INTRODUCTION: CHILEAN CHILDREN DURING THE PANDEMIC

The suspension of in-person classes and the closing of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a complete transformation in the daily life of school-aged children and adolescents. In Chile, this situation was particularly exacerbated due to the Full School Day (JEC, Jornada...
Escolar Completa), established in 1997, which has had the effect of a significant monopolisation of children's routine by the school. In effect, the school day at the primary level (grades 1 through 8)\(^1\) is designed for a compulsory minimum of 38 h weekly, which, in comparative terms, positions Chile as one of the countries with most hours of class worldwide, with 35% more hours than the OECD average (2017).

In addition to the JEC hours, it is common for schools to offer optional extracurricular activities, so a child in primary school may spend approximately 8 h daily at school, which does not include transportation time or other complementary activities. Although the JEC promised to eliminate school duties at home—mainly in the form of homework—and introduce free-choice curricular activities during the school day, evidence indicates that these objectives remain unfulfilled (Observatorio Chileno de Políticas Educativas [OPECH], 2006). This all points to a tendency toward the over-schooling of childhood, which, as mentioned by Chávez and Vergara (2017), has resulted in a reduction of leisure time and a substantial transformation of spaces of sociability and play.

Like all school systems worldwide, Chilean education was strongly impacted, with schools closing for nearly the entire academic year, which necessitated an improvised ‘distance education’. This new system faced enormous difficulties, especially in rural sectors and for families that lacked sufficient resources in their homes, which in the case of Chile represents a significant portion of the population. The manner in which schools attempted to achieve continuity in their programming during the pandemic varied widely, although a common factor was the suspension of in-person classes, which significantly reduced the time students dedicated to the school institution. Thus, the reality of distance learning weakened the school’s centrality in children’s routines, making room for the emergence of an excess of free time, which was rather marginal during in-person schooling. This situation was exacerbated for students at the primary level and from the lower social classes, in particular; in 2020 especially, these students had comparatively fewer hours of online classes and less time with teachers, in addition to the loss of complementary services such as school meals and tutoring (Ponce et al., 2020).

In the face of this destructuring of routines due to the lockdown and the closing of schools, the question arises of what the repercussions were in children’s daily life. Thus, this article aims to describe how students in primary education, from distinct regions and social classes, managed and made use of this unprecedented time, apart from their school obligations and outside the regulatory frameworks imposed previously by educational institutions. The article is focused on the activities carried out by children during their free time, observing their characteristics, preferences and routines as manifestations of their childhood subjectivities. Additionally, possible answers are put forward in terms of the impact of gender to explain certain differences and similarities observed in the use of time among girls and boys.

The debate on free time, leisure and its importance for subjects

In the social sciences, free time has been viewed from distinctive viewpoints. The first and simplest has been to hold it as that which remains after completing productive activities, or activities necessary for the satisfaction of vital necessities, including buying, sleeping, eating, etc., and social and familial obligations, such as domestic work; in this conception, free time is aimed at man’s physical and intellectual development (Munné, 1980). It refers, in this manner, to a temporal dimension in which subjects are free from any external purpose, and, especially, free from salaried forms of work (Weber, 1969). Among the possible uses of free time include leisure,
understood as all those activities which are distinguished by being chosen freely and whose functions are rest, amusement and personal development (Dumazedier, 1968). In other words, leisure emerges when a subject, during their free time, freely decides and manages their activities, obtains well-being, and satisfies the personal needs of resting, having fun or pursuing personal development (Puig & Trilla, 1987). Thus, the concept of leisure is differentiated from free time by its function, constituting a key form of utilising free time for well-being, learning, the development of creativity and participation.

However, authors including Rojek (2001) and Liebman (2011) have posited that this classic vision is devoid of criticism, isolating ‘leisure’ from the economic, social and cultural constraints that enable and restrict its possibilities. Ultimately, they assert that the difficult distinction between leisure and the rest of life is untenable in a context of globalisation and flexibility, since ideas on liberty, choice and self-determination are shaped by relations of production and consumption (Liebman, 2011; Rojek, 2001), which configure different types of inequalities. Specifically, Rojek (2001) presents a vision of leisure that requires emotional work, intelligence and the disarming of competition. In the same vein, in Habermasian terms, we could claim that leisure has two forms of expression: it is free when it is based on communication, and it is constrained when instrumental (Henderson & Spracklen, 2018).

This discussion allows for the observation of the complexity of free time and the explosion of leisure among children during the pandemic in two ways. First, and very simply, the school represents the productive life of children, which because of long school days in Chile monopolises their routines (Chávez & Vergara, 2017). Conversely, in relation to the discussion provided by Rojek (2001), it is not possible to understand leisure in a homogeneous or absolutist manner, and therefore a nonlinear focus on childhood leisure is established, urging us to observe in children’s activities differences and nuances that affect their experience through the integration of a vision of their material and cultural constraints.

**Research on the use of free time during childhood**

The study of the use of free time by children is recent, and the majority of work in this area has concentrated on ‘structured’ free time; as a result, there are studies that focus on activities carried out by children in an ‘extracurricular’ manner, but few that address ‘unstructured’ free time. However, the most recent literature on the topic accounts for the fact that including both types of activity complicates the vision of children’s daily life (Kanka et al., 2019; Sauerwein & Ress, 2020). In any case, and broadly speaking, the majority of research approaches the study of the use of free time among children by quantifying it through questionnaires (surveys or ‘schedule filling’; Archbell et al., 2020; Larson & Verma, 1999; Mullan, 2018; Sauerwein & Ress, 2020; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001), although iconic studies in the field with ethnographic and qualitative approaches also stand out (Lareau, 2000; Lareau, 2011). On the other hand, a small number of studies have also utilised temporal panels for comparing children’s lives (Mullan, 2018; Shaw et al., 2013), among which the latter study follows an interesting line of research in the UK by comparing three distinct moments (1975, 2000, and 2015) and observing how children’s life has changed across time. In any case, this knowledge production, whether quantitative or qualitative, has focused on reporting by parents on the activities of their children and has disregarded the points of view of children in terms of their self-perception of time and its management, establishing and adult-centric perspective from which to study children’s free time and scarcely including children’s own perspectives (Sauerwein & Ress, 2020).
Some of the most interesting findings within this field refer to the variables that influence the use of free time by children. Among them, one of the first and most important is the cultural and economic capital of parents (Lareau, 2011; Lareau, 2000; Kanka et al., 2019; Sauerwein & Ress, 2020), who make decisions about structured time (e.g. by choosing extracurricular activities) or establish limits on unstructured time. In this sense, the evidence indicates that children from more affluent classes in the United States would be more susceptible to experiencing their free time within the structure imposed by their parents, while children from lower classes would tend to experience a much more informal organisation of their free time (Lareau, 2000). Indeed, in terms of recent research, the comparative study by Sauerwein and Ress (2020) (which carries out an analysis of data from 14 countries) concludes that the lives of children from higher socioeconomic groups around the world are much more similar than the lives of children from distinct socioeconomic levels within a given country.

Meanwhile, another variable that has been studied extensively to differentiate the use of free time is gender. Marked differences exist in the use of free time among girls and boys; Larson and Verma (1999), for example, report that in developed countries, boys spent more time on screens and less time carrying out domestic duties than girls, while Ferrar et al. (2012) state that boys spent more time on screens, but also engaged in more physical exercise compared to girls, who preferred engaging in social activities (with female or male friends) or studying, or were more dedicated to household work. In this same line, Mullan (2018) establishes in a comparative study that girls consistently dedicated more time to schoolwork and studying over time, while their time dedicated to household work had decreased, while boys' screen time had increased. In Chile, meanwhile, scarce information exists on the routines and lives of children, but it has been noted that during the pandemic, girls have been engaging largely in activities such as drawing, painting or crafts, as well as helping with housework or socialising online, while boys have been playing video games daily (Ponce et al., 2020).

Exploring this evidence at greater depth, empirical studies on free time activities and play among children assert that these activities are strongly marked by gender stereotypes (González & Rodríguez, 2020; Kanka et al., 2019; Todd et al., 2017; Ferrar et al., 2012; Freeman, 2007; Servin et al., 1999). Several interesting conclusions have arisen from this literature, and one of the most validated is that boys have a greater attachment to gender stereotypes in the choice of activities they carry out compared to girls (Alexander et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2004; Freeman, 2007; Miller et al., 2009). This could have various explanations, among which the cultural presence of what girls and boys should play is particularly important, as well as the individual family and their expectations, where parents may display far greater rigidity regarding the role of their sons than that of their daughters in terms of gender (Burge, 1981; Freeman, 2007). For example, Freeman (2007) reports that the choice of toys by girls and boys between 3 and 5 years old is deeply stereotyped, but with a greater degree of freedom among girls, which is directly related to the beliefs of their parents (collected in interviews), who tend to support girls in exercising their freedom of choice regardless of gender stereotypes, as opposed to boys.

Lastly, in Chile, studies on free time and childhood are scarcer, and mainly present the quantification of activities carried out by children in their free time based on structured questionnaires (UNICEF, 2007, 2011). Moreover, social research on childhood that recognises children as social and political actors with the capacity for agency are likewise recent (Vergara et al., 2015). Thus, understanding through discourse and images how children have resolved the emergence of free time during a pandemic and what they do with this time, from a non-adult-centric perspective, is not only essential for advancing in both areas of knowledge, but also groundbreaking for the population in question, which is unaccustomed to temporal autonomy.
METHODOLOGY

This article is part of a larger study whose objective was to investigate children’s experience learning from home during the COVID 19 pandemic. The data considered for this article correspond to the qualitative phase of the study, which consisted of conducting in-depth interviews along with a process of participative photo-elicitation, with a total of 43 children between 8 and 12 years old from three regions of Chile.

Ethical process

In order to work with children in this study, we followed an ethical process in line with the corresponding Committee of Ethics, who approved our research instruments (interview guidelines) and protocols of outreach, information, data storage and crisis (for complex emotional situations during interviews). To ensure the fully voluntary participation of parents and children in this study and their access to all necessary information regarding the study and their involvement in it, an informed consent was included for the mother, father or primary legal guardian, and an informed assent for the children. Both protocols were recorded via audio, in line with the context of lockdown. Afterward, in accordance with the protocols established by the ethics committee, all materials (audio recordings and photos) were stored privately, with only the researchers having access.

Definition of the sample

The sample included children between 8 and 12 years old from three different regions of Chile (Región Metropolitana, Ñuble, and Los Ríos) who attended both public and private school establishments, from urban and rural zones, and from lower, middle and upper social classes. We worked with a sample structured in order to achieve the greatest diversity of cases possible within the established sample criteria. Given the sensitivity of this research (working with children virtually during the height of the pandemic), participants were contacted via the researchers’ own networks and later through confirmed participants’ extended contacts in a process of snowball sampling.

Finally, the sample was composed of a total of 43 participants, 20 girls and 23 boys, who included 17 residents of the Metropolitan Region (Chile’s capital and urban center), 14 from the Region of Ñuble (in the south-central zone) and 12 from the Region of Los Ríos (in the southern zone), of which eight live in rural areas and 35 in urban areas. Nine upper-class participants, 23 middle-class children (consider upper, middle and lower middle class) and 11 lower class children.

Childhood research techniques

In order to understand children’s learning experiences during the pandemic, we implemented methodologies that could draw us in to their points of view. Specifically, two techniques were used to achieve this: semi-structured interviews and participative photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002).
The interview was utilised on two occasions for each participant. During the first meeting, a short conversation took place about mainly descriptive data, including children’s names and ages, who they lived with and what school they attended. In turn, a superficial inquiry was made regarding changes in routine after the closing of schools. Following this initial contact, children were asked whether they wanted to continue in the study as active and collaborative agents in the investigation. In order to do so, they were asked to take photographs of their daily routines and chores, which would then be reviewed together as they provided us with a visual doorway into their daily existence.

Following the previous step began a process of participative photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002; Martínez-Guzmán, 2018), in which we sought to incentivise children’s own exploration of their realities, encouraging them to be collaborators in the research process. The photo-elicitation facilitated a situated approach (using semi-structured interviews) within the experiences of the participants, constructing a dialogue that ranged from commentary about what they thought of the exercise, to what appeared in the images in descriptive terms as well as what was not observed (Cooper: 4, Cooper, 2017).

Thus, visuality adopted the role of ‘detonator’ of meanings among participants, starting conversations about daily routine from the image of a bed or desk, or about academic workload from a notebook, ultimately driving the second semi-structured interview. In this sense, it allowed—although the topic of the interview and investigation was centred on ‘educational experiences’—the overlapping and primacy of domestic, school and leisure issues, as well as children’s feelings and emotions during the pandemic, in dialogue with the lockdown scenario.

Systematisation and analysis

For the systematisation and analysis of the data collected, certain aspects of narrative analysis were utilised, with an initial case-by-case analysis followed by a second process of cross-sectional analysis. During this first stage, narrative sheets were constructed for each child, which delineated the following: (1) descriptive–material situation (referring to family and individual resources for education at home, ways of organisation adopted by the school and actual school activities); (2) descriptive–social (transformations in connections, nuclear family relationships, leisure and recreation activities); and (3) interpretive (reflections on how school should be, socioemotional approaches, promoting children's analysis of the current circumstances).

In a second analytical stage, following the line of narrative analysis, cases were analysed in a cross-sectional manner, as we observed the emergence of shared aspects with a special emphasis on gender, social class and territory, while also including emergent and relevant factors for the participants such as their socioemotional lives and their relationships with their family members. Drawing from this second stage, the management and attributes of free time could be observed more clearly as a central linking element within the results.

RESULTS

In this section, we will describe in-depth the activities that the children carried out during their free time in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will consider these activities through the lens of gender differences, though we will also complicate our gaze by examining the roles of territory and social class. Additionally, the results that we present will be complemented with
visual materials (particularly photos) obtained during the research, with which we seek primarily to reinforce the central ideas that we set forth.

We emphasise that the data obtained during this study were collected during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when a strict movement and travel policy was in place. The activities that were integrated into the analysis were those which corresponded to free time and leisure, focusing mainly on unorganised time; it bears mentioning that extracurricular activities remained suspended during this time period for the majority of children in the sample.

**Excess time, bored children**

Both girls and boys describe not knowing what to do with their free time during the pandemic, alluding to a generalised sensation of boredom. In effect, boredom presents itself as a cross-sectional problem in the cases in question, though we note that boys have had greater difficulties than girls in confronting or avoiding these states. It is possible that this difference can be explained by the lower diversity of activities that the former engage in during their pandemic routines, and we observe that despite the fact that broadly speaking, girls and boys coincide in many of the activities carried out, girls tend to combine a greater variety of different activity types: arts and crafts, video games, action figures, socialisation with friends and physical activities, among others. Meanwhile, boys tend to devote their free time to a more restricted group of activities, with video games predominating and to be less proactive in solving the problem of boredom.

In any case, many girls and boys relate having learned to use their free time for leisure activities during this period in such a way that they have managed to avoid becoming bored, taking advantage of this state as an opportunity to discover new interests.

“When I was in in-person classes, it was just like when I got to school, I would get home and get so bored. So now I’ve learned to not be so bored. Sometimes I draw, I paint’

(Boy, 10 years old)

**Between video games and outdoor activities**

In general terms, we observe that participants in this study, especially in urban areas, devote the majority of their free time to video games, including console gaming and online games on smartphones or tablets. They also frequently view YouTube videos or television programmes. While both girls and boys incorporate video games and other screen time into their routines, it is especially common for these types of activities to be central to the routines of boys in urban contexts, and they invest more time than girls in this area. Boys’ preferred game categories include action, shooting, strategy, sports and open world, while girls prefer party games—with Among Us being one of the most played—as well as social games. See Figure 1.

The type of game accessed by girls and boys and the time devoted to these activities varies based on the availability of devices at home, the provision or lack thereof of an internet connection, and family rules, which in turn depend heavily on children’s social class and the region—urban or rural—that they inhabit. In general, we note that urban children from the middle and upper classes have consoles available—usually PlayStation or Nintendo—in addition to other devices. On the other hand, for girls and boys from lower middle and lower classes, it is
more common to have only a cell phone available to play on or perhaps a computer shared with other family members; furthermore, oftentimes their opportunities for gaming are reduced due to lack of internet connection, resulting in increased time watching television. Likewise, just as Lareau (2000) has concluded, the parents of middle- and upper-class children tend toward greater regulation of their daughters’ and sons’ screen time. As one participant, an 11-year-old boy from a middle-class neighbourhood in the capital city of Santiago, told us, ‘my parents don’t let me play PlayStation more than four hours a day’. In lower-class families, meanwhile, rules for screen time are very uncommon.

By contrast, we observe that in the daily life of rural children, the use of these devices seems to be less significant, and their use tends to be associated with moments of boredom or not having other entertainment available. Without a doubt, this phenomenon reflects the lower availability of technological devices and, especially, of internet connection in rural zones, which often limits the possibilities for activities that require greater connectivity, such as watching videos or gaming online. We find that rural girls and boys tend to substitute these activities with watching series, cartoons or other programmes on television.

Child: I ride my bike, and when I don’t have classes I play outside with my cousin, we ride bikes or play sports.
R: Ok. And what about if there is bad weather and you have to stay inside?
Child: Just playing on the cell phone.
R: And do you have something like PlayStation, Nintendo, a gaming console?
Child: No.
R: You don’t play video games?
Child: No. (Boy, 11 years old)
In addition, however, rural children tend to incorporate outdoor activities and games into their chores to a greater extent, managing their free time in relation to their environment or the productive activities of their households. The greater availability of open spaces and the greater proximity to the natural world of the countryside, combined with the lower incidence of technological devices and the games associated with them, are likely at the root of this higher occurrence of play in the fresh air and, above all, away from screens. Thus, rural children incorporate, for example, climbing trees, playing with rocks, sticks and other natural objects, going on walks or excursions, horseback riding, taking care of plants and trees, chopping and stacking wood and feeding and caring for animals within their daily routines. See Figure 2.

**Figure 2** Picture sent by a 9-year-old girl from the rural area of Ñuble region. The photo shows the sister of the girl jumping in a trampoline
A 10-year-old boy who lives in a remote area of the Region of Ñuble describes his preferred winter activities to us as follows:

**Child:** When there's light rain I go to kill birds with the slingshot.

**R:** You kill birds with the slingshot?

**Child:** Yes.

**R:** And what about in the summer, do you go out to kill birds or no?

**Child:** No, in summer there's no bird hunting.

**R:** Why not?

**Child:** Because birds are raised in the summer so they have chicks.

In the case of girls and boys from urban zones, these activities are practically nonexistent in their imaginaries or repertoires of possibilities, and during the most critical periods of the sanitary crisis, many remained shut inside their houses without going out to open spaces; following lockdown, many only accompanied their parents once in a while on a bicycle ride or to go shopping. In any event, the time dedicated to outdoor activities for urban children is certainly less than screen time.

**Using your hands: Arts and crafts**

Another type of activity fundamental to children's daily life includes those linked to arts and crafts. We observe that drawing, painting and the invention and creation of objects using different craft techniques—from assembling structures to creations with wire, wool, thread, etc.—are incorporated daily within children's routines in both urban and rural areas.

In general, girls dedicate greater time to making things with their hands, mainly drawings, paintings, crafts and food, among other examples; boys, meanwhile, not only dedicate less time to these activities, but when they do engage in them, they mostly restrict themselves to drawing and painting. In addition, boys tend to focus their creations on themes such as superheroes, animals, myths or videogame characters, and they generally do not show interest in techniques or materials. In terms of crafts, girls' graphic pieces, drawings and paintings span more varied subjects, in addition to combining different techniques, colours, and materials, thus expressing their creative potential through a permanent search for resources and styles. See Figure 3.

In addition to painting or drawing, in general girls show greater interest in handicrafts ranging from posters to sewing, knitting and embroidery and creating objects from recycled materials and other elements. It is worth noting that interest in and dedication to creative and artistic activities is not mediated by the social class nor the economic resources of children's families, although these factors certainly have a direct impact on the materials available. Children from more disadvantaged families, then, often reuse domestic objects for their creations or try to procure the materials they need, as explained by an 11-year-old girl from a lower-class family living in a small town in the Region of Ñuble:

**R:** Ah, so you love to make things, huh? With your hands?

**Child:** Yeah, I love it, that's why I save money and buy things. Right now I'm saving up for some pens I want.
FIGURE 3  Photo taken by an 11-year-old girl from a suburban area of the Ñuble region. The picture shows a page of the dictionary she created during the pandemic using different types of font.
Friends and the search for spaces for socialisation

One of the spheres most affected by the transformation of life during the pandemic has been social life. Without a doubt, the suspension of in-person classes and long periods of lockdown have meant a nearly complete loss of the spaces for socialisation that existed for children prior to the pandemic.

Within this restrictive scenario, we observe differences in children’s routines based on gender in relation to social activities or interaction among peers. In general, girls show themselves to be more proactive in the search for spaces for connecting with friends, and even during periods of total lockdown, they invented ways of staying in contact. Boys, on the other hand, show less interest in inventing new spaces for socialisation during periods of greater restriction.

Significant differences exist in this area associated with social class. First, middle- and upper-class children, particularly girls, have remained connected to their friends through videocalls, during which they engage in different activities including watching movies or videos together, drawing, painting, making handicrafts or simply talking. Older girls also incorporate chatting on WhatsApp or online gaming into their daily lives. Middle- and upper-class boys, on the other hand, have maintained spaces of socialisation through online gaming, and generally do not resort to other forms of remote communication with friends, as one participant from Quilicura in the Metropolitan Region illustrated:

**Child:** Fortnite is for fighting and we can fight among ourselves or as a team, with more players connected.

**R:** So that’s why you talk? **Child:** Yes, that’s why we talk. (Boy, 12 years old)

In terms of children from lower middle-class and lower-class backgrounds, there is less access to resources for remote connections, so in spite of the interest among girls in particular to communicate with friends, these intentions generally have not come to fruition. Nevertheless, some children from lower-class backgrounds continued going out and playing with friends and neighbours in their neighbourhoods even during lockdown.

In relation to territory, it is important to highlight the marked differences in the presence of social activities in the use of free time between children from rural backgrounds and those from the city, which arose for two main reasons. The first, which was outlined previously, entails the technological limitations that restrict any type of communicative activity that is not in-person; in addition, though, in other cases, the configuration and dynamics of community life more typical of rurality have attenuated these limitations or have promoted the maintenance of social links beyond the immediate nuclear family, and it is common that these children live in zones in which they share physical spaces and interact daily with other family members and/or neighbours. This situation was exemplified by the words of a 12-year-old boy from a lower middle-class background living in a small coastal hamlet outside the city of Valdivia:

**Child:** Now I’m going out more, with my cousins over that way over the hill.

**R:** Oh yeah? And do you do have cousins who live over there, close by?

**Child:** Yeah. Actually, we meet them on the hill. There’s a road to get to Kemi’s house, then to get to Cristofer’s grandparents’ house, to get to Martina’s house and then to Cristofer’s house and from there you go up to get to my great-grandma’s house.
Care and self-care

Prior to the pandemic, 84% of children under 12 in Chile carried out household duties for at least 1 h per week (Ministerio Desarrollo Social, 2013), with girls engaging in these activities in greater proportion. While we cannot establish whether the time children dedicated to household chores while in-person classes were suspended increased or decreased, it is clear that they form part of their routines. In this sense, it is very common for schoolchildren to work daily on setting and clearing the table, helping with cleaning (mainly sweeping), making beds or washing dishes, and in some cases, they are involved in the preparation of meals and caring for younger siblings. We do not observe class differences in the time dedicated to domestic work, and one possible explanation for this phenomenon is that during the study period, because of sanitary restrictions, families that usually had hired cleaners, cooks and the like at home, which a is common scenario in Chilean middle- and upper-class households, needed to do without them and assume all the duties of the household on their own.

Despite not observing differences in the domestic activity load among girls and boys, there seems to be a greater disposition and more proactive attitude toward household labour among the former, who often consider these activities as simply part of their responsibilities and not necessarily an obligation or special collaboration within the home. As one participant explained:

‘I prepare the teatime meal. The milk with bread in the afternoon, because sometimes they have meetings at that time and since I can do it (...) I set the table, put out the food, clean the patio, tidy up the house a bit, I do my homework, I’m responsible’.

(Girls, 11 years old)

Likewise, girls, in contrast to boys, invest time during their days in organising and cleaning their rooms, clothing and toys by their own accord. Some of the participants in the study described resorting to these types of activity in order to deal with boredom. See Figure 4.

Sometimes I organize my closet and fold the clothes in a different way. I watch videos on how to fold clothes because I do one thing and I get really bored, so I change the room around a lot

(Girl, 10 years old)

Another difference marked by gender occurs in rural zones in terms of the type of activities carried out, where, in contrast to urban zones, it is common for boys to be assigned chores that involve the use of physical strength, such as chopping wood, while girls are limited to the chores of cleaning, organising and cooking. As one girl described:

Sometimes my dad and my brothers would work on more difficult things, like with more strength

(Girl, 10 years old)

Within the sphere of care, one of the activities that girls and boys took part in equally was caring for pets. It is notable that in many cases, these pets had arrived at their homes during the pandemic and played a fundamental role in children's lives during this period. Without any distinction based on gender, class or region, a large majority of children interviewed consider their daily activities to include playing with, caring for or spending time with their animals, with whom they develop
FIGURE 4 Photo taken by an 8-year-old girl from a suburban area of the metropolitan region. The picture shows several of her stuffed animals disposed tidily in her bed. Arranging them this way is a part of her daily routine.
deep emotional bonds and who have represented an important source of support in overcoming the loneliness that lockdown has signified and the absence of in-person classes and other instances of socialisation. See Figure 5.

**R:** And who takes care of Bengi, who is in charge of him?

**Child:** The kids pick up the poop and feed him. Sometimes our parents give him food... Ehh, we also take him for walks. I mean, we have a calendar of days. I mean, me and my brother pick up the poop and feed him, we do it like every other day, Monday me, Jota on Tuesday, me on Wednesday, Jota on Thursday, me on Friday, Jota on Saturday, me on Sunday, after that me again on Monday and that’s how it works. (Boy, 11 years old).

While the assumed definition of free time would tend to exclude all those activities carried out as part of domestic or family obligations, here we incorporate these into the definition, as it seems that girls include this work within their interests, beginning with their own self-care but also extending to the spaces they inhabit, without the mediation of parents’ demands; this work may

![Figure 5](image)

**FIGURE 5** Photograph (‘selfie’) of a 10-year-old kid from the metropolitan region in Chile. The picture shows the affectionate and close relationship with his dog. Pet photos were the most repeated among both girls and boys
also constitute activities of entertainment and enjoyment. This does not occur in the same way among boys, who appear to take on these activities as an obligation or a way of helping rather than based on their own motivation, with the exception of caring for pets.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The pandemic together with the dissolution of the school in its traditional form and its replacement with distance learning has destructured the routines of childhood, organised and colonised by the school institution, leaving an unprecedented amount of free time at children's disposal. Facing the breakdown of the structure of daily life, managing and occupying this time has formed part of the challenges that children have had to confront in the crisis scenario.

To that effect, an initial reflection on the results of this study allow us to question the hyper-schooling of children and the pressure from society as a whole to make childhood a productive time (Chávez & Vergara, 2017), and how this comes into play in a reduced development of the capacity for agency in terms of free time. Our findings point to a generalised difficulty among children to resolve the question of what to do in and with their time, and an attachment to the school as a structurer of the daily routine that prevents them from being unoccupied. In this sense, free time should not only be reclaimed as one of children's fundamental rights (Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU), 2013), as time fundamental for self-discovery, the development of abilities in different areas and self-realisation, but also as part of a vital period that is essential to the promotion of autonomy, curiosity and emotional management, which are undoubtedly crucial factors in the affirmation of the child as a social and political actor. In turn, we assume, just as formulated by Rojek (2001), that the use of free time beginning in childhood is mediated by conditions of inequality—based on class, gender, territory—that limit or enhance the use of leisure time, its expressions and constructions, and that this free time is not always linked with activities that foster personal well-being or development (e.g. excessive screen time). Further research should go into greater depth regarding the variables that play a role in taking advantage of free time as leisure time.

On the other hand, the results give an account of how free time is not occupied in a neutral manner, but rather is mediated by gender stereotypes, as well as by territorial variables and social class. In the face of this reality, while we believe that these relationships go beyond the scope of this article, we do recover certain findings in light of current feminist theory, with the objective of setting future reflections in motion.

In this vein, the main finding of the study indicates that fundamental differences exist in the manner in which girls and boys resolve the issue of free time. These differences are expressed, on the one hand, in girls' engagement in a more varied array of activities than boys, as well as their incorporation of distinct forms of entertainment: arts and crafts, video games, action figures, various instances of socialisation with friends and activities linked to domestic chores, among others. Meanwhile, boys tend to devote their free time to a more restricted set of activities in which video games predominate for urban boys and outdoor activities for those in rural contexts. On the other hand, the second expression of this difference occurs in the greater difficulty we observed among boys to confront or resolve states of boredom compared to girls, who tend to be more proactive in the face of the problems that emerge as a result of excess time.

In this sense, and in the same vein as previous studies on childhood and free time (Alexander et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2004; Freeman, 2007; González & Rodríguez, 2020; Miller et al., 2009), we note that boys generally remain closer to a stereotype of what they should be doing. As posed
by Rubin (1986), the system of ‘sex/gender’ would imply that societies carry out a social inscription of biological sexuality through the assignment of roles to distinct sexes within society. In accordance with our results, effectively we were able to observe how boys are constrained in the use of their free time beginning with these arbitrary assignments of gender roles associated with the feminine and the masculine. In simple terms, while girls join together in their repertoire ‘typically feminine’ practical activities, such as care, with playing sports and gaming, boys reduce these possibilities to those imposed as masculine and their repertoires are quickly exhausted.

This assertion, then, allows the opening of the discussion on gender inequalities in a double tension: for their part, girls show greater diversification of their activities, incorporating care among them in an affirmative sense, which could point to a greater burden and concern with the reproduction of life. This situation, however, could also be rethought as a more comprehensive and expressive form of development. Meanwhile, boys considerably reduce their creative and expressive possibilities, which has implications in their capacities to manage their free time, while simultaneously limiting their possibilities of development and search for identity, causing them greater emotional wear during the pandemic.

As proposed by Mendieta-Izquierdo et al. (2021), the invisibility of men’s feelings positions them in a contradictory state that continues to keep them in a space of privilege, while at the same time, in periods of crisis, can be perceived as oppressing them as boys in the process of identity construction. Incidentally, it is worth thinking about how masculinities are formed and which activities are promoted or not by society and by boys’ mothers, fathers and/or teachers. In this sense, we can interpret that the apparent freedom that we have observed in girls versus boys is nothing more than a drifting of feminine roles from the sex-gender system during childhood, that is, their confirmation not being granted importance. Traditional masculinity is not configured based on an essentialism, but rather is culturally constructed (Carabí & Segarra, 2000), configuring stereotyped discourses about the male being that allow his suffering and emotions to be made invisible (Mendieta-Izquierdo et al., 2021). This situation continues to be reproduced as the product of a patriarchal system that we know to also oppress men, but while generally maintaining the privileges granted to them intact.

An understanding of the manner in which girls and boys utilise their free time opens a space to discuss and think about the way in which masculinity is constructed during childhood and what is associated with it, as well as constituting a good starting point for questioning and deconstructing such stereotypes, thus promoting the emergence of new masculinities. In this sense, this study joins with what Butler (2006) formulated regarding the social conflict around the expression of new identities, contributing to the displacement of the norm in favour of a deconstruction of gender stereotypes, as well as of conscious limitation around the need for future research on the realities of non-binary and trans children.

Starting from the doors opened by this research, we propose delving deeper into the roles and expectations that exist for boys and girls on the part of mothers, fathers, and/or tutors, from a non-adult-centric perspective (Mukherjee, 2020). This input would nourish the line of research of the present study and explore the roles of caretakers in the formation of gender roles dominant in childhood.

To conclude, we believe that it is necessary to emphasise the lack of studies with children in Chile, and further, in qualitative and intersectional research regarding the use of free time. In accordance with this, we urge going into greater depth in this type of research, inasmuch as we can observe in new generations a reflection of the social, as well as the fact that it is actors who contain the permanent possibility of transformation of society (Magistris, 2019). In this sense, works that incorporate childhood as a static and homogeneous category are not
sufficient; rather, collaborative and participatory methodologies must be included that give agency to children's world (Sepúlveda, 2021) and that promote spaces for their expression. Thus, the inclusion of visual and narrative techniques represents an approach to the recognition of childhood subjectivities and the ways in which they play, activate, inherit and appropriate the contexts in which they find themselves situated (Stewart & Floyd, 2004). Through these strategies, it would be plausible to approach what Mignolo defines as border thinking (2006), that is, to contribute to the conditions of possibility that would allow that which has remained invisible in the traditional descriptors of childhood to be heard and seen (Medina Melgarejo & da Costa Maciel, 2016).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The study was funded by the National Research and Development Agency (Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo) through the Competition for the Rapid Allocation of Resources for Research Projects on Coronavirus (COVID-19) Year 2020 (COVID0065), together with funds from the Center for Advanced Research in Education (Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación ANID/PIA/Basal Funds for Centers of Excellence FB0003) of the University of Chile.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors of this article declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ORCID
Rocío Díaz https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9037-2785

ENDNOTES
1 In Chile, since 2003, there are 12 years of compulsory schooling, beginning in the first cycle of primary education, which lasts 8 years. Coverage is almost universal in the case of primary education (99.7%) and very high for secondary education (87.7%) (MINEDUC, 2018). In 2020, school enrollment rose to 3,608,158 students. Although preschool education is not compulsory, coverage at the kindergarten level is quite high (currently 94% according to MINEDUC data from 2019).

2 For other study results: Bellei et al. (2021). The Fragility of the school-in pandemic in Chile. In: Reimers, F (editor). Primary and Secondary Education during Covid-19: Disruptions to Educational Opportunity During a Pandemic. Springer Academic Publishers. Available from: https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783030814991; Ponce et al. (2020). Experiencias educativas en casa de niñas y niños durante la pandemia COVID-19. Available from: https://www.ciperchile.cl/wp-content/uploads/CIAE-EXP-EDU-final.pdf.

3 Comité Ética de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades de la Universidad de Chile. More information is available at https://cedea.uchile.cl/comite-de-etica.

4 The prevalence of screens was reaffirmed through the numerous photos sent by participants, which show diverse devices of this type.

REFERENCES
Alexander, G., Wilcox, T., & Woods, R. (2009). Sex differences in infants’ visual interest in toys. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 38(3), 427–433. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-008-9430-1
Archbell, K., Coplan, R., & Rose-Krasnor, L. (2020). What did your child do today? Describing young children's daily activities outside of school. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 18*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19898724

Bellei, C., Contreras, M., Ponce, T., Yáñez, I., Díaz, R., & Vielma, C. (2021). The fragility of the school-in-pandemic in Chile. In F. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and secondary education during covid-19: Disruptions to educational opportunity during a pandemic*. Springer Nature.

Burge, P. L. (1981). Parental child-rearing sex-role attitudes related to social issue sex-role attitudes and selected demographic variables. *Home Economics Research Journal, 9*(3), 193–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19898724

Butler, J. (2006). *Deshacer el género* (2nd ed.). Paidós.

Campbell, A., Shirley, L., & Candy, J. (2004). A longitudinal study of gender-related. *Cognition and behavior. Developmental Science, 7*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7678.2004.00316.x

Carabi, A., & Segarra, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Nuevas masculinidades* (1st ed.). Icaria.

Chávez, P., & Vergara, A. (2017). *Ser niño y niña en el Chile de hoy. La perspectiva de sus protagonistas acerca de la infancia, la adultez y las relaciones entre padres e hijos* (1st ed.). Ceibo.

Cooper, V. (2017). Lost in translation: Exploring childhood identity using photo-elicitation. *Children's Geographies, 15*(6), 625–637. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1284306

Dumazedier, J. (1968). *Hacia una civilización del ocio* (2nd ed.). Estela.

Ferrar, K., Olds, T., & Walters, J. (2012). All the stereotypes confirmed: Differences in how Australian boys and girls use their time. *Health Education and Behavior, 39*(5), 589–595. https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198111423942

Freeman, N. (2007). ‘Preschoolers' perceptions of gender appropriate toys and their parents' beliefs about gender-ized behaviors: Miscommunication, mixed messages, or hidden truths?’ *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34*(5), 357–366. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-006-0123-x

González, E., & Rodríguez, Y. (2020). Estereotipos de género en la infancia. *Pedagogía Social, 36*(8), 125–138. https://doi.org/10.7179/PSRI_2020.36.08

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies, 17*(1), 13–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860220137345

Henderson, S., & Spracklen, K. (2018). ‘Plus ça change, plus C’est la Même chose’: Music promoting, digital leisure, social media and community. *Leisure Sciences, 40*, 239–250. https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2017.1378139

Hofferth, S., & Sandberg, J. (2001). How American children spend their time. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*(2), 295–308. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3654593

Kanka, M., Wagner, P., Buchmann, M., & Spiel, C. (2019). Gender-stereotyped preferences in childhood and early adolescence: A comparison of cross-sectional and longitudinal data. *European Journal of Development Psychology, 16*(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2017.1365703

Lareau, A. (2000). Social class and the daily lives of children: A study from the Unites States. *Childhood, 7*(2), 155–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568200007002003

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class race, and family life* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

Larson, R., & Verma, S. (1999). How children and adolescents spend time across the world: Work, play, and developmental opportunities. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*(6), 701–736. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.6.701

Liebman, G. (2011). Reviews: Beyond the everyday. Chris Rojek, the labour of leisure: The culture of free time, sage: London, thousand oaks, CA, New Delhi and Singapore, 2010. *International Sociology, 26*(2), 247–256.

Magistris, G. (2019). *Niñez en movimiento: del adultocentrismo a la emancipación* (p. 256). Editorial Chirimbote.

Martínez-Guzmán, A. (2018). Una Relectura de Fotovoz como Herramienta Metodológica para la Investigación Social Participativa desde una Perspectiva Feminista. *EMPIRIA. Revista de Metodología de Ciencias Sociales, 41*, 157–185. https://doi.org/10.5944/empiria.41.2018.22608

Medina Melgarejo, P., & da Costa Maciel, L. (2016). Infancia y de/colonialidad: Autorias y demandas infantiles como subversiones epistémicas. *Educación Foco, 21*(2), 295–332. Available from. http://perdiodicos.ufjf.br/index.php/edufoco/article/download/19722/10590
Mendieta-Izquierdo, G., Tincaja-Prada, D., & Cuevas-Silva, M. (2021). Representations about emotions and masculinity in Bogota males. *Masculinities & Social Change, 10*(2), 186. https://doi.org/10.17583/MCS.2021.7319

Miller, C., Lurye, L., Zosuls, K., & Ruble, D. (2009). Accessibility of gender stereotype domains: Developmental and gender differences in children. *Sex Roles, 60*(11–12), p870–p881. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9584-x

MINEDUC (2018). Indicadores de la Educación 2010–2016. Available from: https://centroestudios.mineduc.cl/wpcontent/uploads/sites/100/2018/03/INDICADORES_aa.pdf

Ministerio Desarrollo Social. (2013). Principales Resultados Encuesta de Actividades de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes (EANNA) 2012. http://observatorio.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/storage/docs/eanna/2012/presentacion_EANNA_28junio_final.pdf

Mukherjee, U. (2020). Towards a critical sociology of children’s leisure. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure, 3*, 219–223. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12369

Munné, F. (1980). *Psicosociología del Tiempo Libre* (2nd ed.). Trillas.

Observatorio Chileno de Políticas Educativas (OPECH). (2006). Jornada Escolar Completa: La Divina Tragedia de La Educación Chilena. Available from https://www.opech.cl/inv/documentos_trabajo/JEC.pdf

OECD (2017). Education at a glance 2017: OECD indicators. OECD Publishing https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en

Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU). (2013). Observación General No 17 (2013) sobre el derecho del niño al descanso, el esparcimiento, el juego, las actividades recreativas, la vida cultural y las artes (artículo 31) Available from https://www.defensorianinez.cl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OG17.pdf

Ponce, T., Bellei, C., & Vielma, C. (2020). Experiencias educativas en casa de niñas y niños durante la pandemia COVID-19. Available from https://www.ciperchile.cl/wp-content/uploads/CIAE-EXP-EDU-final.pdf

Puig, J. M., & Trilla, J. (1987). *La pedagogía del ocio* (1st ed.). Alertes.

Rojeck, C. (2001). Leisure and life politics. *Leisure Sciences, 23*(2), 115–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/014904001300181701

Rubin, G. (1986). El tráfico de mujeres: notas sobre la “economía política” del sexo. *Nueva Antropología, 8*(3), 95–145. https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/159/15903007.pdf

Sauerwein, M., & Ress, G. (2020). How children spend their out-of-school time—a comparative view across 14 countries. *Children and Youth Services Review, 112*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104935

Sepúlveda, N. (2021). Sociología de la infancia y América Latina como su lugar de enunciación. *Iconos, Revista de Ciencias Sociales, 70*, 133–150. https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.70.2021.4438

Servin, A., Bohlin, G., & Berlin, L. (1999). Sex differences in 1-, 3-, and 5-year old toy choice. In a structured play-session. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 40*(1), 43–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9450.00096

Shaw, B., Watson, B., Frauendienst, B., Jones, T., & Hillman, M. (2013) *Children's independent mobility: A comparative study in England and Germany (1971-2010)*. Policy Studies.

Stewart, W., & Floyd, M. (2004). Visualizing Leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research, 36*(4), 445–460. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2004.11950031

Todd, B., Fischer, R., Di Costa, S., Roestorf, A., Harbour, K., Hardiman, P., & Barry, J. (2017). Sex differences in children’s toy preferences: A systematic review, meta-regression and meta-analysis. *Infant and Child Development, 27*(4), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2064

UNICEF.org (www.unicef.org). La voz de los niños. Educación en Chile y reforma educacional. 2007. Available from https://www.unicef.org/chile/media/1401/file/la_voz_de_los_ninos.pdf

UNICEF.org (www.unicef.org). Los niños de hoy: Percepción de las madres. 2011 Available from https://www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/224/Encuesta%20foro.pdf

Vergara, A., Peña, M., Chávez, P., & Vergara, E. (2015). Los niños como sujetos sociales: El aporte de los Nuevos estudios sociales de la infancia y el análisis crítico del discurso. *Psicoperspectivas, 14*(1), 55–65. https://doi.org/10.5027/PSICOPERSPECTIVAS-VOL14-ISSUE1-FULLTEXT-544

Weber, E. (1969). *El problema del tiempo libre*. Editora Nacional.
BIOSKETCH

**Rocío Díaz** is an Anthropologist from the University of Chile; she works as a research assistance at the Center for Advanced Research in Education of the University of Chile. Her research focuses on education processes and policies, gender in the school context and qualitative social research methods.

**Mariana Contreras** is a Sociologist from the University of Chile; she works as a research assistant at the Center for Advanced Research in Education of the University of Chile. She has conducted research and published about the sociocultural dimension of the school choice and its relationship with the socioeconomic school segregation, and high school improvement and innovation processes. Email: mdemarianacm@gmail.com

**Tania Ponce** is Master in Studies in Women, Gender and Citizenship (University of Barcelona) and Sociologist (Catholic University of Chile). She has worked as a research assistant at the Center for Advanced Research in Education, University of Chile. Her research focuses on gender and education, with a special emphasis on inequity and social exclusion. Email: tvponce@uc.cl

**Isabel Yañez** is a Sociologist from the University of Chile and Master in Visual Anthropology from FLACSO Ecuador, with studies in Feminist Geography. Her research focuses on territorial defence, women spatial production and the visual approach as a social intervention. Email: isabelpaz.ym@gmail.com

**How to cite this article:** Díaz, R., Contreras, M., Yáñez, I., & Ponce, T. (2022). Free time, gender and the pandemic: An exploration of children’s daily routines in the times of COVID-19 in Chile. *Children & Society, 00*, 1–21. [https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12576](https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12576)