

SOC496HF – New Topics in Sociology: Sociology of Free Time

University of Toronto, Fall 2023

Course Info: Thursdays 11:10 – 1:00pm starting September 7th, 2023

Location: Omitted for Security Reasons

Course website and links for weekly lectures found on Quercus:

<https://q.utoronto.ca>

Instructor: Professor Brent Berry, Dept of Sociology, University of Toronto

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4:00pm & by appointment, room 17110 (17th floor), 700 University Ave
(*I can also talk after class, arrange a phone call or teams meeting, just ask*)

Summary

A 400-level special topics course is an opportunity for faculty to explore topics with students that don't fit into existing categories.

This term we will study the sociology of free time. Free time is when you do not have to work, study, etc. and can do what you want. But can you really do what you want during free time? What are the constraints on free time, and how has it changed historically and over the lifecourse? The quantity and quality of free time is also inextricably linked to privilege, and can be seen as part of the social stratification system.

We will first read and discuss several pieces that problematize contemporary life, focusing on problems with how free time is spent. Free time, often called leisure time, can also be seen as spare time available for activities that you enjoy. It excludes time spent doing work, domestic chores, personal care, education, and sleeping. It is hard to discuss free time without discussing what constrains it. We will learn that lives, on average, are more work-centric than ever, with attention divided between various roles in ever more complex ways, affecting the quality and quantity of free time.

Some have raised concerns about the quantity and quality of free time. Skidelsky and Skidelsky (2012) emphasize how capitalism has failed to return surplus free time to workers, instead creating a work centric life of insatiable consumer wants that keeps traditional notions of the “good life” out of reach. Hunnicutt (2013) suggests that a kind of collective amnesia has simply forgotten that free time was once core to the American Dream. Morozov (2013) reviews modern and postmodern views of distraction and information overload during free time, undermining capacity for uninterrupted contemplation. Gray (2011) and Henrick (2014) raise concerns about the loss of free time play for both children and adults.

The second part of the course is about how free time problems are influenced by work and family demands, household/home characteristics, and aging/lifecourse. We will also review how common personal and household practices and habits we engage in at home, such as technology/media use, meals, and outdoor activities, influence free time.

Online and screen time at home

The growing prominence of “screen time” during leisure is largely confined to interiorized spaces at home, impacting physical activity, family relationships, and social activity outside the home (Putnam 1995; Berry 2007; Mesch 2009). Social class differences in how free time is structured for children has important implications for lifetime stratification and inequality (Lareau 2000, 2002)

Busyness, Gender, and work-life balance

The experience of free time varies by family, gender, and age. The most sizable body of research examines gender differences in the work-life balance for parents with young children, seeing how free time alone and with family are compromised and unequal. What are the free time costs of children, and how does the quantity and quality of free time vary when work schedules are more flexible (Golden 2008), when childcare is available, and as children grow? How do parents identify quality free time? Our selective readings cannot do justice to this expansive literature.

Food Choice and Shared Meals during free time

Reductions in the quantity and quality of free time, along with changes to households and in the food industry, have significantly affected food choices and shared meals at home. We will review what has happened as work has spilled over into food choices at home and the sociability of meals.

Household Type and Free Time: Going Solo, Coupled, or Married with Children

The type of household we live in, and the relationships we have with household members influences our free time choices. We will examine how free time varies for singletons versus other household types. What are the implications of household for important free time activities like cultural participation, civic involvement, and territorial functioning?

The Community Question and Housing Adaptations: Seeking More Fulfilling Free Time in the Ownership Society

We will conclude by speculating how homeownership, conspicuous consumption, and the rise of the “ownership society” have contributed to the free time problems. As a counter-movement critical of the limitations of contemporary community and conventional ownership restrictions, cohousing offers purposive social interaction. We will also discuss the rise of collaborative consumption and its influence on free time, as well as other intentional communities that seek alternative housing and household arrangements. We will also review critical perspectives on these movements.

Prereqs for take this course: 1.0 SOC FCE at the 300+ level. Students without this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

Evaluation

Grades are based on four components. First, class attendance and participation are worth 15% of your final grade. Second, each student is asked to submit weekly 1-2 page reaction papers (500 words) the night before class (together worth 30% of your grade). The remaining 55% of your grade is a research paper on an approved topic, consisting of a proposal/outline due no later than November 2nd (worth 15%), and the final paper worth the remaining 40%. Final papers are due no later than November 30th. Choice of paper topics will be discussed in the second week of class.

Readings and In-Class Content

The readings can be downloaded from the class web page. Due to copyright restrictions, you must login to access them. Most of the readings are in PDF format. Readings listed as “supplemental” or “further reading” are optional, meaning they are not required. The instructor will sometimes post slides or discussion guides the evening before class. They are provided to benefit in-class note taking. Besides the posted lecture slides, we will incorporate a range of audiovisual materials. It is important to complete all required readings, attend class, and be prepared to contribute to the discussion (off-line or online)

Email and the Course Webpage

In my courses, email and the ability to access the course webpage is important. I will use e-mail for reminders, clarifications, last-minute notifications, etc. Feel free to contact me via e-mail with questions, requests or problems that were not --or could not be-- addressed in class.

Missing Deadlines/Submitting Late Work

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons, need to email the instructor (not the TA), and also declare their absence on the system (ACORN).

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

Late work will be accepted at the discretion of the instructor.

The University's plagiarism detection tool

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Be careful to avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the "Code of Behavior on Academic Matters"). If you are using someone else's ideas, do not present them as your own. Give proper references if you are using somebody else's ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference --you are not going to be punished for that. Please also be aware that turning in an old paper, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second (or third etc.) course, is considered an academic offense that results in students being referred off to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Ouriginal will not be assessed unless the student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

Accessibility Needs

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> .

Comments on Writing

I encourage you to use the university's writing resources, which are described on their website. Subject to available time, the instructor is willing to read over drafts of your work during office hours. I can help you more if you seek help early. All too often, students' papers are one or two drafts short of excellence when time expires.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week-by-Week Schedule

Sept 7 Introduction and Overview to the Course (no readings)

Sept 14. Free Time Problems: Capitalism and Consumption

- Response paper #1 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Keynes. 1930. "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren" Essay from John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion*, New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1963, pp. 358-373.
- Skidelsky and Skidelsky. 2012. "In Praise of Leisure." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 18, 2012
- Kaplan. 2008. "The gospel of consumption" *Orion Magazine* May/June 2008

Sept 21. Free Time Problems: Historical Origins

- Response paper #2 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Hunnicutt, Benjamin. 2013. *Free time: the forgotten American Dream*. Temple University Press [into, ch1, ch3, ch9-10, but whole book is interesting]

Sept 28. Free Time Problems: Compromised Attention, Household Relationships, Sedentary Lifestyle, and Interiorization of Life

- Response paper #3 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Berry. 2007. "Disparities in Free Time Inactivity.." *Sociological Perspectives* 50(2): 177-208
- Mesch, Gustavo S. 2006. "Family Relations and the Internet" *Journal of Family Communication* 6(2) 119-138.
- Morozov, Evgeny. 2013. "Only Disconnect: Two Cheers for Boredom" *The New Yorker*, Oct 28, 2013 issue.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. "Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America." *Political Science and Politics*, 28(4) 664-683.

Oct 5. Free Time Problems: The Nature of Play

- Response paper #4 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Gray, Peter. 2011. Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents. *American Journal of Play* 3(4) 443-463
- Henricks, Thomas. 2014. Play as self-realization. *American Journal of Play* 6(2) 190-213.
- Lareau, Annette. 2000. Social Class and the Daily Lives of Children: A study from the United States. *Childhood*. 7(2) 155-171.

- Lareau, Annette. 2002. Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childbearing in Black and White Families. *American Sociological Review* 67(5) 747-776.

Oct 12. Free Time Problems: The Nature of Time – Political and Cross-Cultural Perspectives

- Response paper #5 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Bergmann, Werner. 1992. The Problem of Time in Sociology. *Time and Society*. 1(1) 81-134.
- Clancy, Craig. 2014. The politics of temporality: autonomy, temporal spaces and resoluteness. *Time and Society* 23(1) 28-48.
- Raybeck, Douglas. 1992. The coconut-shell clock. 1(3) 323-340.

Oct 19. Free Time Problems: Work-Life Balance and Family Free Time

- Response paper #6 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Craig and Mullan. 2012 Australian fathers work and family time in comparative and temporal perspective. *Journal of Family Studies* 18(2-3) 165-174.
- Craig and Sawrikar. 2009. Work and family: how does the (gender) balance change as children grow? *Gender, Work, and Organization*. 16(6) 684-709.
- Mattingly and Sayer. 2006. Under pressure: gender differences in the relationship between free time and feeling rushed. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68(February): 205-221.
- Roxburgh. 2006. "I wish we had more time to spend together..." The distribution and predictors of perceived family time pressures among married men and women. *Journal of Family Issues* 27(4) 529-553.

Oct 26. Free Time Problems: Work-Life Balance and Adaptations in Family Life

- Response paper #7 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Brown. 2011. Labouring for leisure? Achieving work-life balance through compressed working weeks. *Annals of Leisure Research*. 14(1) 43-59.
- Hill, Tranby, Kelly, and Moen. 2013. Relieving the time squeeze? Effects of a white-collar workplace change on parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 75 (August): 1014-1029.
- Schieman and Young. 2014. Who engages in work-family multitasking? *Social Indicators Research*. Published Online 02 April 2014. DOI 10.1007/s11205-014-0609-7
- Craig and Powell. 2013. Non-parental childcare, time pressure, and the gendered division of paid work, domestic work and parental childcare. *Community Work and Family* 16(1) 100-119.

Nov 2. Time Scarcity and Family Food Choices: Finding Time for Shared Meals

- Project Proposal/Outline due today! (15%)
- Response paper #8 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Devine, et al. 2003. Sandwiching it in: spillover of work onto food choices and family roles in low- and moderate-income urban households. *Social Science and Medicine* 56(2003) 617-630.
- Jabs and Devine. 2006. Time scarcity and food choices: an overview. *Appetite* 47(2006) 196-2004.
- Skafida. 2013. The family meal panacea: exploring how different aspects of family meal occurrence, meal habits and meal enjoyment relate to young children's diets. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 35(6) 906-923.
- "The Magic of the family meal" *Time Magazine*. June 12, 2006.

Nov 9 is Reading Week -- No Class

Nov 16. Household and Free Time: Going Solo, Coupled, and Married with Children

Response paper #9 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Klinenberg, Eric. 2012. Going Solo: the extraordinary rise and surprising appeal of living alone. Penguin Press. [select chapters]
- Kraaykamp, van gils, and Ultee. 2008. Cultural participation and time restrictions: explaining the frequency of individual and joint cultural visits. *Poetics* 36(2008) 316-332.

Nov 23 – Free Time Problems: The Role of Homeownership and Disassociated Community

Response paper #10 due by 10pm night before class

Readings:

- Arai and Pedlar. 2003. Moving beyond individualism in leisure theory: a critical analysis of concepts of community and social engagement. *Leisure Studies* 22(3) 185-202.
- Edwards, Mark. 2001. Home ownership, affordability, and mothers' changing work and family roles. *Social Science Quarterly*. 82(2) 369-383
- Lauster. 2010. "Housing and the proper performance of American motherhood, 1940-2005." *Housing Studies* 25(4) 543-557
- Williams. 2005. "Designing neighbourhoods for social interaction: the case of cohousing" *Journal of Urban Design* 10(2) 195-227.

Nov 30. Housing Adaptations to Address Free Time Problems

Final Projects due by today (40% of grade)

No Response paper due for this final week

Readings:

- Chiodelli and Baglione. 2014. Contextualizing cohousing within the global phenomenon of private residential communities.
- Sargisson. 2012. Cohousing: a modern utopia?
- Todd. 2013. The 'Lacking' Narrative: Why intentional community members choose to live a more demanding lifestyle.
- "How the trailer park could save us all" *PS Magazine* 2013