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# Anxieties and aspirations: The making of active, informed citizens

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## Chapter 9

### **Anxieties and aspirations: the making of active, informed citizens**

**Doune Macdonald,**

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In writing *The Code of Health and Longevity* in 1818, Sir John Sinclair hoped that with the provision:

of the facts and observations, which are *most essential* for the preservation of health, .... that it will now be in the power of every considerable person, to ascertain what rules are suited to his particular situation, and to adopt those which are likely to be most efficacious.

(Sinclair 1818: 13)

Motivating Sir John's tome nearly two hundred years ago was his concern that 'people seldom attend to their health till it be too late' (p.12) and that 'the attainment of longevity, if accompanied with good health, is not only an important consideration to the individual, but also to the community to which he belongs' (p.12).

Since that time, persuading citizens to take responsibility for their health and well-being has become a pre-occupation of governments in most Western democracies. These government are said to be largely driven by neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on cost-containment, shrinking of the state, and a freeing of the market (Ball 2007). In practice, the contemporary thrust of citizenship in the context of the neo-liberal state is to increase citizens' allegiance to the state while, at the same time, fostering practices which minimize demand for state services (Hall and Coffey 2007). The thrust for the healthy citizen sits within a broader conception of citizenship comprising of three dimensions: 'membership of a democratic political community; the collective benefits and rights associated with membership; and participation within the community's political, economic and social processes' (Bellamy 2008: 12).

Thus the neo-liberal government is concerned with the varied kinds of work the rational actor does on themselves: 'social actors are induced to perform in order to comply "voluntarily" with the ends toward which their governance is directed' (Bennett, Dodsworth and Joyce 2007: 536). According to Kelly (2006: 18):

(Neo)Liberalism emerges, not only as a means of governing the state, the economy, and civil society, but also as a means of governing in these domains via the *rational, autonomous, responsible* behaviours and dispositions of a *free, prudent, active* Subject: a Subject we can identify as the entrepreneurial Self.  
(italics in the original)

This rational, active self comes into play in advanced liberal societies as a subject who is expected to conduct him or herself based on an ethic of active citizenship in relation to health:

in which the maximization of lifestyle, potential, health, and quality of life has become almost obligatory, and where negative judgements are directed toward those who will not, for whatever reason, adopt an active, informed, positive, and prudent relation to the future.

(Rose 2006: 25)

In this chapter we explore how the rational, active citizen is enmeshed in bodily practices and, more broadly, what Hohle (2009: 283) considered as ‘idealized citizenship’. While Hohle was writing of Black civil rights as an embodied social movement that moulded and shaped participant bodies for political purposes, we suggest that the same may be argued in relation to physical activity and health agendas. Hohle outlined how ‘citizenship schools’ for Black activists sought to de-racialize and thereby empower Blacks to be less Black and in turn more successful. More specifically, in Hohle’s examination of citizenship schools:

The idea was to organize a set of ethics that instructed blacks how to inspect the health of bodies – self, family, and friends – to ensure that black bodies did not conform to the black stereotypes of the dirty and unkempt self.

(Hohle 2009: 299)

As a social movement to construct and project idealized citizenship, bodily gestures, postures, grammar, habits and physical appearances were explicitly taught to urban Black people with a view to them trading their comportment for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

McClintock's (2009) historical research on citizenship looks at the intersection of citizenship discourses with class and, more specifically, the invention of idleness as a dimension of corporeal control. British discourses, beginning in the sixteenth century, associated poverty with the sloth of the farming classes. They functioned to 'not only to draw distinctions between labouring classes but also to sanction and enforce social discipline, to legitimize and plunder and to alter habits of labor' (p. 365) thereby socially and economically empowering those leading a particular valued 'lifestyle'. The discourses of idleness and work remain central to how the responsible (young) citizen self-manages, particularly given the co-opting of discourses of work (school work, employment) to health work (diet, exercise, balance etc.).

While studies of citizenship can highlight the significance of structural features such as race or class, according to Walkerdine (2003: 240), the neo-liberal subject is projected as one who has:

been completely freed from traditional ties of location, class and gender and to be completely self-produced. ... Freed from ties of class the new worker is totally responsible for their own destiny and so techniques and technologies of

regulation focus on the self-management of citizens to produce themselves as having the skills and qualities necessary to succeed in the new economy.

It follows that studies of citizenship also reveal shifts to a focus on ‘choices’ made by, and opportunities available to, citizens as individuals, rather than entitlements available from government, suggesting a more active and engaged citizenry as well as a more individual, less solidaristic, citizenship (Taylor-Gooby 2008).

In this chapter, we are interested in how young people interface with discourses around the rational, active citizen specifically in relation to physical activity and health.

Following Foucault, Walkerdine (2003: 239) notes there have been ‘shifts in modes of regulation [from] practices of policing and external regulation to *technologies of self-regulation* in which subjects come to understand themselves as responsible for their own regulation’. Halse (2009: 50) has built upon citizenship discourses and their contemporary features such as active citizenship and personal responsibility and proposes a notion of a ‘bio-citizen’ to suggest ‘a new species of human being’ constituted by ‘welding the body onto the social, cultural, economic and political responsibilities of citizenship and the state’. She argues that ‘[w]hile active citizenship is central to the identity of the new bio-citizen, her/his identity also derives from the disembodied, rational subject of liberal humanism, a universal ethic of justice and a notion of the common good’. For the bio-citizen then what

*counts* as virtuous, moral actions are those that serve the interests of the individual and all others in any society. Thus for the bio-citizen, failure to

control one's weight makes one a bad citizen by ignoring the interests of the common good needed for a well-ordered society.

(Halse 2009: 51)

Enacting the modes of regulation required of the new bio-citizen can be particularly intense for young people who are located within institutions of schooling and families as well as broader society. School health and physical education as well as (increasingly) health promotion in schooling and beyond seek to (re)educate young people on how to manage all aspects of their embodiment such as wearing neat school uniforms, resisting drug and alcohol abuse, managing their bodies for healthy weight, and partaking in desirable socialization through sport. 'Eat well, be active' health promotion iterations are intended to be pervasive and we examine how these discourses have been taken up or resisted by the young people with whom we worked in the *Life Activity Project*.

While the health promotion literature abounds with research on how to produce compliant, risk-averse young people, relatively little is known about resistance or its potential to be generative. The young people in the *Life Activity Project* data set (aged between 12 and 20) upon which this chapter draws were similar in age to those involved in Flanagan, Stout and Gallay's (2008) research into changes in adolescents' perceptions of their rights concerning their health and 'lifestyle' choices. They found that young people aged 14 to 15 years were more likely to argue their right to take risks with their bodies that might compromise their health and that the government had less right to constrain their individual choices i.e. personal rights peaked around 14-15 years

old. That said, females were less likely to endorse individual rights and more likely to endorse public health messages. Thus, we are interested in patterns of resistance, perhaps seen as an individual's 'right', as well as compliance and structural features that may moderate accessing 'healthy lifestyles'.

The slim, mesomorphic, physically active, fruit and vegetable consuming body is said to symbolize a particular idealized citizen constructed discursively, corporeally and performatively (Hohle 2009). As will be seen in the data to follow, young peoples' techniques of self management (i.e. resources employed to work on the body to meet citizenship expectations) were differently known, valued, available, managed, taken up and associated with both pleasure and pain. Hall and Coffey (2007: 294) reminds us that citizenship 'figures as a language of both anxiety and aspiration'. Walkerdine (2003: 241) explains:

The issue is that, in the Foucauldian sense, the practices of subjectification produce a constantly failing subject who has to understand their position in essentially personal and psychological terms. It is, of course a deep irony that the subject of neo-liberalism is actually produced as multiple, having to cope with existing in a number of different discourses and positions: the subject who is supposed to be able to choose who they are from a myriad of offerings, who can make themselves.

Our analysis of citizenship anxieties and aspirations draws on the *Life Activity Project* data set. As outlined in Chapter 1, it comprises a series of interviews, across a number



of years, with purposively selected young people from across the eastern states of Australia. A analysis of data entered into QSR Nvivo under nodes such as ‘knowing the right thing’, ‘health, ‘fun’, ‘care’, ‘I should’, and ‘time management’ was conducted to identify common themes and language use.

The first section of the chapter then looks at what information (and misinformation) the young people ‘know’ constitutes an appropriate ‘lifestyle’ and how these messages should be played out in their own lives. The corollary is the value that the young people place on particular corporeal practices within their daily lives. The second section focuses on the feelings of guilt and disappointment associated with living up to what the young people know and value, while the third section looks at the pervasiveness of the individual’s sense of responsibility to live the discourses, despite structural and contextual barriers and tensions.

### **Knowing and valuing healthy citizenship**

The abovementioned theoretical frameworks suggest the starting point for active citizenship is to know and understand the ‘rules’, to understand what it is one should do to be a ‘good citizen’. The second requirement is to understand that following the rules is imperative to being a good citizen and contributing to the good of society. While the first was very evident in the data, the second was more subtly embedded in *how* the young people talked about health and how people *should* behave; it was more about what was taken-for-granted as normative behaviour rather than explicitly expressed as contributing or not to the common good.

We can say with some conviction that the most of the young people in the study no matter what their class or gender, *knew* what it meant to be a healthy person in ways espoused in public health policy, health promotion strategies and school curricula (Baum 2008). As is evident from other papers in this section of the book, an understanding of health as eating the right kinds of foods (primarily vegetables and fruit), avoiding ‘fast foods’ and food high in sugar and fat and engaging in sufficient physical activity to maintain the balance of energy in energy out, was something they all offered as central to being healthy. For some this was complemented by references to emotional, social and mental health. But even when these other elements were mentioned, balancing intake of food and expenditure of energy still dominated most descriptions of health and featured as the primary areas which required attention if the participants saw themselves as needing to be more healthy.

The following quotes are typical of responses to questions about the participants’ meanings of health or about how they would rate their health (from 1–poor to 10–the best). For example, in the following quote, although Faye begins by associating health with a psychological attribute, she soon moves on to defining health in terms of food and exercise: ‘Well I think that confidence is a good thing, but also to be aware of um, you know, eating the right thing, but also not trying to diet. Like not trying cut back on what you eat but eating healthier and also do lots of exercise.’ (Faye, interview 2000). In one of his early interviews, Felipe rated his health ‘3, 4, 4 to the max’. When asked what he would need to do to be healthier replied: ‘Not be physically inactive, eat healthy, eat like no fatty foods, I eat like ten eggs a week and just my eating habits are not very good, high in fat’ (Felipe, interview 2001).

It was also well understood that if one practiced unhealthy behaviours (if one were ‘inactive’ or ate the wrong foods) one would suffer the consequences now and in the future. For some of the participants, the consequences were clearly in relation to appearance, for others the threat of ill-health and even not getting a job. This quote from Felicia, also illustrates how parents comments were often important in presenting the consequences of ‘unhealthy’ behaviour:

My parents are always saying ‘eat healthy because you don't want to, by the age of twenty-six, you don't want to be really, really big and not be able to do anything’. You see a lot of places when you go for jobs and they don't accept like bigger people. It's been on the news a couple of times and they were having like anti-discrimination or something like that, which there's a policy on. ... I think it helps you, I think perhaps you'll live longer, the healthier you are, the better life you'll have to live; longer lasting. I think it's important.

(Felicia, interview 2001)

This notion of responsibility, an understanding of what it takes to be a ‘good’ citizen and how to assess oneself as such, manifested in the young peoples’ talk as imperatives, this is what one (any ‘responsible person’) *should* do. For example, in the following quote Eun-ji, in defining ‘being healthy’ in terms of eating health foods and exercising, that is, ‘balancing energy in and out’ (the key tenets of a ‘healthy lifestyle’), reiterates that this is something you/one *should* do, *have to* do; to not do so is unthinkable. She directly addresses the irresponsible person who might transgress this rule: ‘If you do eat

fatty foods don't just sit around and do nothing'. If you can't manage this you should at least try - to not 'try' from this discursive position is to have given up on being a 'good' person.

Being fit and not eating fatty foods or if you do eat fatty foods you *have to* burn them off. If you do eat fatty foods *don't* just sit around and do nothing. You *have to* exercise and keep it off and have like, because we go shopping every Friday and I usually get chips every Friday it's just like a treat once a week. ... [And you reckon you have to burn those off over the weekend] Yep. And if you can't do that *try not* to have so much fatty foods and stuff.

(Eun-ji, interview 2002, italics to indicate imperatives)

Although the descriptions of lives over time demonstrated quite clearly how the capacity to manage their own health was substantially constrained by financial and geographical factors and competing family, health, study and work priorities, most of the young people still blamed themselves for failing to eat and exercise in the ways they 'knew' they should (see Chapter 10). Even those that resisted the imperative, for example, to 'be active', knew that they *should* be more active and judged themselves accordingly, some being more sanguine about this than others.

Angela, for example, is quite clear in the following quote that being physically active is not at all on her mind. Angela's comment is reminiscent of the response of the African-American young women to similar questions, in their case about food (in Chapter 11). Her own background is Fijian Indian and this culture seems to play her a role in her

capacity to challenge the discourse – few other participants in the studies would have been able or wanted to represent themselves in this way. On the other hand, she recognises herself as a ‘bad’ citizen, but she is not too worried about it and suggests that it is no-one else’s business. The quote below begins with her response to a question about ‘how she sees fitness?’

Angela: Okay, firstly the word fitness, anyway, the first image I would get in my head would be like people exercising, running around, doing weights or whatever. So again I'd be like ‘nah, wrong direction, don't want to see that word, moving on’.

Int: How do you think about yourself as in taking care of yourself?

Angela: Out of ten I would probably give it three.

Int: Why is that, what do you mean by that?

Angela: Well, I'm aware that I don't take care of myself that well. I'm a junk food junkie big time; chips [...] like in that aspect I know that what I'm doing is not right, it's not healthy and I'm not getting fit or anything. But even knowing that, it's not stopping me, I'm like, okay, I know that but I don't care, why should anyone else, I won't stop doing it, so, in that way I suppose, I'm not really all that, looking after myself that well, in the health and fitness way.

(Angela, interview 2002)

For Angela her priorities lie elsewhere with completing college so that she can earn money and be independent and her relationships with friends and family. She simply

does not subscribe to a discourse which suggests she is not a good citizen if she does not eat well and exercise.

So I don't really have a priority at the moment. But I guess getting through college is one of my priorities. ... I guess, college would be my first and my friends would be, well, my social life would be my second, yeah and then somewhere down there is my family.

(Angela, interview 2002)

For most of the young men in the *Life Activity Project*, if they were involved in physical activity and most were, it was mostly about the enjoyment afforded by playing sport with others, being skilled or being fit enough to play sport or to feel capable. It wasn't until sport was no longer organised for them at school, or they began to feel they wanted to look better, be more physical/masculine that they began to be more reflective about their 'lifestyles'. Steve's example, however, suggests that for some at least, messages about health were not completely absent in their thinking about how they should conduct their lives. In the following quote, Steve begins by suggesting that he is pretty laid back, a bit of a lounge lizard, but then goes on to say that he regularly walks six kilometres and that he does this for 'health and fitness'; one year later Steve has a personal trainer who instructs him on good eating as well as physical fitness. This was explained in terms of improving his body shape so that he was more muscular ('less skinny'). In none of Steve's talk, and this is typical of most of the young men's talk, is there any mention of 'guilt' or 'laziness' or 'anxiety'.

Steve: Weekends, just the activities, I normally go to the beach and [I'll] will just lounge around the house watching movies and stuff or Friday nights sometimes I'll go and watch my sister play sport. I'll sit and watch her and [...]

Int: You don't do sport at all.

Steve: No, no, very little exercise.

Int: Why is that?

Steve: I've never been a really sporty person. I'll go out for a walk of a night time which is a fair distance and then walk back.

Int: How far would you walk of a night time?

Steve: About six k's.

Int: Why do you do that?

Steve: Just to make sure I'm fit and healthy.

(Steve, interview 2004)

### **Not measuring up: Guilt and anxiety**

In contrast to Steve's comments, for many of the young women, particularly the middle class urban young women, health was about balancing energy in and energy so that they were comfortable with the way they looked (see also Chapters 5 and 10; Wright, O'Flynn and Macdonald 2006). In the context of the bio-citizen, to look fat or overweight is to demonstrate your incapacity to care for yourself; to be a good citizen is to eat well and exercise or at least to burn off what you have eaten if you have transgressed. Being healthy or rather not being healthy as indicated by overweight or even potential overweight was thus closely associated with feelings of guilt and anxiety.

For many of the young people and mostly the young women, this was much more likely to appear in conversations where they talked about their own experiences, (rather than how others *should* behave) often in terms of their failure to manage their eating and exercise in ways that they feel they should. Such talk was usually accompanied by self-designations of being lazy and feelings of guilt. These feelings were experienced viscerally, they were embodied in ways variously described as feeling ‘bad’, ‘sluggish’, ‘oily’, or ‘missing something.’ For example, in explaining how she feels if she misses a gym class, Jessica says: ‘I will feel bad. I would feel guilty. Yeah, I feel like I'm obligated. It's personal. Like to keep going and get fit. Stop being so lazy’.

Concomitantly being active and managing the balance between energy in and energy out produced good feelings, feelings that for some were also associated with being productive and ‘not wasting time’: ‘Because then I feel better about myself [if I exercise] and in the end I feel better overall in terms of like my body, like it feels better, it feels stronger... Because [if you sit in front of the TV] you just feel like you've done nothing, like you've wasted you time’ (Faye, interview 2000).

For Chrissie, not being active is much more about her anxieties about her appearance, about putting on weight and the bad feelings that come from that. These bad feelings, however, are not simply about what she looks like but are embodied, if she is not active, she feels ‘like something is missing’. The imperative has been internalized, if she does not eat well and active, she will suffer (feel bad and possibly put on weight). In the quote below she has just been asked how she knows if she is healthy and if she pays any attention to health messages. Her first response is to say that she knows by just looking at herself and then she thinks what I *have to* do. This is then followed by talk about the



pleasure and positive feelings of having more energy she derives from body combat, followed again by the bad feelings she has if she eats badly and does not exercise. The feeling bad does not seem to match the missing out of the fun of body combat – it is not simply missing the pleasure of the activity or even not feeling so energetic – but one of suffering and guilt.

No, not really, I just look at myself and think what I have to do, like with body combat it's so much fun and I feel like I have more energy and think I should keep doing it because if I stop I'm just gonna lose all that and I don't want to lose all that and it's like a form of exercise and it's fun. But I just think if I eat badly, if I don't do exercise, I don't do this, I'm the one who is gonna suffer and no one else.

(Chrissie, interview 2003)

Again in another response in the same interview, the same mixture of talk about the embodied pleasure from exercise and guilt and moral self-judgment (being a couch potato) is evident when Chrissie is asked, why she would continue going to the gym:

Chrissie: um to keep the whole exercise, fit, routine going. So you're not, like because I'm not going to the gym I feel sort of, um, not sluggish, but *like some thing is missing*. Like at the moment it's all schoolwork and you sort of need a break so I've just started taking my dog for a walk around the block. It's just some exercise. It's just something that gets me out of the house and gets me moving because *I don't*

*want to turn into a couch potato* right before the formal and I don't want to have to get another dress because I have put on too much weight, ...

Int: How do you think your health is in all of this?

Chrissie: I think it is a lot better now; not a lot better but because I'm going to the gym every week, I haven't missed a week. We normally go Mondays and Wednesdays and if I miss one day I'll make it up during the week so I still go the same amount, because if I don't, I feel very guilty. I feel guilty and I feel really good after I go to the gym because it's a relief and you do the exercise and I really enjoy it, it's fun and it's hanging out with your friends too and it's good.

(Chrissie, interview 2003)

Appearance was monitored by looking in the mirror and through the fit of clothes, but some of the young women also regularly monitored their weight by standing on the scales. For Natasha this is a daily regime, one clearly fraught with anxiety and frustration:

Natasha: I look in the mirror and I think oh my god and I'm really paranoid about it because I don't want to, I've been trying really hard to lose it and I can't, like I stopped eating all the shit and I'm doing all the exercise, like I did a two hour walk today and in the last couple of days I've been doing walking and,

Int: Do you actually weigh yourself?

Natasha: Every day.

Int: So you have scales and you weigh yourself every day.

Natasha: Yeah just like I'll drink water and I have a salad and I put on three kilos.

(Natasha, interview 2004)

### **The ideal citizen: doing it alone?**

Across the *Life Activity Project* cohorts, family priorities, configurations and resources in the form of time, money, transport etc. were expended by the “good parent/citizen” to provide activity-rich contexts for their children (see also Macdonald et al. 2004). A parent interviewed in Lee’s (2005) study captures the extent of this commitment:

Int: So how are you involved in the children’s activities?

Mother: I drive them everywhere, I make them lunches if they’re swimming and they’ve got to go to somewhere after i usually make them a pasta dish and keep their energy levels high. Especially with Brandon, I mean there was one stage where we were picking him up from swimming, he had half an hour to have something to eat and we’d drop him off at [touch] football and he wouldn’t get home until Monday night about eight o’clock. And yeah, same with when they finish school of an afternoon they usually walk up to the pool and I usually make sure that they’ve got extras packed in their lunch box kind of thing food-wise. What else do I do with them?

Int: You said that you both go down to the swimming club and help out with the club and that sort of thing?

Mother: Yeah and with Friday night is a thing where we go to swimming club... and Terrence [husband] helps with the barbeque or whatever you know.

Int: And actually I talked with Brandon about the volleyball and you do a bit of car pooling and that sort of thing?

Mother: ...On Wednesday afternoons if they go to another school because we've got a Tarago [van] kind of thing we can just about get the whole team in, so we can take the whole team in one go.

Int: Okay so that's your biggest role, with transport?

Mother: Yeah, transport, transport would be our biggest role yes.

(Brandon's mother, parent interview 2003)

Thus, for some young people, their families were invested in physical activity and diet regimes (see Felicia above) consistent with the bio-citizen.

Kendra, on the other hand, attended a school in a rural town and for the interview period was either living by herself or with her boyfriend because of abusive relationships in her own family. The way Kendra, however, talks about her life draws very much on discourses of self-responsibility – she is literally independent, she has to make her own way and part of that, from her point of view, is taking responsibility for her own health and weight. Unlike Chrissie, Faye and Eun-ji and many of the other young people in the study, Kendra's only option was walking, school based physical activity and

housework, she could not afford to go to the gym and did not have the resources or support for community sport or physical activity. On one hand, she was the ideal neo-liberal subject, on the other she was very vulnerable taking full responsibility for making her own life. Below she is describing how she used to be fat and therefore stopped doing PE at her old school, but has begun again at her new school.

Int: Could you explain that kind of view of yourself? Like you went from being very physical activity, very physically active into inactivity.

Kendra: I didn't like it. I feel better about myself now being physical and being able to do stuff with myself. Eating healthy, trying to get myself back on track. To what I used to be. Like I hated it. I didn't like being the way I was. Because I wasn't active, I didn't do nothing. I just sat around, ate food all the time. Didn't do nothing. Now I feel, I go to school, I get up every morning and feel really good about myself and stuff. It's good.

Int: Can you pinpoint or recognise a point in time when things changed for you? Was there anybody that encouraged you or changed things?

Kendra: No, well I got kicked out of home. I quit school and then come back. Because I used to go school over in S. ... But I just didn't do it and over here it's different again. But yeah I just got back into gear and thought this is ridiculous. I don't like being fat and nobody likes me and everyone used to pick on me. So I thought I'll just get back into

it. And I used to walk everywhere, never sat down. I just walked ...  
all the time. I just go back into it.

(Kendra, interview 2001)

However for Kendra, like many of the other rural young people and the young Muslim women in Knez's work (see Chapter 8), school provides the only form of accessible purposive recreational physical activity. Dance, which she loves doing at school was only available in another town and not accessible without a car or family to drive her there.

Now we [she and her boyfriend] have broken up and stuff and when I am home by myself I don't just sit there. I clean up the house, vacuum the floors or put some music on and I like to dance so I stay in my bedroom and dance and work up a sweat so I think that is about my physical activity....

(Kendra, interview 2002)

Underpinning Kendra's responses was the assumption that individuals were responsible for managing their own health. Rachel (interview 2002) says explicitly: 'Yeah, I mean we're ultimately in control of ourselves I reckon. I mean if we want to we can and if we want to do exercise we can; yeah, it's all about, I don't know [laughs]'.

Kendra was not alone in her vulnerability. Jessica Lee's (2004) study of rural young people illustrates how tensions between the ideal citizen and barriers to meeting this ideal became more pronounced as family circumstances changed. For example,

Wadiken's daily routines changed as the drought hit the family farm and he and his siblings were required to work on handfeeding the cattle and sheep. At a more mundane level many participants cited the lack of access to transport as prohibiting their participation in many of the activities they enjoyed, particularly organised sport. Despite these life-changing circumstances, the young people often continued to explain their capacity to engage in physical activity in terms of their own strengths or failings. They held themselves responsible for not being as active as they thought they should be.

## **Conclusion**

'Good citizens are clean, healthy, strong and fit rather than dirty, sick, weak, and fat' (Hohle 2009: 300). It follows that this good (bio-) citizen is then in a position to contribute towards the common good (Halse 2009). Young people in the Life Activity Project and its adjunct projects had learnt this. More specifically, they knew the prescription: exercise enough not to get fat, eat food that will not make you fat, or exercise to balance food intake. Like research conducted in the broader field of citizenship (e.g., Flanagan et al. 2008; Sherrod 2008), the young people in the Life Activity Project frequently approached living out this script as a civic responsibility they held and infrequently questioned the explicit and subtle technologies employed by the neo-liberal state to promote particular individual choices in the interests of public health. Data supported the argument that cultural shifts in citizenship and their interplay with health and education have influenced how young people think about their behaviour and the 'right way' to act or contemplate acting. In this chapter, we have argued that for many young people physical activity and health practices constitute a symbolic citizenship, embodied as healthy weight, slim/muscular body shape,

physically active, ready-for-work, and disciplined. Thus a good citizen is one who knows the facts, self-assesses, self-monitors, and acts (or knows to express self-disappointments should they fail to act).

The normative frameworks in shaping and giving meaning to young people's perspectives and choices were bound up with their social interactions with, for example, the school curriculum, peers, family, and media that nourished and sustained adherence. For some, the family worked to ensure regimes around physical activity and food consumption were consistent with 'good parenting' and, in turn, healthy citizenship. There were also many young people who worked somewhat alone at mastering 'healthy' techniques of self and this became more apparent as participants aged. What was shared, however, was the constant physical, social and emotional work entailed in being or becoming a healthy citizen. Even resistance to the dominant discourse was deliberative and, for some, emotionally draining given the associated guilt.

With the strong sense of individual responsibility for healthy citizenship rather than state, the Life Activity Project's participants had little sense of their citizen entitlements or rights in relation to access and equity. One exception was Felicia, a mother of four young children living in marginal, working class area. Here she refuses to take responsibility for social and structural aspects of her environment which differentiate her chances of engaging herself and her children in physical activity and 'good' eating.

Well they come in saying they are going to snatch people's children away because they are obese. But you don't see them trying to help families out. They



could help families and stuff; they could give some benefits to [to families] for transport. Single mothers get cheaper transport; they get concessions. They don't pay anything to the RTA for registering their car. ... But with health you don't see anything with health; you don't get a discount at the gym; you don't get a discount at the swimming pool. If you want to put your son in swim classes or your daughter in swim classes you don't get that discount. It's like why is it different for everything else when everyone uses it. I guess like with groceries and stuff it would help out. The people who have money, have nice stuff, have nice clothes, have educated kids, upper class schools, they don't struggle whatsoever. And then you see families that have lower incomes, struggling, working, twice as much overtime and they still have barely enough to survive to put their kids into things like swimming classes, gymnastics and dance and art school. It's just not fair. People living in [urban fringe] compared to people living in the city get treated very differently, very differently. I think it's rude to be honest.

(Felicia, interview 2007)

The rarity of this response underscores the ways most of the young people in the study took on self-responsibility for being active, consistent with neo-liberal discourses of the sovereignty of aspiration, personal choice and consumption (Taylor-Gooby 2008; Walkerdine 2003).

The social and political forces associated with bio-citizenship remind us that citizenship education is not limited to school-based subject matter circumscribed as history or

civics but is enmeshed across the curriculum, co-curricular activities, the media etc as young people are exposed to a citizenship education that values a healthy, informed, and physically active citizen (Pike 2007), and, more generally, how citizenship is powerfully embodied. Interestingly, while ethnic and cultural differences and their articulation with citizenship challenges governments the world over (Bellamy 2008), the symbolic citizenship of having or aspiring to a healthy (thin), active body was common across the diverse groups of young people with whom we worked (see chapters in this section for the similarity of discourses employed by young people from a range of socio-economic status, geographical locations and ethnicities).

We note, however, that the healthy citizen was predominantly delimited to diet and exercise. While this may have been, in part, a result of the sequence of questions and interviews, there was scope for participants to take a broader view of health. It raises interesting questions as to how the hegemony of these particular discourses has come to be across such a breadth of contexts. Perhaps even more interesting is how, given the cognisance and verbal commitment of young people to these discourses, governments world-wide are concerned and baffled that the diet/exercise prescription is 'not working'. We are also left with questions that take us back to the notion of a (politically) active citizen and what an empowered citizenry might look like with respect to young people's physical activity and health. What would be the physical activity and health priorities and behaviours of a truly active, informed citizenry? How would such a citizenry come to be? What would be the impact on public policy and provision or, indeed, the media? We leave you with these questions to take up in your research.

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