time includes all three definitions, as we shall see. Ruth Russell (2013) points out that the Greek emphasis on both the mind and the body was manifest in intellectual and artistic pursuits as well as sports. Similarly, the Romans pursued a variety of recreational pastimes, though Seneca, too, distinguished leisure from "idle occupation." The first, he says is when one is free to dedicate oneself to philosophy, whereas the second involves hedonic activities, which, he sees, as making one "restless" (Seneca, 49 ACE/2005).

The ancient emphasis on contemplation continued with the rise of Christianity, particularly in monastic life, where spiritual life was highly valued (Veal 2004). In the late medieval period and early Renaissance, the approach to leisure began to change as instrumental reasoning

came to be more highly regarded than theoretical contemplation (Sager 2013). But perhaps the most significant change in the conception of leisure came about with the rise of Protestantism and a dramatic shift in the attitude to work, which was considered to be a "calling." In Max Weber's (1930/1992) monumental work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the "work ethic" is indicated as the basis for the formation of modern capitalism. Calvanism, he says, encouraged hard work, and economic success was considered to be a Divine "sign." The accumulation of wealth was sanctioned as long as it was not used for worldly pleasures, so that leisure came to be associated with idleness. Edward Thompson (1967) suggests that capitalism also changed the very understanding of time. The appearance of clocks and the industrial revolution, says Thompson, gave rise to more rigid time routines and greater work-discipline. Working hours and production increased, making goods more accessible to the masses. The idea of material rewards resulting from hard work, transformed people's hopes and lifestyles (Veal 2004).

Still, as in classical Greece, leisure remained a privilege of the higher classes. At the end of the nineteenth century, Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899/2007) proposed that "conspicuous consumption" and leisure, which was defined as nonproductive time, distinguished those with a higher income and education from the working classes. By the twentieth century, economic growth and technology were hoped to enable more leisure time for the wider population and, in the postwar period, production and consumption increased while working hours decreased. Advertising and credit cards also promoted greater consumption along with a sense of entitlement (Bell 1976; Robinson and Godbey 1997).

However, as Staffan Linder (1970) claimed, more leisure time, greater affluence and consumption may actually have brought about a more "harried," instead of relaxed lifestyle, as well as leading to a perceived paucity of time, since people felt a need to increase productivity, not only at work, but also during leisure. Juliet Schor (1993) pointed to an obsession with consumption, as leading to a rise in working hours, making Americans "overworked," and thus more pressured. Yet the corollary of overall longer working hours has been refuted with the claim that studies rely on limited data and that they are not supported by time diary results (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Roberts 2006; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Gershuny 2000). Indeed, time use studies that have compared the allocation of time over the years, have found that working time has actually

decreased (Aguiar and Hurst 2006; Gershuny and Sullivan 2017). Nevertheless, today, as opposed to Veblen's "leisure class," those with a college education and more economically rewarding occupations, have been indicated as having less free time than the less educated and those in lower status jobs (Bellezza et al. 2017; Gershuny 2005; Katz et al. 2000; Offer and Schneider 2011; Roberts 2006, 2013; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Sullivan 2008; Gershuny and Sullivan 2017).

Research concerning the relationship between work and leisure has focused, not only on working and leisure hours, but also on how they influence each other. Stanley Parker (1971) developed a typology of work-leisure relationships, defining three main patterns of leisure: the *extension* pattern, where work is central in life and leisure is an extension of work; the *neutrality* pattern, where leisure is independent of work; and the *oppositional* pattern, where work is seen as a necessity in order to obtain leisure. The first, he claimed, is most likely when people enjoy their work, the second, when work is seen as an economic necessity, rather than intrinsically rewarding, and the last occurs when work is disliked and leisure is experienced as the opposite. The work-leisure relationship is also central to Kenneth Roberts' (2006) view of leisure as being significantly shaped by work. Though he also notes economic, political and social contexts in which leisure is defined, he points to the modern organization of work, as the, "first and foremost" of which leisure is a product (p. 2). He says people draw on the concepts of work and leisure to make sense of the way they use their time.

However, past and recent literature has not limited the definition of leisure to its relationship with work. Time and leisure research has defined leisure as time free from the commitments of work, but also from household tasks or family duties (Dumazedier 1960; Parker 1976; Roberts 1978, 2006; Rojek 1999). Given my focus on freedom in this book, what is of particular significance here, is that we tend to regard free time as an unconstrained, flexible part of the day, which can be devoted to the self for relaxation, amusement, or self- development (Aguiar and Hurst 2006; Dumazedier 1960; Fava and Gist 1974). In addition, it is considered to be intrinsically motivated and rewarding, characterized by satisfaction and/or fulfillment, or thought to have other mental or physical benefits (Kando 1980; Roberts 2006; Stebbins 2012). If free time is linked to the self, examining the way we construe it and account for how we use it, may help us understand *why* we do what we do and what it says about who we are, or think we are and want to be.

Studies exploring leisure have covered a wide range of topics including tourism, the consumption of culture, sport and other such activities (Cushman et al. 2005; Katz-Gerro and Shavit 1998; Rojek and Urry 1997; Roberts 2015; Aitchison et al. 2014). These studies associate "leisure" with planned recreation, structured hobbies, entertainment or holidays (Stebbins 2001). I shall prefer the use of the term "free time" rather than "leisure" as I wish to include, not only activities considered to be leisure, but also mundane, everyday practices, which may occupy a greater and less structured share of our daily, uncommitted time than those mentioned above. The use of the term "free time" is also better suited to the book's focus on questions of freedom.

In contrast to recreational activities, much of our day-to-day life can be classified as repetitive and regulated by time (Elias 1991; Giddens 1987; Melucci 1996; Zerubavel 1991). Habitualization relieves tension as it allows activities to be pursued with minimum decision-making (Berger and Luckman 1966). Just as much of our work, household chores or other duties are habitual, so too are many of our free time practices. Watching television, for instance, is a routinized practice in most households in many countries (ATUS 2018; Roberts 2006).

Robert Stebbins (2001) differentiates between "serious leisure" which he defines as "profound" and "based on substantial skill, knowledge or experience"(p. 54) and "casual leisure" which is "short lived" and requires "little or no special training to enjoy it" (p. 53). He describes the former as being deeply satisfying, as opposed to the latter, which is unlikely to produce satisfaction and can become a habitual "way of life" (2001: 53). While Stebbins indicates these distinctions as a central reason why "serious leisure" warrants attention, in my view, this is precisely what makes the quotidian pastimes of "casual leisure" of equal interest to the social scientist. If, as he claims, casual leisure such as watching television, causes "a sense of ennui and listlessness rooted in the unsettling realization that one's life is unfolding in a way largely, if not entirely, devoid of any significant excitement" (p. 54), why, then does the individual pursue such actions?

This book focuses precisely on the subjective experience of everyday free time. This is not to say that it does not relate to "serious" leisure or planned recreation as well, yet it is not limited to these. Although it may be conceived as unimportant or banal, everyday free time may be significant in the pursuit of life goals or the construction of identities. The interaction between "trivial" actions of everyday life and the "existential

drama" of striving for authenticity, self-esteem and meaning, plays an essential role in the self-construction of individuals (Hankiss 2006: 2). Moreover, since everyday life is repetitive and unconscious, exploring "ways of operating" may uncover "tactics" for creative resistance that ordinary people may use (de Certeau 1984: xiv). But to what extent are individuals able to resist?

This brings me to the question of freedom. The word "free" may require further clarification. Free time may be free, as we have said, in the sense that it is time unoccupied by work or duties including both paid work and unpaid work such as domestic tasks or childcare (Roberts 1978; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Rojek 1999). Perhaps it is free too, from other daily necessities such as biological needs or school duties (Kando 1980; Katz et al. 2000; Neumeyer and Neumeyer 1958; Roberts 2006). But is it free in the sense of individual freedom? To what extent is it actually a realm of choice, as traditional definitions of leisure suggest (Brightbill 1960; Dumazedier 1960; Kelly 1983; Parker 1976)? The way we spend our time is also, undoubtedly shaped by external factors and constraints, both on the micro and macro levels. The amount and nature of free time activities among those in different classes, for example, may be influenced by elements outside the individual's free choice (Kelly 1983; Stebbins 2007). Differences in the way people use their free time have been found between various socio-economic groups both within and between different countries (OECD 2009; Roberts 1989; Rojek 2010). One's choices and actions may, in fact, be determined by a number of structural factors such as age, family and community, geographic location, gender, education, health, income or ethnic background (Drake 2013; Henderson and Hickerson 2007; Kelly 1983; Passias et al. 2017; Roberts 2006; Rojek 2010; Southerton 2006). Yet, an additional, if not entirely unrelated, influence on the actor's agency are the cultural and discursive constructs, which are likely to shape, not only the way we use our time, but also how it is subjectively perceived by the individual (Kelly 1983; Rojek 1999). This latter influence is much more subtle, as well as much less explored, hence the need to fill this lacuna by exploring free time with an emphasis on trying to identify the impact of cultural scripts and constructs and how these are linked to agency.

In his book, *Decentering Leisure*, Chris Rojek (1999) does attend to the link between sociocultural constructs and the way free time is used and perceived, yet it is not an empirical study. In a later book, *The Labor of Leisure* (2010), rather than accepting traditional notions of leisure

as freedom, Rojek treats it as a form of labor. Following Rojek, I wish to focus on culture and freedom, yet empirically, as I draw on the findings of the current study to explore whether free time is really free or do people just "believe themselves to be free" (Rojek 2010)? I am concerned with the social structures and cultural influences that may shape one's actions even as the individual may envisage him/herself as a free agent. As Anthony Elliott (2008: 5) suggests, even the act of going to a gym with the goal of achieving a desirable body shape, though it may be experienced as free choice, is undoubtedly influenced by cultural and commercial factors such as media images of ideal bodies or the selling of strategies to attain them. The fact that free time, unlike working time, is perceived as an autonomous arena where, as Rojek (2010: 1) puts it, "we are considered, and culturally represented, to exist in a state of voluntarism," makes it all the more significant for the individual and worthy of attention to the social scientist. Consequently, the study of free time can serve as a valuable tool for the examination of cultural and structural influences on freedom and conceptions of the self.

Because time has come to be thought of as a "precious commodity" (Robinson and Godbey 1997), time scarcity or "time famine" (Reeves and Szafran 1996) have been the focus of research that addresses pressure or role overload (Gershuny 2005; Hochschild 1997; Kaufman et al. 1991; Roberts 2006; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Schor 1993, 1998; Wajcman 2014). The "acceleration" or "speedup of life" (Robinson and Godbey 1997; Rosa 2013; Sharma 2014; Wajcman 2014; Wajcman and Dodd 2016) in contemporary society has led to a sense of "busyness" (Gershuny 2005; Putnam 2000) "time squeeze" and "harriedness" (Linder 1970; Schor 1993; Southerton 2003; Southerton and Tomlinson 2005). Hence, a large body of research focuses on the pressures of work and family, multitasking, and the division of labor and gender inequality (Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Braun et al. 2008; Daly 2001; Gillis 2001; Gerson 2010; Hochschild 1997; Hochschild and Machung 1990; Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik 2013; Offer and Schneider 2008, 2011; Reeves and Szafran 1996). Although these issues certainly merit attention, the focus of the current book is on nonworking time. While I do not doubt that work may play a major role in the construction of identities (Angouri and Marra 2011; Dutton et al. 2010; Gini 1998; Hall and Du Gay 1996; Knights and Willmott 1999) and that it fills a large proportion of one's daily life, it is precisely for these reasons that free time may be perceived as particularly valuable.

Much of the literature has implied an "overworked" self, both within demanding organizations (Schor 1993), as well as among contractors or freelancers, who, despite believing they have more control over their time, still work long hours, leaving little time to be used as desired (Evans et al. 2004). As I have said earlier, other research, however, suggests that working hours have decreased and we now have more free time than our parents' generation ever had, yet people still seem to feel busy and time-pressured (Aguiar and Hurst 2006; ATUS 2018; Gershuny 2005; Roberts 2006; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Rosa 2003; Wajcman 2014), a paradox that I seek to better understand by exploring the subjective experience of free time. I am not the first to attempt to account for this paradox, yet my focus is on free time and the self, as I highlight questions of meaning.

Time budget research and studies using national surveys based on the time diary method, have been useful in ascertaining the amount of time spent working and taking care of the family, as well as determining how much free time people have and the way they use it (ATUS 2018; Cushman et al. 2005; Katz et al. 2000; OECD 2009; Robinson and Godbey 1997). Such research allows the assessment of similarities and differences in time use among various groups according to age, gender, class and race (Bianchi and Robinson 1997; Cushman et al. 2005; Katz et al. 2000; Robinson and Godbey 1997; Shinew et al. 2004). Yet time use studies are more concerned with *what* and *how much*, rather than subjective meanings.

As we have seen, abundant literature has focused on work-leisure relationships, time pressure, gender and time, or on recreational activities such as sport, tourism or cultural consumption, yet the link between time use, freedom and the construction of self has been somewhat neglected. In an attempt to fill this gap, this book focuses on the subjective meanings of "free time," and the way these are related to freedom and the self.

Individualism and the Contemporary Self

Since one of the major concerns of the book is the self and the construction of individual identities, I now examine certain assumptions regarding notions of the self in Western culture as they appear in the literature.

Firstly, the discourse of individualism is central to the way we think about the self. I thus begin by briefly outlining the development of this discourse and the way in which it has shaped conceptions of the self.

As early as the eighteenth century, the foundations of the modern version of individual freedom were laid by Rousseau (1754/1992) who considered free will to be a quality distinguishing man from animals and enabling him to act freely. His work inspired leaders of the French Revolution, with individual freedom being the guiding principle of the first two parts of the revolution's tripartite motto: *liberty, equality and fraternity*. Tracing the historical development of individualism, Steven Lukes (1971) points out that the German, Romantic idea of individualism, was associated with individuality and self-realization. Calling it the "individualism of uniqueness," Georg Simmel (1971: 224) suggested that this new form of individualism that emerged in the nineteenth century, replaced the idea of equality, though freedom, he says, was still the "common denominator" (p. 222). It was not simply being free from the shackles of various institutions that mattered, "but that one was a particular and irreplaceable individual" (p. 222). However, it was in America, suggests Lukes (1971), that individualism came to celebrate capitalism and democracy. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin's (1997) notion of the self-made man was based on the idea that every individual, through hard work, is able to achieve success and prosperity. Yet, French political philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville after having visited America, also pointed to what he considered to be the negative potential of individualism. In his book, *Democracy in America* (1969), he suggests that equality tends to isolate individuals "to concentrate every man's attention upon himself" (p. 505) and that, "Individualism … disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures; and to draw apart with his family and his friends" (p. 574). An additional observation that he makes, is the "restless spirit" of Americans, who, despite their freedom, education and prosperity, seemed to him as "if a cloud habitually hung upon their brow." This, he explains, is due to the fact that they are "always in a hurry" in the "pursuit of worldly welfare" and "fresh gratifications"(pp. 605–606). Such questions concerning isolation, time pressure, and the pursuit of gratification, seem as relevant today as they did then.

Yet, the term individualism acquired more positive meanings as it came to be associated with individual will and self-reliance (Emerson 1841/1974). Since then, fulfillment, the "pursuit of individual autonomy," and "the quest for the self" (Bellah 1985) have become, not only a liberal right, but also an imperative (Bauman 2005; Cronin 2000). This may be particularly true among the middle and upper classes,[1]