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Chapter 10

Young people, transitions and physical activity

Jan Wright

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In the literature on young people's health and its relation to participation in physical activity, there are recurring narratives that lament the decline in participation during the senior years of schooling and beyond (e.g. Sallis, Prochaska and Taylor 2000). This apparent decline has been interpreted as a significant problem and one that must be addressed by strategies to engage young people in more physical activity; most of which target young people with a view to changing their attitudes and behaviours (Gyurcsik, Bray and Brittain 2004; Leslie, Fotheringham, Owen and Bauman 2001). This concern about young people's participation in physical activity seems to be embedded in, and adds support to, a notion that adolescence is a developmental period of 'increased risk', where young people are particularly susceptible to, and held responsible for, making 'bad' health choices (Rose 1992), as parents and schools exert a diminished influence over their lives.

In this chapter we do not debate that having the opportunity to be active, in a range of different ways and for a range of reasons, is not the 'right' of every young person. For many of the young people in our study being able to engage in physical activity brought a great deal of pleasure, satisfaction and feelings of well-being to their lives. What we

will argue in this chapter, however, is that 'choices' about physical activity (like other choices being made in the years immediately after school) are made in a complex environment, where young people are attempting to negotiate new expectations and work and/or study often takes priority (White and Wyn 2004). What we *do* want to do is offer a response to current research and policy which does not seem to take this into account; we want to offer an understanding of physical activity participation as complex and situated, as embedded in social processes and structures, which have sustained effects on the decisions young people make and how they think about themselves and their lives. We want to contribute to policy and planning in ways that take into account these complexities, that improve lives and 'resist … [the] reductive urge towards universality and essentialism' (Slee 2000: xi), which currently characterizses the policy around physical activity and health.

To do this we take a sociological approach to youth which points to the importance of understanding young people's lives and how these are 'constructed and shaped by institutional processes and social structures and by individuals and groups' (White and Wyn 2004: vii). A feature of recent writing on young people drawing on such an approach is the notion that in contemporary societies, where life trajectories are increasingly unpredictable and uncertain, much of the responsibility 'for negotiating their own life patterns' (Winter and Stone 1999, quoted in Abbott-Chapman 2000: 21) is left to young people (Fitzclarence 2004; White and Wyn 2004). From this point of view, 'choices' around leisure and health are important in how young people constitute their own biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). As we will demonstrate below 'choices', however, are not equally distributed and, for some of the young people in the

Life Activity Project, their 'choices' were considerably constrained by economic and social circumstances.

This chapter then will use the narratives of the young people in the Life Activity Project to explore the changing place and meanings of physical activity for young people as they make 'choices' about their lives during and beyond school. The young people who feature in this chapter are those for whom we have data from interviews in their last years of schooling - that is, from Years 10/11 (when they were 15-17 years of age) to their final year - and then again from recent interviews when they were 20-24 years of age. For some of the NSW cohort there are also interviews in the intervening years. Unfortunately we were unable to re-establish contact with the Victorian cohort for the longitudinal study once they left school, which is why they have not been included in this chapter. The variability in numbers of male and female participants is a consequence we would argue of this kind of qualitative study: the young women were more amenable to ongoing contact and in NSW were also part of a doctoral study which meant they had established stronger links with the project.

The young people featured in this chapter come from five of the schools in the project: Malcos, the elite independent boys school (five young men) and Bloomsbury, the elite independent girls school (six young women); Seachrist College the non-elite catholic high school situated in a regional coastal city (one young man and three young women); and the two government schools – Sunnydale on the urban fringes of a large city (two young men and five young women) and Greenvalley the semi-rural school (one young man and two young women). Although in this paper we are using the elite independent

schools as markers of social class, we want to be clear that the some of the young people who attend these schools, and indeed several of the young people we interviewed, came from backgrounds that were far from affluent. For these young people both parents worked long hours specifically to support their children at the schools. However, what has been interesting to us is how the values/dispositions (habitus) inculcated by the school took hold across the group, no matter what their parents' socio-economic status.

Theorizing young people, transitions and choice biographies

The term transition has been commonly used as an economic concept to describe the move by young people from school into the labour force. Transition studies have traditionally used age as a critical marker of change and infer that young people make a linear, permanent progression through different life and/or career stages. Wyn and Woodman (2006) argue the transitions experienced by baby boomers (including school to work shifts, leaving home and establishing nuclear families) have become the dominant way of describing how younger generations make a life, even though these transitions reflect particular historical and cultural influences. This conceptualisation has been criticized by youth researchers because it assumes that youth is simply a 'transitional stage' between childhood and the independence of adult life. White and Wyn (2004: 8) argue that 'this approach conflates youth development processes with social processes; it generally assumes a linear trajectory and makes normative assumptions about young people's lives'.

Using data from the Life Patterns Research Project, White and Wyn (2004) draw attention to the more complex processes of transitions evident in the lives of young people in both rural and urban areas of Victoria, who were often simultaneously working and studying. Related studies by Wyn and Woodman (2006) also illustrate how young people's pathways are more complicated. They found young people constructed pathways that reflected a complex mix of leaving and returning home, undertaking part-time and full-time work at different stages and in some cases undertaking full-time study and full-time work.

From these and other studies (e.g. Ball, Macquire and Macrae 2000) it is possible to see how linear constructions of transition appear to be increasingly out of step and almost irrelevant to some young people's lives. As Wyn and Dwyer point out, these studies indicate:

> that many in the younger generation are becoming increasingly pro-active in the face of risk and uncertainty of outcomes, and are making pragmatic choices for themselves which enable them to maintain their aspirations despite the persistence of structural influences on their lives.
>
> (Wyn and Dwyer 1999: 5)

At the same time, social theorists have also suggested that young people today, living in societies influenced by the 'political and economic culture of neo-liberalism', have had to come to understand themselves as able to make their own futures and as responsible for the choices they make in this process. This process has been described as one of

‘individualization’, where individuals are increasingly held ‘accountable for their own survival in a time where change is the only certainty’ (Ball et al. 2000: 2). And as Ball et al. (2000) found, young people do see themselves as being in charge of their own destinies no matter what their life circumstances.

> In all of the recent major studies of youth transitions from school to work, as with our own one consistent finding emerges … Young people constantly reiterate that they do have choices, that luck, hard work and sheer determination are the bases of “success”… The young people in our study were most likely to blame themselves for any lack of success, either because of stress or failure to “see their best interests”.
>
> (Ball et al. 2000: 4)

While Ball is talking primarily about success in relation to work and post-school study, the same might be said of young people’s participation in physical activity. In relation to the discourse that suggests good citizens have a moral obligation to be physically active for their health, the young people often blamed themselves for their perceived inactivity, despite their narratives demonstrating that the circumstances of their lives made finding time and energy for physical activity beyond the demands of work extremely difficult.

As those writing about young people’s choices from a socially critical perspective demonstrate, ‘choices’ are made in relation to experiences (biographies) and the social, cultural and economic context in which the young people live. As Ball et al. (2000:

150), talking more specifically about the role of space and time, conclude from their study 'the geographies and other possibilities for identity are not the same for all', nor are they stable and unchanging. Some identities are more fragile and some more stable or secure. This is discussed further in their detailed interpretation of young people's narratives in their book, *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16* (Ball et al. 2000). However, what we have taken from their analysis is the notion of identities as a shifting framework for making choices. For Ball and his colleagues, the interest was in 'learning identities' and their connection with young people's choices in relation to postschool education. We propose the notion of 'physical activity identities' to help understand the interaction between young people's histories and their social, cultural, economic and, in our case, geographical environments, as they make choices about physical activity beyond school.

The term 'learning identities' as used by Ball et al. (2000) has come from an exploration of a sociology of lifelong learning by Rees, Fevre, Furlong and Gorard (1997). 'Learning identities', according to Rees et al. (1997: 493), is a concept that captures a number of ideas: 'learning identities' serve as the framework individuals use to view learning and for making decisions about it; they are 'essentially personal with emotional as well as intellectual dimensions'; but they also products of social experience (that is, of interactions with institutions, places, discourses/ideas etc.).

For our purposes then, 'physical activity identities' are identities which are shaped through individuals' interactions with informal and formal lived experiences of physical activity; interactions which are likely to be associated with particular emotions –

pleasurable and unpleasurable – and to have left indelible traces that continue to influence their identities. Physical activity identities are also formed through interactions with particular knowledge or ideas about physical activity (for example, discourses about its relationship to health, to lifestyles and to productive citizenship). Physical activity identities become 'frameworks' for how potential physical activity participation is viewed/evaluated and for making decisions about it. In this chapter we explore how particular physical activity identities are shaped by the experiences of physical activity during the school years (but not necessarily at school) and how they then come to into play in decisions made about physical activity post-school.

Transitions for the young people in the Life Activity Project (LAP)

We use the term 'transition' in the chapter to describe the complex process of moving beyond a time when school is a major organizing feature of the LAP young people's lives. On one hand, there was a very clear notion that they had come to the end of a particular time in their lives, a time when the structure of schooling dominated the way they organized their lives. For most, however, this did not signal a transition from school to paid work; paid work had been part of their lives from 14 or 15 years of age and leaving school meant either increased hours or the re-organization of work around study at vocational colleges or university. As White and Wyn (2004: 173) point out, '[f]or young people, paid work is very often a necessity – in terms of supplementing incomes, of vocational and workplace experiences, and with regard to maintaining group friendships and peer networks'. Most of their part-time work was casual, poorly paid, but necessary to maintain the levels of independence that the young people sought, even when, or perhaps because, they were living at home.

Post-school study in the three years directly after school was one of the main differentiating features of the groups: all of the young people from the elite independent schools were studying at university or had taken a 'gap' year before beginning their study; only one of the young women in the study from the government and coast schools achieved her goal of direct university entry. For those who had hoped for university (and many had), but not achieved a high enough score, most began studying at TAFE or a similar vocational college, some with a view of reapplying to university when they completed their diplomas. The remainder extended their work hours at their current jobs, took on extra jobs, or explored different configurations of work.

The young people from the elite private schools, like the middle class participants in Ball et al's (2000) study, talked about their lives in terms of choices made to balance leisure and pleasure with study and work. All of the young people, however, talked about their lives as 'made' by their own choices and decisions. There were, however, few certain futures and from one interview to another the young people had often made new choices because of unpredictable events (such as scores too low to get into preferred courses of study, health issues, childbirth, new opportunities for careers and new partners). At the same time they imagined themselves in futures with partners and children.

School physical activity and physical activity identities

Physical activity identities like learning identities are contingent on experiences and the relationship between these and social context and, for the young people in our study,

geographical context. For the young people from the elite schools, their schools placed immense value on physical activity as contributing to the wider goals of the school, and set up expectations, structures and resources to support this (see for example Wright and O'Flynn 2007, and Chapter 5). The effects of such investments and expectations were strikingly evident in the ways the young people from these schools talked about physical activity and the place of it in their lives. Physical activity was inculcated as a 'disposition' essential to a 'normal, full life'. There was a subtle gender dimension to this: for the young women it was more likely to be associated with maintaining an acceptable weight (see Wright, O'Flynn and Macdonald 2006), for the young men it was part of being accepted as a male member of the student body. This is made explicit in the following quote from Aidan (interview 2001) who represented the school in soccer, cricket and Australian Rules Football: 'I've always done them [his sports], if you know what I mean. And just a chance to go out with your mates and also, I mean if you don't play anything at school you're a nobody'.

For the young people from the government and coast schools, where school-based ideas about physical activity were embedded in discourses of health, enjoyment and lifelong physical activity (see Wright and O'Flynn 2007); practices were more haphazard and more reliant on individual interest for engagement. There was neither the level of resources nor the tailoring of physical activity to their interests evident in the elite schools. For the students from the coast school, the surf, the beach and (for the female students) organized sport were reasonably accessible and generally played some part in the young people's lives, irrespective of family income. For the young men in particular, and Rusty is a good example, their physical activity identities were

constituted in relation to the beach and to the physical environment. While organized sport such as rugby league, within or outside of school, was also part of their lives, they had often begun surfing at an early age. Even when this was associated with institutional settings such as surf club, being able to surf contributed to shaping a particular form of physical activity identity (or rather a 'surfer identity') that was less reliant on opportunities provided, or mediated by institutions or commercial or community providers.

For the young women on the coast, surfing was also a possibility but less likely than for the young men on the coast. While the beach (and surf clubs) provided one option, their physical activity was more likely to be mediated by school, sports clubs or community providers (commercial and otherwise). The range of these available within their locality was quite broad and accessible. For example, Tamara described herself in her early interviews as someone who had always been into physical activity: she started swimming, ballet and gymnastics very young. In her Year 10 interview she was still managing to fit in squad training and surf club, competitive acrobatics and Tae Kwan Do, while also working at two jobs after school and on the weekend. Later interviews suggest that for Tamara at least part of her need to do some kind of physical activity was associated with her concern to maintain or reduce her weight. During her school interviews, Tamara found it difficult to imagine not being active in some way:

Int: Why do you have to do it, do you have to do it because of training or because of competition or because you just have to do it?

Tamara: Everything, I need to do something, I can't not do anything, I need to, you feel funny.

(Tamara, interview Year 10)

For the young people at Sunnydale ethnicity, as well as gender and social and economic influences, came into play. In the area there are well-developed institutional and community supports for sports such as soccer, rugby league and union, Australian Rules Football and cricket, which often have strong links to local schools. On the other hand, for the young women, community sports and activities were either limited, or not easily accessed without a degree of family resources, which were often not available. School sport and physical education provided the main opportunities for organized physical activity. However, even in this context, being able to follow their interests was a much more chancy thing: electives were only available for some years; and the viability of sport teams relied on the interest of teachers and the motivation of other students. The quote below illustrates a common phenomenon for girls at all of the non-elite schools in this and other studies (e.g. Eime, Payne, Casey, and Harvey 2008): that is, when it comes to organizing opportunities for physical activity, opportunities are often transitory and their existence relies on friendships and personal connections rather than institutional structures. What this suggests is that the physical activity identities of the young women from the government schools were formed in less structured contexts, compared to the physical activity identities of the students from the elite schools or many of the male students at the non-elite schools.

> I used to play softball, last season 'cause this season we couldn't get a team together or a coach to coach us. It was outside of school, and this year, I played for the school for softball at State. We used to have like, sport every Wednesday and a group of my friends, about 10 of us, we'd go play softball and we got through the whole season undefeated, first in the whole, in the whole thing. So we were pretty happy because some of them didn't even know how to play the game and we'd go just do this, I'll tell you what to do.
>
> (Felicia, interview Year 11)

Like their counterparts at Sunnydale, for the young women at Greenvalley High limited community resources meant that school sport and physical education were their main sources of physical activity participation (see also Eime et al. 2008). For the boys from this school, however, farm work, BMX and functional physical activity were more likely to be part of their lives (see Chapter 1; Lee 2003).

Physical activity identities in the contexts of the government schools on the urban fringe and in the semi-rural area were more diverse and their expression – that is, choices of physical activity - more likely to be defined by gender, ethnicity and limited social and economic resources. As will be demonstrated below, as these young people left school, their choices and chances of physical activity participation were impacted by other priorities (and other identities) and also by the degree to which these choices were associated with ‘pleasure’ in busy lives, where time not dedicated to work or study was to be treasured.

Physical activity identities beyond school

For all of the young people managing priorities was intensified after leaving school; their lives illustrate the complex and complicated spaces that young people are negotiating as they endeavour to 'make' a life for themselves. Reading through the transcripts of all of the young people, we were struck by how busy their lives were. Having said this, their lives, as illustrated by some of the quotes below, took very different forms, which, in turn, had consequences for what physical activity meant to them, and the place or not it had in their lives.

For many of the young people from Sunnydale, and the elite schools (less so for Seachrist), the institutionalized context of school organized not only their time but their physical activity. When these organizing structures were removed, the young people were in a position where participation like other aspects of their life became a matter of individual responsibility. Their ongoing participation was contingent on a number of things; opportunities and access continued to be important, but the extent to which the notion of being physically active had become interpellated into the young person's notion of 'self', and the extent to which it had become included in the priority process around daily life, was also a major influence. It is not surprising then that, following from the discussions above, the degree to which the young people participated in physical activity and the form that this took varied on class and gender lines.

The young women who had attended the elite girls school and who had subscribed to the school ethos around physical activity (all of the young women in the study except for Tomiko who had never been very interested in physical activity and for whom music

had been more important), actively sought out new forms of physical activity that suited their busy lives beyond school. They explained these choices in terms of the balance it brought to their busy lives so that they could be more productive (at study or work). For these young women, physical activity was so embedded in their identities, almost like a visceral need. Physical activity was talked about as providing an essential 'balance' to the stresses of study and then work; it allowed them to juggle study, work and relationships and still maintain their health and well-being. Kim, for example, despite managing two university degrees, extracurricular activities that fitted with her social justice agenda, and catching up with friends and family, played and trained at least twice a week for competitive frisbee. Kim managed all of this by using her university as a one-stop shop for managing study, physical activity, socializing and work.

In a similar way Melinda used her physical activity to provide her with many of the necessities for a balanced life while at the same time assisting her with her career. Like most of the young women interviewed from the elite school, she had a clear idea about where she wanted to go with her life, even in general terms, and what she needed to do to get there. This included personal goals around exercise and body shape and weight. In school she cycled and jogged to achieve her 'exercise goals'; after school she took up dragon boat racing to help build the skills she perceived she needed for her future.

> Well I did it for dragon boating a little bit because I wanted dragon boating, because I knew dragon boating could give me things for my career, like it could give me leadership through captaincy and give me organizational skills and I wanted to give something back to the team because I knew that we had so much

> more potential and it just wasn't organized. So by putting time and effort into that I think it helped me form my career a bit more.
>
> (Melinda, interview 2006)

Building skills was clearly not the only reason that Melinda took up dragon boat racing, but in a very busy life it allowed her to manage the expectations she has about being social (friends and team) and maintaining her exercise, as well as building her career.

The young men from the elite school found it initially a bit of struggle to adapt to a life where sport was no longer fully organized for them, but soon found new forms of organization via university or social networks. The young men we interviewed replaced school sport with more social sport, going to the gym and/or jogging or working out. They still talked about physical activity as though it were taken for granted as a part of 'a life', but now it had to be/could be more spontaneous and needed to be organized around their study, work and social lives. This took some getting used to. The following quote from Aaron is typical of the way they talked about their 'choices' about physical activity after leaving school. Eventually they were, however, all in social teams or jogging or spending time the gym.

> It's a little different, you've got to sort of motivate yourself to do stuff; you don't have anyone sort of relying on you to be doing this work if you don't want to. I guess I sort of prefer the way that school was organized because then you always had things to do like to do with sport; you know it was a lot easier to get into back then.

(Aaron, interview 2006)

As indicated above the physical activity identities of the young people from the government schools and Seachrist College were far more diverse and less likely to be so central to their sense of self. In other words physical activity was usually seen as a good thing (particularly in relation to health), but except for Karin none of the young women talked about a visceral need to be active; it became something optional and low in the priorities when other aspects of their lives took precedence. It also took on different meanings with new relationships and changing life circumstances. Felippe, for example, who had shown little interest in physical activity at school or immediately after, by his last interview, having left university to focus on his job, had also begun to work out regularly with his brother every morning because he wanted to build some muscle and put on weight.

> Yes it is, I feel healthy. For a little while I was taking it very seriously, like I'd be walking five days a week as well, just to get some exercise because I don't really exercise. I was walking a little bit and then I was doing the weights as well. But I realized with the walking I was losing a lot of weight and so I thought I've got to stop doing it because I want to gain weight.
>
> (Filippe, interview 2006)

Immediately after leaving school many of the young people from the government and coast schools were trying to combine part-time study and part-time or full-time work. Work that was still often poorly paid and involved shifts at night and on the weekend.

The little time and energy left was often spent socializing/clubbing with friends or partners. For someone like Rusty, an ex Seachrist student, this was not too onerous because he lived at home and surfing could be fitted in anytime around commuting to Sydney for study, working as a bar manager and socializing. Tamara, on the other hand, who had been so active during her school years, was more interested in partying, working hard and studying for a childcare diploma. Eve, who in the 2002 interview was still playing hockey after years of representing at school because it would 'feel weird not to', stopped in 2004 because she was working on Saturday. By 2005 she had begun going to the gym with her boyfriend to fit activity around full-time work. In 2007, she was engaged, working long hours and because of the long hours and an injury stopped going to the gym, but had bought a WiFi game for exercise. Eve, Chrissie and Tamara used the gym too because it helped them keep fit and could be fit flexibly into their busy lives (see Chapter 4).

For Karin, Felicia, Cassie and Sharon, there was a stronger sense of a struggle around physical activity, often talked about as something they would like to do but which they found extremely difficult to fit into their lives. This sense of other priorities interfering with their choice to do some form of physical activity increased over the three years of interviews following school, as their lives became more complicated by health issues, relationships, and the continual need to find employment; for some it was complicated by the responsibilities of parenthood or for elderly members of the family. For example, in the following quote Felicia nostalgically compares a time (at school) when physical activity was not a choice, with her life as the mother of two young boys. Despite her description of 'home' as a place where nothing is compulsory, what she seems to mean

is that ‘home’ is a place where it is impossible to plan for anything on a regular basis because the everyday life of a mother with two children whose partner works two jobs, has little room for time out to go to the park on a regular and predictable basis.

> Yes and then once I left [school] I stopped [playing softball] completely, mostly because your mind is concentrating on what you want to do and you don’t have time to exercise. In school you’ve got the teachers and it is compulsory and then you have a choice whether you want to compete or not. Whereas at home every day nothing is compulsory and you can do what you want when you want. … So when you’ve got swimming carnivals and sport on specific day it is a thing you have to do. Whereas at home if you’ve got two kids and Wednesday is sport day you don’t find many households who are going to go by that rule. Parents say “every Thursday we’ll go to the park” that will encourage kids to do more exercise. But very rarely you’ll find someone that does that.
>
> (Felicia, interview 2005)

For Karin who had been a very keen hockey player at school and who had described physical activity in earlier interviews as absolutely necessary for maintaining her weight and feeling fine about her body, this priority had been replaced (not easily) with the need to work and earn money for her future security. Her almost compulsive need to exercise had been (at least for the time being) replaced by the demands of her work, which, in her final interviews, she described as deeply satisfying. She was winning awards for her work as a pastry chef; and she saw her success as allowing her to realize

her dream of setting up a business and buying a house in Queensland, with her partner. As she points out in her last interview, there was little time for any leisure in her life:

> I want to achieve a lot with my career and work wise so I know I have to put in the hours but then I feel like I'm missing out on the rest; like the social life, you know, just going for a bike ride, taking the kayak out, motorbike. And when you do think alright I've got the time to do it you are just so worn out that you just don't want to do it. It's too much effort. So you just feel tired all the time.
>
> (Karin, interview 2006)

Karin missed physical activity because it has in the past afforded her a great deal of pleasure. She can imagine a time when it will be restored to her.

For the young women from the semi-rural area, Sharon and Cassie, travelling and working long hours, spending time with family and when possible having some time to do the things they liked doing (gave them some pleasure) took priority over physical activity. For example Sharon, who while at school played competitive touch football and netball (until her knees prevented her), was, in her last interview, working long hours managing a bottle shop, studying to get work in security, and living at home with her mum. Pleasure lay with a good movie in bed or if she could afford it going to the Coast with friends.

> Weekends I don't do many things because I work Tuesday through to Saturday so I can't really go out Friday night because Saturday is such a big day at work

> and then Saturday night I'm just exhausted from the week. I just want to curl up in bed with a movie if I'm lucky.

and later in the interview when asked: 'What kind of things would make you happy?'

> Being able to do stuff on my days off because I have the money to do it. Like just go to the Coast for a night would be good, just go to the beach. I can't even go for a day trip because it's extra fuel and it's money that I don't have. I don't know, just things like that, catching up with friends.
>
> (Sharon, interview 2006)

Inflexible and long work hours also made it difficult to take up physical activities that did not fit with her roster.

> Int: So apart from work, which seems to take up the majority of your time, are you doing anything else, any physical activity or leisure stuff?
>
> Sharon: I just bought a camera so I want to get into Photography on my days off. So I'll actually have a hobby. So I'll feel like I'm working for something. And I did start doing some kickboxing but then my roster changed so I couldn't do it anymore.
>
> Int: Did you go somewhere and do that?
>
> Sharon: Yes, that's just at [place] about five, ten minutes away from my place. So it was good, nice and convenient and easy.

Cassie who by her own description has never enjoyed sport very much was also working long hours in a child care centre with children with special needs, planning for her marriage, living with her grandmother and taking her mother shopping in her spare time. In this quote what is particularly interesting, besides the demands of travelling and work, is how she seems to feel the need to explain to the interviewer that she is doing *some* exercise; that is, heavy physical work and walking to work gets conceptualized as a 'good thing' because it provides some 'exercise'.

> Well generally on the weekends I usually work from Monday until Saturday. So I work six days. And then the Sunday I'll spend at home with my grandmother and we'll just go out and do the shopping or do things like that. I don't really, because I work in Brisbane I'm having to, I get up early, I go to work and then I come back and by the time I get back it's relatively late and I'm pretty tired. So I'll have dinner and sit down and watch TV for a little bit and then go to bed.

And later in the same interview

> Work is really good because I walk. Some days I'll walk home from the train station or I'll walk to the train station and then I walk from the train station to work and I'm doing all the heavy lifting like loading and unloading linen and then pushing them up on to each of the wards.

(Cassie, interview 2006)

Conclusion

For most of the young people in the Life Activity Project who we were able to interview after leaving school, school was one of the major (re)sources for physical activity in their lives. For the coast young people, and particularly the male students, the beach and the surf provided other resources. The kinds of physical activity identities that the young people developed, however, differed particularly in relation to the social class effects of the elite boys and girls schools, and the value placed by the schools and then the young people, on physical activity as an essential part of a 'balanced life'. When the organizing structure for physical activity (through school) was removed, physical activity did not disappear from the young people's lives, but was (like all other aspects of life) largely translated into an individual responsibility.

For all the young people in the study managing competing priorities was intensified after school - all struggled to negotiate a combination of work/study/social life/relationships/family. Their 'choices' around physical activity were made in this context *and* in relation to their physical activity identities. In addition, for some, the desire to be active in the ways they enjoyed could not be realized because of non-negotiable factors such as cost of participation and the priority of family responsibilities. The interplay of physical activity identities formed in the school years, the competing priorities in young people's lives, and social and cultural constraints need to be recognized in the commentary on young people's declining rates of physical activity. Discourses of blame are not productive in assisting young people. Rather community strategies to reduce costs and to make relevant forms of physical activity more accessible through free access to gyms and good quality childcare would make a

difference for at least some of the young people in our study and young people in similar situations. School experiences that help to shape positive physical activity identities would also be helpful.

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