Everyday Temporalities: Leisure, Ethics and Young Women's Emotional Wellbeing

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between temporality and young women's emotional wellbeing in order to consider the implications for leisure and health policy. Time is central to much contemporary social policy. For example, the *Active Australia* policy urges us to undertake 30 minutes of physical activity per day to maintain physical health. Debates over paid maternity leave implicate work, leisure and family time. Mental health policies also urge us to take time-out to seek help from medical practitioners and engage in preventative care for ourselves. Policies concerning health and leisure increasingly urge women to use time more efficiently and to be more responsible for their own and others' wellbeing. Hence, it is important to explore critically the effects of how women 'live' time as they are urged to organise their work, leisure, family and community lives in particular ways. In this exploration, we connect findings regarding young women from a longitudinal study on Australian women's health with a qualitative research project investigating the socio-cultural context of youth suicide in urban and rural communities. The issues of time pressure and emotional wellbeing emerge as central to young women's health and identity. There is also an embodied, emotional dimension of time that requires further investigation in relation to the development of health and leisure policies and programs aimed at prevention of illness and promotion of wellbeing. We explore this sense of 'lived temporality' through a concern with the ethical dimensions of everyday social relations, rather than viewing leisure time as merely a resource for health.

Introduction

... the politics of time debate is essentially technocratic. It revolves around determining new parameters for the distribution of free time... In contrast I contend that the fundamental issues in leisure are ethical. They have to do with who we are and who we want to be... The questions of who we are in our free, private time and what we should aspire to be are all too easily lost in the rituals of commodified leisure practice. (Rojek, 2000: 210)

Rojek's comment on the politics of time raises several key issues that are important in thinking critically about the relationship between contemporary leisure-related policies and young women's emotional wellbeing. He emphasises the importance of understanding time beyond its utility as a resource for leisure or health and instead embraces a contemplative turn towards ethics through the question of how

we are to live as temporal beings within the social world. In this article we draw upon findings from two different research projects – the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (Women's Health Australia study)¹ and the Youth Suicide Prevention Project² – that investigate the experiences of young women, in order to consider the temporal dimension of emotional wellbeing as it relates to leisure and lifestyle issues. Leisure was explored in different ways in these studies. The Women's Health Australia study used specific descriptions of active and passive leisure pursuits within the survey method, while the Youth Suicide Prevention study used general open ended questions that did not specifically focus on leisure. Our focus on young women's experiences in this article recognises that temporality is embodied by gendered subjects engaged in particular leisure spaces, places and commodified practices. Hence, we need to consider the implications of current leisure policies for wellbeing in terms of the gendered politics of time.

Governing time

Within neo-liberal societies the everyday practice of managing time as a scarce commodity has become central to the way in which we perform, and hence constitute, our identities as successful citizens. Economic metaphors mediate the way in which we experience time – as money, as something not to be wasted, and/or as a resource for maximising lifestyle opportunities in relation to careers and conspicuous consumption through leisure. Hence, how we use and value time is implicated in the production of our contemporary sense of freedom that is itself increasingly linked to aspirational lifestyles. Leisure choices about consumption (e.g., housing, travel, clothing, technology, entertainment) occupy a central place in the temporal trajectory of our life narratives as successful 'citizens' (Rose, 1999). We structure our daily routines through rituals of work, leisure, home and community activity, and hence govern our sense of freedom through the imperative of good time management.

From this governmentality perspective power is not simply a repressive force, but works through everyday practices to *constitute* what we value as freedom and selfhood. The governance of self, and hence time, increasingly relies upon citizens to think about their own time through a 'calculative' rationality. In this sense our experience of time involves constant value judgements about costs and benefits, and risks and opportunities for maximising lifestyle success (Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999). Cultural messages powerfully shape our very 'personal' beliefs and the way we value everyday activities (working longer or spending time building relationships with others) and rational/emotional aspects of self (time-managed achievements or process time with family and friends) (Rose, 1989; Daly, 1996). These are ethical negotiations that have become the subject of popular debate in the Australian press. One article featured research on an apparent 'downshifting' trend within 23% of the Australian population aged 30-59 (Farouque, 2003: 1). 'Downshifters' seek a better balance between work, leisure and family time through their

post-materialist values that question consumerism and work-based identities (Hamilton 2003). As a recent newspaper headline stated: 'More money, more stress? .. no thanks' (Passmore, 2003). Pursuing a healthier lifestyle through relaxation and social time, finding emotional fulfilment and revaluing the good life also figure within representations of the downshifting trend (Farouque and Nader, 2003). These debates are also concerned about time pressure on women who are balancing demanding careers, health and family life in order to achieve 'success'. One woman is quoted saying 'if I don't use a moment in four different ways, I feel like I've wasted my time' (Cadzow, 2002: 24). Leisure is implicated in such discussions about the paradox of time in contemporary life where we desire 'time-out' from pressure, only to subject our 'freed up' time to the same calculative approach. The following excerpt from a newspaper article identifies the effect of such dominant rationalities on the way leisure is valued and lived:

Down time is essential to our mental and physical wellbeing but increasingly it is becoming another task pencilled into our tight schedules... Going swimming? Can you just enjoy the experience of gliding through the cool, smooth water or are you too busy racing the person in the next lane or doing more laps than last week? (Cameron, 2002: 22).

Perhaps this latter behaviour might be better characterised as 'anti-leisure' – to borrow a term used by Godbey (1975) to describe American leisure patterns more than 25 years ago.

Policy and popular debates over paid maternity leave, flexitime and overtime, balancing family and work time and the promotion of population health, suggest that leisure time is implicated in ethical negotiations about contemporary experiences of temporality. While there may not be an explicit focus on leisure within employment, health and family-related policies it is crucial for leisure researchers to consider the implications of such policies in terms of the politics of time. For example, health policies frequently employ leisure related concepts and strategies in relation to the promotion of individual and population wellbeing. Such policies include the *Active Australia* campaign (Active Australia, 1999), *Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Health* (CDHAC, 2000b), and *Living is for Everyone: Framework for Prevention of Suicide and Self-harm in Australia* (CDHAC, 2000a). These policies play a role in the governance of populations through calculative discourses that employ leisure time as something to be measured and managed effectively in order to improve health outcomes (Fullagar, 2002, 2003; Rose, 1999; Petersen & Lupton, 1997). The *Active Australia* campaign emphasises the need to fit more physical activity into one's day and week – 30 minutes a day is desirable. We are urged to 'do more' with less time as self-governing individuals, to squeeze more into the day and balance often conflicting roles and demands to achieve good health as the measure of social success

(Petersen and Lupton, 1997; White *et al.*, 1995). The benefits of physical activity are articulated in terms of physical health (reduction of obesity), the reduction of disease risk and better quality of life without question (see Gard & Wright, 2001 for a critique of obesity discourses). Mental and emotional health benefits that active (and less active) leisure pursuits offer individuals and populations are less well understood.

There is a distinct mind-body opposition prevalent within policies aimed at promoting health and wellbeing through a calculable notion of time. The complex and intertwined emotional, embodied and social dimensions of our everyday experiences of temporality remain invisible within discursive constructions of mental or physical health and illness as distinct life domains (Busfield, 2001; Lupton, 1998). In the case of national mental health promotion and suicide prevention policies there is an emphasis on reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors, such as individual resilience, and social relationships and building connectedness within communities. The 'recreation sector' is identified as a key partner in many mental health policy objectives that aim to develop a whole-of-community approach to health promotion (CDHAC 2000a, 2000b). Yet leisure generally remains unexplored as a primary site where individuals and communities use their time to develop social relationships and maintain emotional wellbeing within everyday life. Leisure is mobilised within contemporary policy as largely a functional means of improving physical health or an invisible practice through which community connectedness 'occurs' to facilitate 'good mental health'.

In his critique of the assumptions informing current health promotion discourses Buchanan (2000) argues that health as a policy outcome has replaced more complex notions of wellbeing that embrace ethical questions about how we 'live' the good life. Buchanan (2000:106) cites Aristotle's distinction between health and wellbeing as the difference between biological functioning and human flourishing, happiness and prosperity. By extension we could argue that in classical times health was a means of achieving contemplative leisure as an ethical practice. We now see a reversal whereby leisure is positioned as a means of achieving measurable health outcomes – but what are the effects on our understanding of wellbeing? The lack of a broader conceptualisation of leisure as a temporal and spatial practice means that policies often fail to engage with the social and emotional meanings that motivate people to value the time they spend engaged in healthy or unhealthy pursuits. A broader leisure perspective provides a way of countering some of the entrenched moral assumptions about 'the good life' that health promotion discourses produce through an overt focus on risk, protective factors and the utility of time. As Foucault points out, we live in an era that requires ethical questions, rather than moral prescriptions, about how we want to live and how we are to constitute our relations with self in ways that contest the rules governing social life (O'Leary, 2002).

The other key concern with contemporary health policies that mobilise leisure time is the lack of gender analysis and acknowledgement of the gendered politics of time. While there is acknowledgement of gender differences in terms of women's lower physical activity rates (Active Australia, 2003) and higher rates of 'mental health disorders' such as depression and anxiety (CDHAC, 2000b), there is little gender analysis of how and why these differences exist (see Fullagar and Gattuso (2002) on depression policy; Fullagar (2003a) on active leisure policy). While there has been consideration of the gendered nature of leisure within the *National Policy on Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity* (1999-2002), within health the recognition of a gendered understanding of physical activity and depression has only recently emerged in, for example, the *NSW Women's Health Outcomes Framework* (NSW Dept of Health, 2002). While this policy does acknowledge the social and interconnected nature of physical, mental and emotional health, it still employs the biomedical discourse of physically active time use, rather than a more complex understanding of active leisure. We are yet to see a considered policy response that examines the gendered politics of time in terms of the changing nature of women's work, leisure and family lives within the context of neo-liberalism. As Pusey (2003) argues in his research into the experiences of 'middle Australia', women have entered the labour market in significant numbers, yet services (such as childcare) are increasingly privatised and often not readily available.

In this article we are particularly interested in exploring the implications for young women's emotional wellbeing as they appear to be experiencing the phenomenon of time intensification (Brown *et al.*, 2001) and currently have high rates of what has been termed 'mental health disorders'. Young women aged 15-24 years are identified as having the highest rate of depression, the highest rates of disability days (being unable to work, study or manage day-to-day activities) due to psychological distress and higher rates of hospitalisation (than men) due to suicide attempts (Public Health Division, 2002). The *National Mental Health Plan* (CDHAC, 1999) largely ignored the socio-cultural context that governs young women's emotional wellbeing and thus largely promotes pharmacological and psychological 'treatment' pathways to better health (Fullagar and Gattuso, 2002). Stoppard (2000) argues that when women's experience of depression is defined in terms of a medical disorder that privileges anti-depressant treatment, the cultural nature of gender relations is rendered invisible. Without critical examination of the effects of the gendered organisation of everyday life on women's construction of self, emotional distress is often pathologised as an abnormal response. In order to open up alternative ways of thinking about emotional distress, we seek to explore the cultural pressures that impact upon young women's identity in order to consider the role of leisure in sustaining and promoting emotional wellbeing.

Gender, leisure time and wellbeing

The phenomenon of time compression has particular implications for women's health and leisure in terms of their gendered responsibilities for domestic, caring, paid and community work. While time pressures shift with women's life stage changes and gendered roles there is also a cultural transformation occurring that is linked to our experience of time (Frost, 2001). Time-use and women's life-stage changes are two key themes that are being explored in the Women's Health Australia (WHA) study. The study involves three national cohorts of women who are broadly representative of three different generations, with over 41,000 women aged 18-23 ('young'), 45-50 ('mid') and 70-75 ('older') years, responding to a baseline survey in 1996. The baseline surveys included questions on a range of issues designed to explore social, psychological and biological aspects of women's life. In this paper we draw on survey responses from around 14 000 'young' women to questions relating to time pressure, sense of stress and strategies used to reduce stress. The data are drawn from the baseline survey conducted in 1996 and a follow-up survey with the same women conducted in 2000.

Within the WHA study 'young' women (18-23 years old in 1996) reported nearly the same level of time pressure as women at mid-life juggling family and work lives (Brown *et al.*, 2001). In response to a structured question about sources of stress young women felt 'very or extremely stressed' about money, study, employment, living arrangements and relationships with partner worries. Four years later (aged 22-27 years in 2000) these same young women still felt most stressed about money, a little more stressed about work and relationships, but less stressed about study. Over this period these young women also reported a slight increase, from 63% to 66%, in relation to feelings of time pressure 'everyday' and a 'few times a week'.

Interestingly, leisure practices featured strongly in these young women's responses to a question included in the 1996 survey about what they do to reduce their feelings of stress. The most frequently mentioned activities that were undertaken most or all of the time included:

- talking to a good friend (41%);
- music, reading, sleeping, meditation (37%);
- being alone, watching TV (27%);
- eating more or less (20%);
- walking, exercise or working out (17%);
- smoking, using drugs or alcohol (12%);
- writing, drawing or creative activity (10%); and
- letting off steam, eg throwing things (7%).

In the 1996³ survey 73% of young women also reported a desire to engage in more active leisure pursuits (e.g., sport, art, drama, music) and 42% in more passive leisure pursuits (e.g., reading, TV, writing letters). In addition 50% of young

women desired more time for sleeping, which may indeed be linked to feelings of stress and pressure. There are connections that we can make between the ways in which young women deal with stress and the significance of leisure in maintaining emotional wellbeing. Talking with friends, social activities that offer support, quiet time and space for relaxing and unwinding, as well as more active forms of release and embodied expression all figure importantly in the everyday management of self. The significance of these everyday leisure experiences is often overlooked in health policies that adopt medicalised discourses about the psychological or biological cause, treatment and prevention of mental health disorders.

The emphasis that young women place on non-medical leisure related practices for the management and prevention of stress is also supported by research into Australian attitudes about the 'treatment' of depression. Highet, Hickie and Davenport (2002) undertook a survey of a representative community sample of 900 adults regarding treatments for depression and reported that 97% of respondents found support from family/friends to be helpful, 91% exercise, 87% yoga, 87% psychological therapies and 65% antidepressants. In the study, among the 18-24 year old cohort 50% would first seek help from family, 36% from friends and 11% from general practitioners. In another Australian study (with a national sample) into the helpfulness of different interventions for people with symptoms of depression and anxiety, Jorm *et al.* (2000) found a preference for self-help rather than professional treatments. The most commonly used interventions over a six-month period included: 50% who became involved in physical activity, 35% consulted a GP, 20% took antidepressants and 4% sought psychotherapy (Jorm *et al.*, 2000). While these studies are not gender-specific they do point towards a cultural preference for lifestyle interventions that enhance emotional wellbeing through leisure-related participation.

We need to ask what might be the social effects on emotional wellbeing for young women as they age and experience increased time pressures associated with work and family life? Leisure may indeed assume a key role in creating time and space for critical reflection upon the gendered experience of time for women. While leisure researchers (Wearing, 1998; Harrington, 2001; Brown *et al.*, 1998, 2001) have pointed out the clear gender inequities that shape the division of time between home, leisure and family life, there is also another issue at stake. It is a question about the value of time as it is lived in the pursuit of wellbeing, not just 'health' or 'social success', but in terms an ethics of self and social relationships, embodied modes of being and creative capacities to engage in community life. This is a profoundly gendered issue because it involves unearthing the masculine assumptions that have historically informed everyday ways of valuing time through the privileging of a sense of identity steeped in work achievement and leisure consumption, instrumental relationships and a reason/emotion opposition (Davies, 2001).

Next we turn to a discussion of youth suicide and explore some of these implications for emotional wellbeing through a qualitative study of young women's perceptions of the pressures that contribute to young persons' desire to end their own lives.

Pressures to perform

The youth suicide research project involved 81 in-depth interviews with young women and men (15-24 years in 2000), adults and youth/health professionals in an urban (Subcity) and regional (Bordertown) community (see Fullagar 2001). Subcity is a relatively affluent suburban area of an Australian city and Bordertown is a growing regional city with surrounding small towns that rely upon agriculture and tourism. Interviews were taped and involved nine open-ended questions (e.g.: Why do you think young people take their own lives? Is it an issue within your community? What can be done to prevent youth suicide?) and several scenarios to elicit perceptions and observations. There was no specific question about leisure participation and hence participant responses about leisure were largely self-generated (occasionally a prompt would be used, such as: 'What about reasons relating to work, leisure, family and community issues?'). In this article we shall draw only upon the 20 interviews conducted with young women in order to identify the kinds of pressures that they feel contribute to youth suicide. Suicide is often identified within the literature and policy as a mental health problem for young men, yet young women have higher rates of hospitalisation for suicide attempts and self-harm (Public Health Division, 2002; CDHAC, 2000a). Hence, suicide and the desire to self-harm needs to be understood as a highly gendered social phenomenon.

The research explored the cultural context that shaped community perceptions and responses to youth suicide and hence it did not actively seek out young people 'at risk' of suicide. However, within the cohort of ten rural young women, five had attempted suicide themselves, three had close friends or family who had attempted or died, one knew of more distant people who had died and one did not know of any. Within the urban cohort of young women no-one disclosed a personal suicide attempt although several had known of others within their community who had died or attempted suicide. This stark difference may be related to methodological issues concerning rural/urban willingness to disclose personal experiences. Nevertheless, the stories of these young women and their insights into the pressures of contemporary life are compelling. In contrast to the young men in the study, young women spoke specifically about several gendered experiences that could contribute to suicidal feelings. These included becoming pregnant without support from family or partner, dealing with feelings of shame and a lack of self-worth related to childhood abuse, feeling exploited within teenage heterosexual relationships, anxieties over body image and harassment about sexual identity (being lesbian, bisexual or just different from feminine norms). Overall, the majority of responses

that young women gave to a question about reasons behind youth suicide can be identified with three major themes:

- a perceived lack of emotional support within families and communities (relationship breakdowns, violence and conflict, social isolation and exclusion);
- pressure and stress to achieve at school and at work (getting high marks; getting a job);
- the more complex leisure-related phenomenon of peer pressure to conform and perform a particular kind of feminine identity in relation to conspicuous consumption (clothes, leisure goods), alcohol and drug use, heterosexual relationship and friendship norms.

The following account by one of the rural young women who had previously attempted suicide is a complex response to our question 'why do you think young people are taking their own lives?'. Her comment about the effect of multiple pressures on young women today was also echoed by many participants who felt that there was no single 'cause' that would lead someone to attempt suicide.

There's so much pressure these days, it used to be just get married and have babies and finish year 10. Now it's the pressure to get 99 for your TER [Tertiary Education Rank] at school, even though it doesn't really matter, you know, a year after you've finished high school what does the TER matter? There's pressure to be popular and the image of yourself and that is such a strong thing. I think it really crushes your spirit a lot. You think 'oh it's not worthwhile living, I'm just too embarrassed to be me, or I don't want to feel like this any more'. I don't think there's help for that sort of thing. Like even antidepressants, they won't change your image of yourself. If you're not happy with yourself no one else can make you happy. There's drug pressure, there's pressure to go out, you know, and be sociable. Pressure about who has got the best friends and the best clothes and what else is there? You know, uni. choices and jobs, not able to get jobs and where you get money from if you're, like, unemployed. If you're not employed that's when you get yourself into trouble, sitting around all day... (Cloe, 23, Bordertown).

Cloe describes how the combined effects of school, work, drug and social pressures led to her feeling 'crushed' by the weight of cultural expectation about 'performing' a successful feminine identity. She also identifies how changing gender roles have not simply brought about more freedom of choice for young women within neo-liberal society, but have in fact become caught up within a highly individualised ethos of successful self-management (Wyn, 2000; Walkerdine, *et al.*, 2001).

The pressures that Cloe identifies are echoed in the responses of both urban and rural young women with some differences related to cultural and socio-economic norms. For the rural women a lack of family support (abuse, neglect, divorce and emotionally unsympathetic parents) with resultant stress, negativity about self and feelings of not belonging, was the major reason identified in relation

to suicidal feelings. While this reason also figured predominantly within the responses of the urban young women, the pressure to achieve at school (and fear of failure) along with parental expectations are cited more frequently. Interestingly leisure and sport are caught up within these pressures to successfully manage one's self in relation to time and activity. As Renee says:

You're getting so much pressure put on you at school to do this and then you've got your parents on your back. A lot of these people that I knew (who had attempted suicide) were quite into sport and had lots of sporting commitments and pressure from that. I think it is not knowing how to deal with pressure all at once. (Renee, 22, Subcity).

For this more affluent cohort achieving academically was linked to future success in gaining a place in a preferred university or a good job. Wyn (2000) suggests that this pressure to succeed is connected to the changing meaning of young adulthood that is tied to new workplace practices, uncertainty about employment, and balancing leisure and study. For young middle class women the increased expectation to perform successfully (the 'clever girls' phenomenon) in education and employment also contributes to the self-regulation of emotions and anxiety about performance (not being 'good enough') (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2000). Other research into youth suicide has also identified the pressure of academic success in relation to over-achievement or under-achievement as a contributing factor (Sankey, 2003). While pressures to achieve at school were mentioned by half the rural cohort it was often linked to the uncertainty of potential unemployment and available career options. This difference may be understood in relation to the gendered pattern of rural inequality where young women have children at a younger age, experience entrenched gender roles and have more limited career opportunities (Warner-Smith and Lee, 2001).

Both groups of young women emphasised the intensification of everyday pressures in relation to conflict over balancing time spent in leisure, study and part-time work and in terms of sources of emotional support. They experience a combination of pressures and the feeling that they cannot deal with them autonomously (as a sign of personal failure), alongside a perceived lack of emotional support. As one respondent, Sandra, indicated, the time pressures and discourses of success that govern young women's experience may lead to a restriction of their leisure and social life, which is ironically a major source of emotional support.

From school, from home, teachers and parents put so much pressure on their children to do well and not all kids can cope with it... They expect kids to spend every single hour of their waking life doing homework and they don't want them to have a social life. (Sandra, 19, Bordertown)

Both the rural and urban young women spoke with ambivalence about the role of peer friendships within their lives and in relation to reasons behind and prevention of suicide. On the one hand, half of all the young women felt enormous peer pressure to conform to an identity based upon 'being cool': conspicuous consumption, narrowly defined body image or appearance, fear of being stigmatised about 'problems', and risk-taking behaviours involving drugs and alcohol. Whether this was associated with achieving urban middle-class status or finding one's place within a small community in which everyone knows everyone else, friendships were an importance source of identification. Talking with friends, generally other young women, was also seen as a vital source of emotional support in everyday life, especially when parents were perceived to be either too busy because of work commitments, emotionally unavailable or actively unsupportive. Courtney talks about the importance of social relationships in dealing with stress:

A group of friends might understand what they're going through and help with handling stress by playing sport or just going out and socialising. But with some people they might not feel that is an option so they keep it to themselves and start stressing within themselves because they have no outlet to release it. (Courtney, 17, Subcity)

Courtney identifies the ambivalence expressed by many young women about how to 'deal with' or talk about their emotions openly and safely with friends. Several spoke about how they could express their emotions amongst friends ('unlike the guys I know who only talk about footy'). Yet others identified a double emotional burden in which they did not want to share and thus 'burden' their friends (or family) with problems that they themselves felt overwhelmed by. Not speaking about emotional difficulties was also mentioned in relation to pressures to appear 'independent, strong and capable of dealing with things', whereas crying or sharing feelings would be seen as 'weak' and risky to one's reputation. Young women are increasingly urged to perform a 'successful' neo-liberal identity that diminishes the value of emotional expression and intensifies the sense of shame associated with talking about feelings (Fullagar, 2003b). The pressures to fit more into a busy lifestyle of work, study and consumptive leisure means that the time required to develop and sustain emotionally supportive relationships is being eroded. Leisure practices and spaces that are informal and emphasise relationships, rather than the acquisition of commodities, are vitally important in creating opportunities for everyday support for young women.

Policy implications

In relation to these issues the challenge for leisure and health policy and program development rests with facilitating these social opportunities for young women in ways that address the gendered nature of social relations and emotional wellbeing.

Policy development in these areas is yet to fully utilise the growing body of research that explores gender relations and the complex relations between leisure and health that undermine, and also promote, wellbeing (Patterson and Pegg, 1999; Caltabiano, 1995; Coleman and Iso-Ahola, 1993). To reverse this, leisure would need to be understood as an embodied spatial and temporal social practice rather than simply as a functional vehicle for promoting physical health. For example, the growing interest in physical activity creates potential problems with promoting universal programs that do not acknowledge the social and gendered nature of wellbeing. Recent American research has found that participating in physical activity is not necessarily a 'protective factor' in young women's mental health: Unger (1997) found that, while adolescent boys who did not participate in exercise or sport had higher rates of suicidal behaviour than their peers who were more physically active, the results were very different for adolescent girls. Girls who exercised 6 to 7 times per week, but were not involved in sports, reported higher rates of suicidal behaviour than girls reporting no activity.

Similar results were also found in a survey of college students by Brown and Blanton (2002) who found that women engaging in frequent vigorous or moderate exercise activity (e.g., jogging, gym, aerobics) were at increased odds of suicidal behaviour compared with inactive women. However, they did find that sports participation was protective against suicidal behaviour for men and women, which was perhaps due to social contact within teams. For young women who are at risk of suicidal behaviour, exercise may be used to cope with stress and some may engage in compulsive physical activity that involves a negative relation to the body (Frost, 2001). Brown and Blanton recommend that health professionals promoting physical activity to young people assess what motivates them to exercise. These studies identify but do not explain the complex relationships between gender, physical activity and emotional wellbeing. Further qualitative research is required to examine what 'being active' means to young women in the context of their emotions, social relations and gendered constructions of self. This research suggests that some young women engage in physical activities that may be akin to 'anti-leisure' practices, emphasising punitive, calculative relations to the embodied self. Such anti-leisure practices measure time spent in terms of energy expenditure (weight loss, muscle toning) rather than through a temporal relation that values social enjoyment and pleasure in active physicality for its own sake.

Conclusion

To those within the leisure studies field it is self-evident that experiences of pleasure, sociality, joy and self-expression are central to individual and social wellbeing. Yet, the temporal qualities of such experiences have perhaps not been recognised within health policies that have historically been concerned with measuring health problems and identifying risk and protective factors. This approach undervalues how leisure experiences act as 'social determinants' of

wellbeing (both positive and negative) and the gendered nature of leisure particularly in the lives of young women. There is an opportunity within the discursive operations of whole-of-government policies to engage in cross-disciplinary conversations about leisure in relation to other spheres of life. Within policies that cross the domains of health, sport, community engagement, work and welfare there needs to be a better understanding of how young women construct their own sense of emotional wellbeing in relation to social and time pressures. Along with Rojek (2000) we argue that technocratic debates about time use leave little room for articulating different meanings about leisure, particularly within the contemporary trend towards privatised provision of services and the calculation of specific kinds of 'health' outcomes. Yet, there are counter discourses about work-leisure balance, eco-lifestyles, community renewal and quality time that work to disrupt the normalising imperatives associated with neo-liberalism and commodity consumption. For example, Hamilton (2003) identifies the emergence of an alternative economy of value that is being articulated through a 'downshifting trend' in Australia where leisure is perhaps being refigured through a different notion of time.

All policies, despite their best intentions, play a role in the governance of populations and the construction of particular problems and solutions. Hence, Commonwealth, state and local policies that impact upon young women require ongoing reflexive analysis as to their effects and possibilities. We are used to thinking about the provision of leisure in terms of space, rather than time. Many public or community leisure spaces are utilised more often by young men (e.g., skateboard parks and sports facilities) with young women favouring the private, safe space of the home (e.g., the bedroom) (James, 2001; Harris, 2001). This being the case, how might we engage young women in the policy process itself in mapping out possibilities for the provision of leisure as a spatial and temporal practice? The everyday temporalities through which young women construct identity, form relations with others and engage in embodied practices come to inform notions of leisure. Such an understanding is crucial to policy and program development. We also need to ask how certain leisure experiences invoke a different kind of temporality – a sense of time that resists the pressures of modern life in a move towards creating an alternative ethics of self. It is an ethics that contests the instrumental values of the market place and revalues the time it takes to create community, to establish emotional relationships and open up creative possibilities for individual and social expression.

Notes

1. This study commenced in 1995 with funding from the Australian Commonwealth government. More information about the project can be obtained from the website www.fec.newcastle.edu.au/wha

2. This study was funded by the Australian Research Council from 2000-2003 and conducted by G. Sullivan, S. Fullagar and G. Howarth
3. This survey involved a sample of 14,739 women aged 19-23 in 1996. See Brown et al. (2001) for a description of methods.

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