

Leisure

Bonnie A. Osif

Employ thy time well, if thou meanest to gain leisure.
—Benjamin Franklin¹

Work thou for pleasure; paint or sing or carve
The thing thou lovest, though the body starve.
Who works for glory misses oft the goal;
Who works for money coins his very soul;
Work for the work's sake, then, and it may be
That these things shall be added unto thee.
—Kenyon Cox, *The Gospel of Art*²

Most people say they don't have enough time for leisure activities. This column is written in the very beginning of December. The semester is almost over, and there is a rush as students try to get their work done by the due dates. In the library there are the end-of-the-year projects that must be finished. And there are personal issues; after all, this is the time of many holidays, and the resulting parties, shopping, cooking, and other activities that seemingly must be carried out. Even an activity that might often be considered leisure can become almost a duty, not really relaxing. Yet this is not just a once-a-year problem. Studies show that many Americans don't take all their vacation time and those who do don't necessarily vacation. According *Culture and Customs of the United States*,

Americans are notorious for their reluctance to make time for play. On average, they work five more weeks than Brazilians or the British and two and a half weeks more than Canadians, Mexicans, Australians, or the Japanese. While the French average thirty-nine vacation days each year—and use them—Americans accrue only

fourteen vacation days and typically leave four of them unused. And when Americans do go on vacation, 41 percent of office workers bring their laptops and plan to do work.³

A frequent comment by some European colleagues is that Americans don't know how to vacation nor do they take enough of it. Getting away, visiting, hiking, and other ways of relaxing for more than a week are beneficial, yet there is still the image of the rushed American tourist doing four cities in six days and claiming they have seen those cities and really vacationed. That is, if they even go. Leisure may be on the way to the endangered list for many.

So, what is leisure? There are a number of interesting definitions. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term as "opportunity afforded by freedom from occupations" or "the state of having time at one's own disposal; time which one can spend as one pleases; free or unoccupied time."⁴ Esteve uses several definitions in his article, suggesting that leisure refers to being "freed from daily needs, engage[d] in activities that are an end in themselves," to "any activity an individual can engage in voluntarily after he/she gets free from professional, family or social duties," and to "any activity people engage in during their free time just because they feel like it, enjoying themselves, having a good time, furthering their personal growth."⁵ Gini quotes G. K. Chesterton as saying leisure involves "no practical or utilitarian task" and also describes it as the "opportunity to do other than that which is necessary or required. To do as one pleases. To be freed from the mundane. To be free to pursue the unusual, the inexplicable, the irrelevant, the interesting and the idiosyncratic."⁶ Leisure, Gini continues, "is an attitude of nonactivity, of not being busy, of inner calm, a commitment to silence, mediation, observation and letting things be. Leisure is a way of life."⁷ So, leisure is a concept that has lots of definitions. We will see from some of the studies it also has lots of benefits; yet, it is misunderstood and underused.



Bonnie A. Osif (bao2@psu.edu) is Assistant Engineering Librarian at Pennsylvania State University in University Park.

Slow down, you move too fast, you've got to make the morning last

The textbook *Pastimes* has a format that is excellent for the beginning student of the topic of leisure.⁸ Chapters begin with clear definitions, lists of key terms with the pages on which they first appear, and a number of pictures and sidebars that help to illustrate the topic. There are numerous bulleted lists and some self-scoring exercises and questions. Each chapter has a very good bibliography. Chapters cover age, culture, work, technology, time, and diversity, the last being a topic not seen in many of the works on the subject. Excellent for those who want to look at the breadth of the field and to get a good grasp on the subject. While a textbook, it is very interesting reading, and the historical information is enlightening and gives structure to the subject. Worthwhile for those wanting a solid foundation in leisure studies.

A collection of writings by the leaders in the field of leisure studies, *Constraints to Leisure's* editor states "Knowing where we have been, where we are, and where we are going in the future in leisure constraints research are, I strongly believe, crucial if the field is to fulfill its potential to add to the body of knowledge about leisure, and ultimately to help enhance the quality of people's lives."⁹ Leisure constraints are "factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preference and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure."¹⁰ They affect choices of and participation in leisure activities and can include factors such as cost, time, commitments, skills, and facilities. Individual chapters look at issues such as gender, race, age, environment, time, and costs. Each chapter closes with an extensive bibliography. Chapters of particular interest can be read without reading the entire book. Recommended for those with a strong interest or a particular need for information on one of the issues covered.

A text on leisure studies, Harris' *Key Concepts in Leisure Studies* begins each section with a summary of the key concepts with key terms that are boxed and clearly defined, and concludes with additional readings.¹¹ The arrangement is alphabetical, so it is in essence a detailed encyclopedia of leisure studies. Useful as a reference while reading other books on leisure for information that might be glossed over in other texts or studies.

There are a number of studies on the psychological aspects of stress, overwork, and other negative aspects of modern life. Some of these have been explored in earlier columns. The role of leisure has also been studied from a psychological perspective. One tool used to measure leisure was reported by Esteve, San Martin, and Lopez in 1999 and is referenced by several other studies. Several of the earlier definitions are from their article and they make the case that the study of leisure is a complex one. The tool they developed "aimed at the assessment of what people feel when they are involved in a leisure activity."¹² This

study was preliminary but very interesting, and it provides useful insight to understanding subsequent studies.

Schulz and Watkins developed the Leisure Meaning Inventory (LMI), which measures "four different ways of experiencing the meaning of leisure: Passing Time, Exercising Choice, Escaping Pressure and Achieving Fulfillment."¹³ They provide a good review of the literature and the method they used for developing the inventory. This inventory has twenty-seven statements. A sample includes levels of agreement to statements such as "Leisure is doing nothing," "Leisure is a way of clearing my mind and I don't have to think about anything," and "Leisure allows me to escape the pressure of my daily routine."¹⁴ The authors conclude that

the LMI provides a relatively reliable and valid instrument that conceptualizes leisure meanings as an experiential construct with relations qualities. . . . It complements existing instruments by providing a direct measure of several different leisure meanings in terms of experiences that embody different ways of being at leisure, and provides an avenue to study the relationships between leisure meanings, behaviors, and outcomes.¹⁵

Very interesting article and one that might encourage some library-specific research.

Joudrey and Wallace look at lawyers and the role of leisure as a means of dealing with job demands and reducing depression.¹⁶ Their paper looks at passive leisure (television watching, reading), active leisure (activities involving some physical exertion), social leisure (activities involving interaction with others), and vacation. They hypothesized that any of these four would reduce depression. The study involved more than eighteen hundred lawyers. The researchers found that vacation and more active or social leisure were all beneficial to mental health. However, the passive forms of leisure were not. Noting that this was only one study involving one set of professionals, and so is not necessarily generalizable, the result is interesting because for many, the way to relax after a day at work is to sit in front of the television or to read a book, both being examples of passive leisure.

Another interesting study by Watkins and Bond looked at qualitative leisure experiences that were described as passing time, exercising choice, escaping pressure, and achieving fulfillment.¹⁷ Students were the test subjects. The results roughly mirror those of earlier studies, and the literature review and analysis provide a good overview of the research.

Just kickin' down the cobble-stones, lookin' for fun and feeling groovy

Walker writes in *Learn to Relax* "While there is no completely adequate definition of *anxiety*, we might refer to it

as the reaction we have to a situation in which we believe our well-being is endangered or threatened in some way.”¹⁸ Since the normal options are fight or flight, and since neither of these are real options in most situations in today’s society, “homo sapiens may be like cornered animals that experience a chronic state of anxiety and fear in a complex world.”¹⁹ Other behavior options must be attempted. Terms that are common in this discussion are tension (low-level anxiety), fear (anxiety from a specific threat), free-floating anxiety (tension that may disappear but returns), panic (anxiety so great that the person loses control), and stress (pressure that can be handled).²⁰ Stress can be described as “eustress” (positive stress), “distress” (negative stress), and “neustress” (neutral stress). Stress can help us recognize and protect ourselves from danger, but when it is in excess it creates problems.

Some of the interesting insights from the book include the summary of the work done by Albert Ellis on myths of our times, which Walker summarizes as follows:

1. I must perform well and/or receive the approval of significant others, or else I am an incompetent, unlovable person.
2. You must treat me kindly and fairly, or else you are a rotten, damnable individual.
3. Conditions must be favorable and fortunate (bring me much gain and little pain), or else life is terrible, I can’t stand it, and it is hardly worth living.²¹

“Life Structuring and Engineering,” and “Realistic Goal Setting” are chapters on planning and include both amusing anecdotes and sound advice. Other chapters deal with practical advice on relaxation, problem solving, exercise and nutrition, and relaxation. While written as a textbook, the book is easy reading and has a good balance between research and real-life examples. Understandable summaries of the research that develop the ideas of the book are an excellent review for the reader. The book also includes exercises that can be used individually or in discussion groups and suggested readings at the end of chapters. Very worthwhile overview that might help the readers, either in improving themselves or in working with others who have a problem with anxiety.

Relaxation, Meditation, and Mindfulness goes beyond the normal strategies most of us develop to relax to those the author, Jonathan C. Smith, calls professional deep relaxation. These include yoga stretching, progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises, autogenic suggestion (“thinking powerfully suggestive relaxing phrases”), imagery and relaxing self-talk, and mediation.²² The benefits of each of these six techniques, or as he calls them, families, is detailed. After reviewing the physical aspects of stress (increased breathing and heart rate, release of sugars, blood flow rerouting for fight or flight, and so on), Smith reviews the benefits of relaxation (less susceptibility to illness, better healing, and less stress on organs and mental

processing). He writes, “the relaxation response is the mirror image of the stress response. . . . the body more or less pauses for rest and recovery.”²³ The subsequent chapters detail the six families in enough clarity for even the novice to understand the technique. Of special interest might be the chapter on group relaxation. While many might feel more comfortable working directly with an expert in relaxation, the book does give an idea of the options for and benefits of the techniques reviewed, and some practical advice can be garnered from a careful reading.

Ken Roberts presents a wealth of interesting information in his book *Leisure in Contemporary Society*. The first page of his first chapter asks

If leisure can improve the quality of people’s lives, how can it be that, despite the growth of leisure since the Second World War, people today appear no happier, no more satisfied with their lives, than when the relevant assessments were first made in the 1950s and 1960s?²⁴

Roberts reviews the basic research of leisure and the social, economic, political, and psychological reasons for studying it. His statistics are from the United Kingdom, but he does state that there are similarities between Western societies, suggesting that some general conclusions can be drawn for American culture. He looks at leisure issues as they pertain to gender, lifestyles, age, work and consumerism. While not necessary reading, this is an interesting book for those with a strong interest in the subject.

I’ve got no deeds to do, no promises to keep

In *Between Work and Leisure: The Common Ground of Two Separate Worlds*, Robert Stebbins explores the social, cultural, and social psychological conditions that have drawn and will likely continue to draw occupational devotees to their work, captivated as they are by the many profound and exceptional cultural values and intrinsic rewards they realize there. *Occupational devotion* is a strong and positive attachment to a form of self-enhancing work, where the sense of achievement is high and the core activity (set of tasks) is endowed with such intense appeal that the line between this work and leisure is virtually erased.²⁵

While most people work because they must without any great love of the job, the occupational devotee finds fulfillment. Stebbins states his “aim in this book, then, is to lay to rest the prevailing myth . . . that work and leisure are wholly separate and, as often as not, mutually antagonistic spheres of life.”²⁶ Presenting occupational devotion as a positive attachment to work, he develops the concept in this short book using real examples and research. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi states that there are eight aspects that work and leisure share. These are: sense of competence, concentration, clarity of goals, immediate feedback, focused involvement, control, loss of self-consciousness,

and time truncation during activity.²⁷ In Stebbins' list of occupations that can fall into devotee occupations is library science, and this might account for some of the common traits of the profession, especially that of commitment. He states, "The worker discovers in the course of working just how fulfilling the core tasks can be."²⁸ Of special interest is the chapter "Erasing the Line between Work and Leisure," which discusses serious leisure, focusing on the amateur (the nonprofessional with some link to a profession, such as amateur astronomers), the hobbyist, and the volunteer. Stebbins concludes that both serious leisure and devotee work improve well-being. Interesting book, especially for a profession that seems to have many who are occupational devotees and who tend to have serious leisure activities related to their profession.

Spent provides some practical advice on health. Lipman, a medical doctor who uses both conventional and alternative medicine, provides information on how to heal the "epidemic of exhaustion" and stay healthy.²⁹ He bases his advice on his idea of a total load—the total amount of physical, psychological, and environmental stress on the body. We don't get enough sleep, exercise, or nutrients, and we get too much inactivity, television, food, and environmental toxins. Some of these we can control, and doing so will help put us on the road to recovery. There are a number of books that recommend changes in our daily habits, diets, exercise programs, and that recommend relaxation or meditation routines, all designed to help us step off the treadmill of rapid living, fast foods, shortened rest periods, and increased stress. The book includes recipes, resources for additional help, and references.

Unavailable when the column on multitasking was written, *The Multitasking Myth* is a detailed treatise focused on flight professionals.³⁰ While of no direct applicability to the library professional, it does make a very strong case for the hazards of multitasking, albeit in a very specific field. It makes the case that multiple tasks cannot be handled at the same time, no matter what the voice of popular culture says and can increase the stress levels in our work life.

I'm dappled and drowsy and ready to sleep

My thesis is a simple one. Even if we love our jobs and find creativity, success, and pleasure in our work, we also crave, desire, and need not to work. No matter what we do to earn a living, we all seek the benefits of leisure, lassitude, and inertia. We all need to play more in our lives.³¹

So begins *The Importance of Being Lazy*, a breezy take on a serious topic. In the prologue, Gini uses phrases such as "made a fetish out of work," "addicted to the promise of work," and "we simply don't know what else to do with ourselves."³² Instead, "all of us need escape, if only for a while, to retain our perspective on *who we are* and *who we don't want to be*. . . . In fact, we must all try to *studiously do less*, in order to *be more*."³³ Gini provides historical and social information about vacations, travel, shopping, and retirement, interspersed with some personal

examples, cartoons, a quiz, and research findings. One of the most interesting aspects is the discussion of the pervasive commercialization of leisure. He cites ethicist Richard Lippke's thoughts on this topic and its role in the "diminishment rather than development of self."³⁴ The areas of concern include lack of self-development; lack of autonomy; and effect on social life, competition, and valuation confusion. Gini ends his book with an example from his youth. Most dinners were eaten as a family, but Sunday dinner was a long family affair missed only for "illness, dismemberment, or death."³⁵ And while these times were not uniformly perfect, "they were a statement and a ritual of well-earned rest, celebration, and thanks. They were about sharing and caring for others that you were related to by law or blood."³⁴ So different from what many have now. He concludes, "Our society has grown to expect more and more from us and in less time: and to an extent, we each bear some responsibility for allowing this to happen. . . . A life of all work, or all play, or all rest would not be a balanced one. . . . The trick is to get the ingredients and the proportions balanced and right."³⁶ A must-read for all.

Beginning with a tale of his frustration with his son's time spent on the couch, Tom Lutz provides personal anecdotes, studies, interviews, and more that discuss the non-workers or the loafers, loungers, slackers, and bums of his book's subtitle.³⁷ He writes, "I never seem to stop or rest. Everyone I know is in the same boat. We are all lazy imposters, and we are all workaholic slaves. We work way too hard and not nearly enough."³⁸ People and books are referenced freely in the book, which tracks slackers from Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Johnson through characters in Kevin Smith movies and George W. Bush. This is an interesting journey through the history of those who definitely don't believe in overwork. By the end of the book his son is off the couch and gainfully employed, and Lutz is "ready to get off the treadmill, to face the slow, beautiful emptiness and say, Yes, this too is good."³⁹ It has an extensive and interesting bibliography. Not necessary reading with little practical application, but the insight, humor, and honesty makes it recommended reading for those with the time and the interest.

The purpose of *How to be Idle* "is both to celebrate laziness and to attack the work culture of the western world, which has enslaved, demoralized and depressed so many of us."⁴⁰ Tom Hodgkinson has collected a series of texts from more than three thousand years of history to support his premise. As he states, "The sheer number of great idlers in history proves also that we are not alone."⁴¹ Topics covered with his humorous and pointed prose and backed up by numerous quotations move from the benefits of sleeping and lying in bed half awake, to dictates of jobs and the clock to coffee shops that are now "simply pit stops for working machines, petrol stations for human beings,"⁴² to the loss of breaks to downtime at work, to the role of conversation, pubs, parties, and finally to going back to sleep. The book is written by the time of the day, waking

at 8 and having time during the next twenty-four hours to sleep in, work, have breaks, go drinking, go fishing, party, meditate, and more. Fast reading, it is entertaining and does make one think about the cycle of our days. There may be no direct application to the workplace, but it provides much to think about in a rather lighthearted manner.

Let the morning time drop all its petals on me

“Only I am no longer capable of doing nothing.” As he waits in an airport, Carl Honore writes *In Praise of Slowness* that he sees an article with the line “The One-Minute Bedtime Story.”⁴³ First intrigued and then appalled, Honore realizes his

whole life has turned into an exercise in hurry, in packing more and more into every hour. I am Scrooge with a stopwatch, obsessed with saving every last scrap of time, a minute here, a few seconds there. And I am not alone. Everyone around me . . . is caught in the same vortex. In 1982 Larry Dossey, an American physician, coined the term “time-sickness” to describe the obsessive belief that “time is getting away, that there isn’t enough of it, and that you must pedal faster and faster to keep up.” These days the whole world is time-sick. We all belong to the same cult of speed.⁴⁴

After a brief review of time issues involving child care, work schedules, overscheduled children, overworked individuals, the use of stimulants instead of adequate sleep, vacationitis (avoidance of taking all allowed vacation), road rage, and Post-it-Notes communication, he notes “We have forgotten how to look forward to things, and how to enjoy the moment when they arrive. . . . Instead of thinking deeply, or letting an idea simmer in the back of the mind, our instinct now is to reach for the nearest sound bite. . . . The Slow movement is not about doing everything at a snail’s pace. Nor is it a Luddite attempt to drag the whole planet back to some pre-industrial utopia . . . the Slow philosophy can be summed up in a single word: balance. Be fast when it makes sense to be fast, and be slow when slowness is called for.”⁴⁵ He covers topics of food, cities, medicine, work, leisure, and children and concludes, “What the world needs, and what the Slow movement offers, is a middle path, a recipe for marrying *la dolce vita* with the dynamism of the information age.”⁴⁶ We are at the center of the information age, but we also need to slow down and be with our patrons, balance our needs and theirs, their speed with ours. A fun, interesting, and thought-provoking book.

While the slow foods concept may be seen by many as simply a gastronomic trend that will come and go, there is actually more substance to this than many might realize. Started as an essentially political movement in Italy decades ago in response to the encroachment of fast foods and agribusiness, it became global and has influenced restaurants, agriculture, and individual lives. It also has real

implications for the way time is used, the manner in which the intake of food for sustenance becomes a leisure activity that can enhance life rather than just maintain it. Petrini writes a very readable book on the slow food movement, *Slow Food Nation*.⁴⁷ Slow Foods, a non-profit international organization, writes on their website that “We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: *Fast Life*, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods.”⁴⁸ *The Slow Food Story* is the history of this movement and is a fascinating read.⁴⁹ The book makes it very clear that the movement is not just about eating a meal that doesn’t involve shouting your order into a box while seated in your car. The movement is about food production, distribution, land use, fair prices, and more. And the philosophy goes beyond food. Professor Nicola Perullo at Slow Foods’ University of Gastronomic Sciences says “we should now talk of ‘slow knowledge’ which in its emphasis on wisdom, understanding and experience, offers a counter to that ‘fast knowledge’ which has become reduced to technologically driven information that ‘can easily be reproduced and applied elsewhere.’”⁵⁰ For those especially interested in the topic, *Slow Food Nation* provides a more detailed look at the movement, as it is written by one of the founders of the movement. Both books are tangential to the topic of leisure, but their insight in moving away from the highly mechanized, rapid, rote style of life has some important things to say about our lifestyle in general. They are highly recommended for those interested in the topic.

Life I love you, all is groovy

Maybe the words from Simon and Garfunkel are dated. When was the last time you heard someone say groovy? But the concept is still valid. We need to slow down, look for some fun, look at those cobblestones and sit still so some petals can drop on us. Leisure, real leisure, is important. Toting the laptop, fretting about meetings, scribbling notes while “relaxing” just doesn’t qualify as time to recharge, rekindle, relax, and look around to see the world and those around us with fresh, renewed vision. It would seem that taking time to stop and smell the roses and maybe plant some, tour a garden, and actually take the time to really see the flowers is more than an old adage. There are benefits to taking time, doing something other than work, using those hard-earned vacation days, enjoying the days and hours when we are in, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* says, “The state of having time at one’s own disposal; time which one can spend as one pleases; free or unoccupied time.”⁵¹ And when we do return to the time that is not at our disposal, but that of our employer, we can be more productive, more efficient, and maybe happier.

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