

The place and meaning of physical activity, physical education, and physical culture in the lives of young people living in rural Queensland

Jessica Lee, School of Human Movement Studies, University of Queensland

Abstract

Young people living in rural and regional areas are often reported as being less physically active than are young people living elsewhere. An understanding of this phenomenon will inform policies and strategies to address this finding. One source of valuable information is a qualitative understanding of how social relations and cultural meanings influence young people's opportunities and choices in relation to physical activity as told by young people themselves. It is envisaged that this information will inform the development of school curricula to engage young people and which will enable schools, community groups and governments to collaborate in meeting the needs of young people living in rural Queensland.

Introduction

Research has indicated that young people living in rural areas negotiate certain factors such lack of facilities, transport, and money when considering participation in physical activities (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Mummery, Schofield, Abt, & Soper, 2000; Wyn, Stokes, & Stafford, 1998). Their experiences are therefore particularly diverse and tend to differ from the experiences of young people who live elsewhere (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Mummery, Schofield, Abt, & Soper, 2000). Despite this, the nature of physical activity participation of rural youth and how they engage with physical culture is given little attention in physical activity research.

Research regarding the amount and type of young people's physical activity has been well documented (e.g. ABS, 1998; Australian Sports Commission, 1991; Booth et al., 1997). This type of participation research, often based on quantitative, large scale surveys, has identified a declining trend in participation rates among young people in general (ABS, 1998) and particularly those from rural and remote regions (Bennett, Emmison & Frow, 2001^{*}; Mummery et al., 2000). As such, the Australian government has identified rural youth as a target group in its most recent 'More Active Australia'

^{*} Results from this study also included rural adults.

policy document, "Our aim is to see more sport played at the grassroots level, particularly amongst school aged children and in rural areas" (Australian Government Sport and Tourism Division, 2001). Whilst acknowledging that these results are informative, as well as providing a strong rationale for this research, they raise significant questions that cannot be answered by the quantitative methodologies so far employed. For example, they cannot provide information about the place and meaning of physical activity as these change over time (particularly for non-organised sport and recreational activities); demonstrate how the discursive and material resources associated with physical culture are used to construct young people's identities in relation to physical activity; document how young people's perceptions of physical activity influence their engagement with school sport and physical education (Wright, Macdonald, Wyn, & Glover, 2001).

In general, the participation literature is not designed to take into account the social and cultural contexts which young people participate in as a part of physical activity. Therefore, by using qualitative methods, this paper aims to explore the claim that rural young people are less physically active than other young people and to illustrate their participation patterns as they describe them. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theoretical framework will be used to assist in the explanation of rural young people's engagement with physical activity and physical culture.

Key terms

At this point it is important to clarify the meaning of some key terms relating to the current research, rural, sport, physical activity, physical education, and physical culture. The existing literature reflects the enormous diversity of the term 'rural', both within communities (such as gender, race, and social class divisions), and from regional, economic, social, and geographical differences between rural communities (Wyn, Stokes, & Stafford, 1998). Due to the extent of this diversity, the term 'rural' is increasingly difficult to define. The broadest definition of 'rural youth' includes all young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years who live outside of the metropolitan areas (Wyn et al., 1998). This definition accommodates approximately one quarter of young people in Australia.

Due to the confusion over what is considered 'rural', some researchers choose to use their own definitions. Quixley (1992), for example, in her study of the experiences of young people in rural and remote communities in Australia derived her sample from young people living in population centres of between 200 and 5000 people. Other researchers choose to include towns and regional centres because the decline of the rural economy is also felt in these areas along with other common problems such as access to transport and service provision which are felt in rural communities (Wyn, 1998). Rural young people themselves form a diverse group in that some are from farming families and others are

from more residential areas.

A sociocultural definition of 'rural' maintains that "culture and history influence perceptions and understanding of rurality and, therefore cannot be ignored" (Bourke & Lockie, 2001, p. 8). There is no doubt that many Australians identify with rural or urban living, "rural therefore, can be understood in contemporary contexts as a social construction, whereby meanings and identities have been constructed over time with our culture" (p. 8). As the focus of this research is on presenting the voices of young people, a sociocultural understanding of 'rural' will be used allowing the young people themselves to *identify* with what has been socially constructed as rural living and their feelings of 'differentness' to the urban lifestyle.

It must be acknowledged that some of the participants in the present study reside in small towns that would not qualify as rural in terms of traditional indicators such as population size or distance from capital city or major centre. However, these young people do identify with the 'rural lifestyle' and are no doubt different from urban young people in terms of access to facilities such as popular entertainment, sports, education, public transport, medical, and government agencies. For consistency, the term 'rural' will be used to describe all of the young people in this study. However, so as not to gloss over their diversity, the young people in this cohort consist of those who live on family-run farms, one vegetable, and one larger, more isolated cattle/sheep farm; three who live on smaller properties around 100 kilometres from the nearest town; and 10 young people living in a small town (population approximately 1500) less than 200 kilometres from a capital city.

Despite some of the participants not living on farms or even properties, they all describe their local areas and "typical" residents as farmers. For example:

Brett: "[At TAFE] you try not to talk about cows and horses and that sort of thing. You definitely get there and talk with your funny accent and that sort of thing and talk a lot slower and all that stuff and as I said talk about cows and horses and what so. So you'd probably find yourself sitting in your own little corner and talking to yourself."

Sally: "Cause it's daggy, there's a lot of people out in the country that dress up like cowboys and cowgirls, they get you know the hats and you know those shirts".

Int: "So why would you consider this a rural area?"

Sharon: "There isn't much to do for starters. There's lots of old people, horses, cows, all that

sort of stuff, typical country little town.”

Furthermore, they tend to talk about themselves as fitting with this stereotype, that is, answering positively to the question “would you consider yourself as a country person?”

The terms sport and physical activity are often used interchangeably; however they both have very prescriptive definitions. Meier (1995) suggests that there is a multitude of individual characteristics and factors that are deemed to be components of sport. Some of the necessary features of sport are: it involves challenge/competition; rules govern its structure; it is unnecessary and ‘unreal’; it may be serious or trivial; it entails physical exertion, prowess or ‘locatedness’ (Meier, 1995). The key words relating to the definition of sport are ‘rules’, ‘competitive’ and ‘physical’, therefore ‘sport’ can be understood as *organised* physical activities. Sport represents the dominant form of physical activity in our culture (Tinning, Macdonald, Wright, & Hickey, 2001).

‘Physical activity’ is a more inclusive term defined by the U.S. Surgeon General as any activity that significantly increases an individual’s energy expenditure beyond the basal metabolic rate (i.e. resting) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). It is important to note that this definition incorporates organised and non-organised activities, recreational and leisure activities as well as physical forms of transport (e.g. walking, bicycle riding), and physical labour.

Whilst being more inclusive in terms of the types of activities, ‘physical activity’ does not take into account the social and cultural meanings surrounding sport and physical activity. The concept of ‘physical culture’ is therefore also vital to research of this kind. Kirk (1997) defines this term as the *social practices* involved with maintaining, representing and regulating the body which constitute sport, physical recreation and exercise. In the process of engaging with physical culture, young people do not merely ‘participate’ in physical activities, they also become consumers of the commercialised and commodified products of physical culture, such as foodstuffs (e.g. sports drinks, breakfast cereals), music (e.g. used in the advertising of sports and sport products), and sportswear (Wright et al., 2001). Physical culture provides the discursive resources for making sense of physical activities, hence young people construct identities utilising these resources (Wright et al., 2001). This concept provides a broader scope in which to locate physical activity within the total biography of young people’s lives (Macdonald, 2002).

Physical activity has historically played a significant role in the Australian school curriculum (Tinning et al., 2001). The focus of contemporary physical education reflects the dominance of ‘sport’ in our

culture. According to Alexander (1996, cited in Tinning et al., 2001, p. 37), the purpose of physical education is to 'increase a person's approach tendencies [desire] and abilities to participate in a successful, rewarding and socially responsible way in the movement culture'. This definition locates physical education strongly in the context of contemporary social life. Physical education is influenced by such sociocultural factors as the changing nature of schooling, commodification of the body, physical activity in society, and the changing nature of society (Tinning et al., 2001).

Bourdieu's sociology applied to physical activity and rural young people

When applied to physical activity, Bourdieu's theory suggests that physical activity participation and indeed the type of activities that individuals choose are shaped by social structures (Bourdieu, 1978). Practices (including physical activity and sport) are shaped by three key elements: habitus, capital and field.

Bourdieu describes the embodiment of social rules, values, and dispositions as 'the habitus', which he defines as 'the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations ... [which produces] practices' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). Habitus is, 'social structures embodied', or embodied, internalised schema that structures (but does not determine) actions, thoughts and feelings (Jarvie & McGuire, 1994). The result is that one's (apparently) spontaneous choice of personal practices (e.g. a way of grooming, a kind of sport) as well as the meanings attached to them, are the product of embodiment of dispositions and norms that are derived from and are indicative of social conditions (Harvey & Sparkes, 1991).

A field can be defined as a 'social arena'. Sport and physical activity constitute one such field (Jarvie & McGuire, 1994). Fields are characterised by struggles for dominant positions (Jarvie & McGuire, 1994) and to determine what constitutes capital within that field, and how that capital is to be distributed (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Capital refers to aspects of social currency that individuals possess in varying degrees (unequally distributed amongst different groups in society). Economic capital is the most lucrative and directly refers to actual economic assets; other forms of capital can be transformed into economic capital. Cultural capital refers to the amount of competence in 'legitimate' (or dominant) social codes.

Social fields are maintained and reproduced through the 'doxa'. That is, the core set of values and discourses which are fundamental principles of the field, the existing social order (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Bourdieu (1990) describes the doxa as the 'presuppositions of the field' (p. 68) and can be likened to "the rules of the game". As the habitus is shaped by the social field, Bourdieu

suggests that people adjust themselves to achieve consistency with the doxa, this is known as the 'doxic attitude'. However, the 'doxic attitude' does not denote comfort within the status quo; subjects can maintain a doxic attitude even when it causes them suffering (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). This is a form of 'misrecognition', where agents become so familiar with their roles in the social world, they seem like second nature (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). 'Symbolic violence' (as opposed to physical violence) occurs in social fields when people are denied resources, treated as inferior, or have limited rights and opportunities (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). In other words, symbolic violence is a form of discrimination. For discrimination to be termed 'symbolic violence' however, it must be 'misrecognised' (Bourdieu, 1992). That is, agents who comply with the doxic attitude, believing the situation to be the natural order of things, do not perceive it as discrimination (Bourdieu, 1992).

Rural sociological research has identified a strong gendered power structure within the agricultural field (Campbell & Bell, 2000; Davidson, 2001; Liepins, 2000). This is a result of the long-standing assumption that "farming is 'men's work' and that women are largely confined to the domestic sphere as the wives, daughters and mothers of male farmers" (Davidson, 2001, p. 204). Male domination or hegemonic masculinity is a concept that is widely studied in sociology in general; however, more recently there has been an interest in how masculinities are constructed in rural settings. This is not to separate *rural masculinity* as opposed to *urban masculinity* but rather to explore the "intersection of the rural and the masculine on a symbolic level" (Campbell & Bell, 2000, p. 539). Masculinity is often closely associated with rurality, for example, the farmer is commonly constructed as a "he", and farming work is understood as active heavy labour (Campbell & Bell, 2000; Liepins, 2000). Campbell and Bell also suggest that discourses of rurality have also been incorporated into popular cultural representations of masculinity, "for example, rural themes are used commonly in images of the "real man": the logger with his chain saw felling a giant tree; the Marlboro cowboy cantering over the plains on his trusty horse" (p. 540).

Hegemony theory makes use of a relational understanding of gender, such that gender categories are constructed in relation to each other (Campbell & Bell, 2000).

As mentioned previously, the activities most obviously linked to farm income are culturally understood to be men's activities, where women merely play a 'helping' or 'supporting' role in these activities (Davidson, 2001). Therefore, women's roles have been described as 'invisible' in the rural field.

Bourdieu's theories provide a lens with which to examine how rural young people are positioned within their social fields, in particular sport, physical education, and recreational physical activity. Whilst it has been established that rural communities are diverse, I propose that there is a certain 'doxa' associated with gender relations and what is socioculturally understood as 'rural'. In the results section I will discuss how rural young people are exposed to symbolic violence in terms of access to sport, physical activity, and physical education opportunities. Furthermore, I will examine how some young rural men and women take up the 'doxic attitude' and 'misrecognise' the symbolic violence, where others draw on agency and capital to transcend this situation.

Research Process

This study forms a component of a national project funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), 'Physical Activity and Physical Culture in the Lives of Young People' (Wright et al., 2001). The aim of the national project is to provide insights into young people's engagement with physical activity and physical culture which will inform the generation of new policy and program interventions and contribute to young people's well-being (Wright, Macdonald, & Groom, 2003).

The national project has been implemented across three states (New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland) and involves participants from eight schools (both government and non-government) chosen specifically to sample young people from diverse geographical (i.e. rural, inner-city, coastal), ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. This allows the project to explore different 'cultures' of physical activity amongst young people and the impact of different state education systems on their experiences of physical activity in and out of school.

Data has been collected for just over two years (28 months) with 15 young people residing in rural areas throughout Queensland. The participants were recruited from a government secondary school in small community and a school of distance education. The primary method of data collection has been semi-structured interviews based on physical activity participation patterns, health and fitness, the local community, and physical culture (e.g. popular media, sports clothing, sports spectatorship patterns). Several stimuli have been used for these interviews including physical activity record diaries, magazines, photographs, and map drawings. Photographs that the participants and their family members took of their daily activities and maps that participants drew of their own local area and the places that they visit/facilities that they use, were used as a basis for interview questions. Data collection has involved both face-to-face and phone interviews as well as more innovative methods such as e-mail, and personal web pages.

Examination of the data: The voices of rural young people*

The data will be presented in two sections. The purpose of the first section, *description of physical activity patterns*, is to illustrate how the young people in this cohort engage with sport, physical activity, and physical education and the meanings they associate with their participation. The second section, *theoretical analysis of participation in physical activity, sport, and physical education*, involves a deeper exploration into the discourses of the participants using the lens of Bourdieu's theories that were outlined previously.

Description of physical activity patterns

Sport

Less than half of the cohort is involved in organised sport.

Brandon is unique in that he is involved in many sports, both club and school based including volleyball, swimming, triathlon, golf, and touch football. His family circumstances such as his parents' willingness and ability to transport and give financial support are the main factors that allow him to be involved in this way. Brandon's parents run their own vegetable farm and employ several farm hands, which provides the option of more free time to be involved in their children's sporting activities. Furthermore, Brandon has to work on the farm without pay so that his parents are willing to cover the many costs. His parents also participate in activities such as golf and touch football with him.

Lisa is also heavily involved in her chosen sport of dressage. She spends every evening after school grooming and working her four horses and most weekends travelling to competitions between 100 and 300 kilometres away from her home. Having also been a dressage competitor, Lisa's mother is very committed to travelling with her daughter to specialist training sessions and competitions as well as financing the upkeep of a stable of horses.

Tyrone has previously been involved in a number of sports (gymnastics, rugby league, Little Athletics, cricket), but his participation has always been mediated by distance and travel, and the sports available in his local area. Since moving to a new property which is more distant from small towns he no longer participates in any sports. *Lemming* is involved in club sport however; he is unable to engage fully with the team due to distance and travel. "My brother and I play cricket in [regional town] on the

* Participants chose their own pseudonyms to be used for the study in order to protect their anonymity.

weekends but it's a long drive so we don't have to go to training during the week".

Although these young people are engaged in organised sport, there are certain sociocultural mediators that shape their involvement. Whilst factors such as family support and availability of facilities are mediators of sports involvement in all areas (i.e. urban and rural), both are more significant in a rural setting. Small communities are usually unable to support a large number of different clubs, therefore sporting options are generally more restricted in rural areas. Furthermore, due to distance from local towns or regional centres, travel to sporting venues for young people necessitates the commitment of parents.

In response to the question "What do you get out of participating in sport?" Lemming and Tyrone both identified fitness, fun/enjoyment, and making friends. Lisa also mentioned that she is involved in equestrian "to make friends", but also "for something to do".

Recreational physical activities and physical labour

Although less than half of the cohort are involved in sports, 14 out of the 15 take part in regular physical activity. Furthermore, being able to ride bikes and play with siblings in large yards and on bush tracks is something that seems to be taken for granted by some rural young people.

It has become evident throughout this study that the young people tend to associate health and fitness with sport and planned exercise, such as going for a jog or working out at the gym. While mostly regarding themselves as physically inactive (because they don't do any "sport"), the young people represented in this section are all involved in physical activities. These activities include recreational activities, walking for transport, and physical labour.

Mouldy studies via distance education and spends his breaks during the day outside either playing cricket or riding bikes.

Mouldy: "[we normally ride] just down on the road, like not real far away but just down a bit".

Int: "Is there any shop or friend's house that you normally ride to?" M: "No we're just in the bush".

Jacinta is not involved in any sports, as she perceives transport to be an obstacle. Whilst she believes she is physically inactive, she reveals that she jumps on the trampoline, walks, and dances in her leisure time.

Jacinta: "There's nothing to do around here... I'd like there to be more things to do but, living out where we do, everything is like in a driving distance, but living in the city you would be able to walk there..."

Int: "What physical activity are you doing at the moment?"

J: "I don't think any, any more... Well usually if I'm doing anything, I go out and talk to my sister who's usually outside on the trampoline. We just start talking and then we go down the road, we go for a walk down the road because there's nothing else to do..."

[I also] Dance to music. I turn on 'Rage' and I'm just standing there dancing..."

Due to the lack of public transport in their small community, both *Tammy* and *Adam*, who have part-time jobs to supplement the family income, are responsible for their own transport to-and-from work. These two young people both live in single parent families and cannot rely on their parents for transport as they work full-time.

Tammy: "I walk to work at the bakery.... It's about a 45 minute walk". Tammy also walks for about 10 minutes to the bus stop to get to school everyday. Adam usually travels longer distances to visit his father, so he rides his pushbike for transport. "Well I pedal to [train station], catch the train down to my father's, and then catch the train back and then pedal home".

Many of the participants have responsibilities at home or on other properties that involve physical labour. The young people usually discuss these activities in terms of chores or responsibilities rather than physical activity. *Lisa* captures this distinction between work and physical activity (or exercise) by saying "It's not really a physical activity because I'm not doing to get fit". *Sally* describes herself as inactive, when she is responsible for grooming horses at home and works hard labour at a turf farm before school. Conversely, *Tyrone* and *Wadiken* are no longer involved in any sport, but are keen to demonstrate that they are still physically active.

Tyrone: "We've got a few young colts and I'm helping mum work one of them... I do chop the wood 'cause we have a combustion stove".

Wadiken: "Well what kinds of physical activity have [I] been involved in outside of school, well working around the property for one. Dad keeps us very busy, like property to run with shearing, branding and all of that and lots of things and that keeps us pretty fit. But we have a tennis court with a hit up board at the back of it and I've got my own bike and I do bike riding which is pretty good for muscle building..."

Physical education

At the small-town secondary school, health and physical education (HPE) is compulsory for years 8 and 9. A non-Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS) subject called 'PE Extension' is also offered for all grades. As PE Extension is non-board, that is, it does not contribute towards the OP (overall position - tertiary entry score), senior students are reluctant to choose it even for those students who are interested in sport such as Brandon.

"I used to do PE Extension but this year I changed out of that to do business principles... I could have picked between BP and PE Extension but sort of my studies are more important than sport and I didn't need that for my future studies"

This dilemma is probably common in small rural schools where student numbers do not warrant a broad range of BSSSS subjects.

For the students studying via distance education, it is compulsory to participate in HPE until grade eight. Interestingly, practical work is still focused around team sports such as basketball along with athletics and swimming. The absence of a class context makes participation in these types of activities difficult and usually requires students to participate with siblings and/or parents. Again travel becomes an issue when facilities such as pools are not available nearby. Restraints such as these often result in the students disengaging with HPE altogether. *Lemming* provides insight into this situation:

"I do not do physical activity for my school work at the moment or any more. I did HPE in year eight but I don't do it now. I didn't enjoy it much. I had to play basketball and dancing with my mum. I reckon it would have been better if I could do it with other kids instead of with my family... The things that I did in it were basketball, athletics and swimming... It's a bit hard by yourself too, I had to travel for an hour to get to the pool in swimming so that was hard and we don't have any water around here".

Theoretical analysis of participation in physical activity, sport, and physical education

The young women in the cohort are generally aware of the dominant discourses of health and fitness, and all associate being physically active with being healthy. As such the girls often mention that to be healthier they "should do more *exercise* and *sports*". Despite their unanimous identification with this discourse, only one of the girls is involved in a sporting activity. The girls' tendency to not participate in organised physical activities may be a result of a lack of 'feminine' options. When asked about the physical activity options in their communities, they identify cricket and football, "but nothing for girls

to do". It is notable that Lisa, the only girl in the cohort to be involved in organised sport, participates in equestrian events, particularly dressage, which is consistent with feminine discourses of grace, beauty, and elegance. Lisa's involvement in her chosen sport is also made possible by her possession of cultural capital necessary for participation in equestrian, gained through her mother's previous involvement with the sport. Furthermore, Lisa's family also has sufficient economic capital to sustain her involvement in this comparatively expensive pursuit.

Most of the young women also identify strongly with a feminine "family responsibility" discourse in terms of household chores and babysitting. As such, their conceptions of physical activity (that is exercise and sport) are not consistent with a rural feminine discourse. Sharon who attends a small rural high school emphasizes her feelings about school physical education: "[I don't like PE] because it's based around all boys' stuff and stuff like that, they should put more like female sports and stuff". In terms of Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this is an example of *symbolic violence* where the young females are not given the opportunity (either real or perceived) to participate satisfactorily in sport, and physical education. Furthermore, the girls rarely question or even acknowledge the gender order, accepting that it is 'just the way things are' and can therefore be interpreted as *misrecognition*. While some of the girls do participate in recreational physical activity and physical labour, they do not perceive these forms of physical activity legitimate because of the dominance of *sport* and *exercise* discourses. They would also therefore, be classed as 'physically inactive' in terms of large, quantitative based studies.

The rural young men in this cohort also associate physical activity and exercise with being healthy. However, the boys tend to consider physical activity more as a *necessity* to function in life, for example strength and endurance (typically masculine qualities) are needed to carry out daily tasks.

Adam: "Healthy [is] eating proper, exercising... Probably just the ability to do whatever I like, like down the SES [state emergency service] shed, I see some people who aren't healthy and they're restricted by it, I can sort of go out and do most things... [exercise is important] just to keep my body alive, I think exercise is important just to keep everything working."

Wadiken: "[being unhealthy] would probably stop you from doing what you want to do."

Brett: "I don't like the idea of not being able to run around if I want to, I'm a fairly active person, so I'd like to be able to say I'm going to run over to the shed and be able to do it and not get tired."

The boys in the cohort are more likely to be involved in organised sport, as there are more opportunities and facilities for 'boys' sports. Five out of the seven male participants are involved in sports and organised physical activities, both club and school based. Their activities include cricket, swimming, volleyball, golf, touch football, SES and army training, and pistol shooting. The two young men who are not involved in organised physical activities (Wadiken and Tyrone) both live on properties and are involved in hard physical labour. By being involved in farming work, Wadiken and Tyrone's masculine identity is consistent with the dominant *masculine rural* ideal. However, for the young men who do not work on properties, their masculine identity is maintained through participation in sport and organised physical training (SES, army). They identify one of the primary reasons for participating in these activities as "fitness" which enables them to carry out 'normal lives'. While the rural young men have more opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity than do the young women, in comparison to other young men who live in urban areas, the rural boys still have fewer options.

It appears that amongst this cohort of rural young people, the gendered power structure of the rural field is dominant in the *doxa* of the sport and physical activity field within the rural setting. This *doxa* subjects the young women to *symbolic violence* in terms of 'legitimate' activities as well as availability of facilities. The young men on the other hand, hold the dominant power position and almost 'expect' to be involved in sport and physical labour as a way of life. However, the *doxic attitude* taken up by the young men and women means that the symbolic violence is *misrecognised* and accepted as 'just the way things are'. Possession of sufficient economic capital, and available free time, known as *distance from necessity* (Bourdieu, 1978), along with cultural capital has afforded one young woman agency to participate in a legitimate sporting activity.

While it has been observed that there are gender differences in the meanings of physical activity in this cohort, it is also significant that the value of physical activity seems to be a *family* discourse. The data reveals that the majority of rural young people in this cohort say that they spend most of their time with their families. The following quote from Sharon demonstrates not only that she spends most of her time with her family, but she believes that this is a typically rural trait.

"I've never lived in the city but, I don't know I'd say you're more sort of family orientated [in rural areas], you like to be at home and with your family and everything, I don't like know if this is true or not, but in the city you sort of, you've got all this public transport, you can go out and about, you can do heaps of stuff, whereas if you're here, you're stuck, so you sort of become more close to your family and learn to

respect them a bit more.”

Furthermore, many of the participants, when asked who they most admire, nominate their parents. For example:

Wadiken: “I’d like to be like my dad because he’s smart, inventive, he’s clever, he’s a good thinker and he’s a good worker too... I admire mum and dad because they have battled the odds for the past 20 years now and they have turned [the property] from a hopelessly run-down place that it was into the well-run property that it is now.”

Jemima: “I admire my parents, and I sort of follow what my mum does and what my dad does...the person I most admire, that’s got to be my parents.”

Adam: “I always aspire to be like my dad.”

For those who are involved in sport and physical activity, their parents (and grandparents) are involved in supporting roles such as coaching and transporting, and are also seen as role models for their own participation.

Lisa: “[the person who I most admire is] probably mum because she follows me around and takes me to everything and pays for the lessons and everything.”

Brett: “I look up to my dad ‘cause he’s ranked seventh in the world for pistol shooting and yeah, I’d like to be there one day... probably my grandad as well ‘cause he’s a shotgun shooter.”

Sharon: “She’s [mum] influenced me the most. She used to do aerobics and everything when I was little and she’s always really been into a lot of sports and very healthy, she’s got a treadmill, we go for walks in the afternoons.”

Cassie: “My grandad until he passed on... we used to walk like 10 kilometres a day... he used to say you should get involved with everything ‘cause you don’t know what you’re missing out on otherwise.”

Jacinta: “My mum has been a big part of my fitness and stuff and she just says oh come on let’s go for a ride and stuff like that.”

Sport consumption patterns and engagement with discourses and practices surrounding physical

culture are not as evident within this rural cohort. That is, none of the participants say they value sporting brand clothes, only four have been spectators at major sporting events, and the same four are the only ones who watch sports on television (or listen on the radio) or follow any sporting teams. A number of reasons for this lack of engagement with the commodities of physical culture can be drawn from the interview data. Sporting clothes are not seen as a marketable commodity because they are not suitable for work, and are too expensive for just “wearing around”. For example, Wadiken says:

“We wear second hand clothes but work clothes because Adidas, Billabong, Nike aren’t very good clothes because they get wrecked and stuff, they’re not really good quality so we wear proper hats, long sleeved shirts... Those kinds of clothes [brand name sports clothes] would be alright in the city but they’re very expensive out here and they wouldn’t last long.”

Furthermore, major games and events are often too far away for rural families to watch at live venues and commercial television channels that broadcast major sporting events are not accessible in some locations.

A limited engagement with the commercialised products of physical culture coupled with a lack of opportunity to compete and access to necessary facilities, there is less *capital* associated with sport consumption amongst the rural young people in this cohort. However, this observation cannot be generalised to all rural young people, as some families’ social, cultural, and economic capital allows them to access pay television and to travel to cities and major centres for sporting events. Furthermore, some rural young people go to boarding school or private schools in rural locations where opportunities and exposure to physical culture is increased.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore, using qualitative methods, the claim that rural young people are less physically active than others who live in city areas. Preliminary data analysis reveals that young people living in rural Queensland, who form this cohort, due to their geographical location, engage in sport, physical activity, and physical culture in diverse, creative, and unique ways and certain factors in their social environments mediate their choices about involvement in sports. However, this does not mean that they are destined to be physically inactive. When considering rural young people’s participation, the more inclusive term of ‘physical activity’ rather than ‘sport’ has become particularly useful, as although their access to organised sport is somewhat limited, engagement in various forms

of regular physical activity is common.

The data presented in this paper from a rural Queensland cohort of young people demonstrate that indeed, their participation in, and decisions regarding physical activity are shaped by social structures such as economic capital, family, location, and access to facilities. However, as individuals these young people engage with the discourses in their social worlds in various ways and utilise different opportunities, therefore assuming diverse pathways throughout their lives. Hence, their individual habitus (shaped by the discourses in their social environment) produces diverse engagements with the discourses within the field of sport and physical activity. This is not to say that social structures determine their participation in certain sports or physical activities, but rather that these young people understand and value physical activities in different ways (shaped by their habitus) and utilize the available opportunities and facilities (i.e. economic capital, school subjects, parental support) to produce the diverse patterns of engagement with physical activity and physical culture observed in this study.

These results highlight the need to explore rural young people's engagement in physical activity and physical culture from a qualitative point of view in order to reveal how sociocultural factors shape these young people's attitudes toward physical activity and physical culture. A thorough understanding of this relationship will shed new light on participation statistics that identify rural young people as being one of the most physically inactive groups. Furthermore, it will provide information that can enhance rural young people's experiences of sport and physical activity.

Data from this study can help inform school curriculum by providing a voice to the young people themselves about their experiences with school physical education. For example, an opportunity to study health education and physical education at a senior level may be warranted for some rural students. Perhaps such schools with limited student numbers could combine with other schools (either primary or secondary) in the local area or community groups (local sporting clubs, unemployed people, senior citizens) to provide the numbers and facilities needed. Furthermore, a review of the types of sports and activities on the distance education health and physical education curriculum seems relevant in order to maintain students' interest and provide opportunities for those with limited access to facilities.

In addition, an appreciation of the place and meaning of physical activity and physical culture in the lives of rural young people imposes the recognition that participation in sport and organised physical activities is not always as simple as 'just doing it'. This provides insight for the generation of new government policies that consider the multitude of sociocultural factors that shape rural young

people's decisions and opportunities surrounding sport and physical activity. With new government initiatives, local community facilities and the provision of sports and physical activity programs can be improved to suit the diverse needs of these young people. Data from this study reveal a strong family influence in the meaning of physical activity. Perhaps there is a need for *families* as well as schools to be sites for physical activity promotion. The collaboration between governments, schools, and communities can only serve to enhance the experiences of rural and regional young people in sport and physical activity.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my supervisor, Associate Professor Doune Macdonald, who proofread my drafts and directed me to useful resources throughout the process of writing this paper. Her guidance is very much appreciated.

Jessica Lee is a PhD candidate in the area of pedagogy in the School of Human Movement Studies at the University of Queensland. This article reviews some early data from her PhD research project entitled 'Physical activity and physical culture in the lives of young people living in rural and regional Queensland'.

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 1998, *Culture and Recreation Special Article – Participation in Physical Activities (Year Book Australia, 1998)* (online). <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats> [Accessed 16 October 2001].
- Australian Government Sport and Tourism Division 2001, *Backing Australia's sporting ability: A more active Australia*. Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts: Canberra.
- Australian Sports Commission. 1991, *Sport for Young Australians: Widening the gateways to participation*. Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.
- Bennett, T., Emmison, M., & Frow, J. 2001, Social class and cultural practise in contemporary Australia. In *Culture in Australia: Politics, publics and programs*, eds. T. Bennett & D. Carter. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Booth, M. L., Macaskill, P., Phongsavan, P., McLellan, L., Oackley, T. 1998, Methods of the NSW Schools Fitness and Physical Activity Survey, 1997. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 1 (2), pp. 111-124.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977, *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Bourdieu, P. 1978, Sport and social class. *Social Science Information*, 17(6), pp. 819-840.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990, *The logic of practice*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. 1992, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourke, L. & Lockie, S. 2001, Rural Australia: An introduction. In *Rurality bites*, eds. S. Lockie & L. Bourke. Pluto Press. Annandale, NSW.
- Campbell, H., & Bell, M. M. 2000, The question of rural masculinities. *Rural Sociology*, 65(4), pp. 532-546.
- Gordon, W. R., & Caltabiano, M. L. 1996, Youth leisure experiences in rural and urban North Queensland. *Australian Leisure*, 7 (2), pp. 37-42.
- Harvey, J., & Sparks, R. 1991, The politics of the body in the context of modernity. *Quest*, 43, pp. 164-189.
- Jarvie, G. & Maguire, J. 1994, *Sport and leisure in social thought*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Kenway, J. & Bullen, E. 2001, *Consuming children: Education- entertainment- advertising*. Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Kirk, D. 1997, Schooling bodies in new times: The reform of school physical education in high modernity. In *Critical postmodernism in human movement, physical education and sport*, ed. J.-M. Fernandez-Balboa. SUNY Press, Albany.
- Liepins, R. 2000, Making men: The construction and representation of agriculture-based masculinities in Australia and New Zealand. *Rural Sociology*, 65(4), pp. 605-620.
- Macdonald, D. 2002, Extending agendas: Physical culture research for the 21st century. In *Gender and physical education: Contemporary issues and future education*, ed. D. Penney. Routledge, London.
- Meier, K. V. 1995, Triad trickery: Playing with sport and games. In *Philosophic inquiry in sport*, eds. W. J. Morgan & K. V. Meier. Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL.
- Mummery, W. K., Schofield, G. M., Abt, G., & Soper, L. 2000, Correlates of adolescent physical activity in regional Australia: Results from the Central Queensland Adolescent Physical Activity and Nutrition Study. *Proceedings of the World Sport Science Congress*. Central Queensland University.
- Quixley, S. 1992, *Living, learning and working: The experiences of young people in rural and remote communities in Australia*. National Youth Coalition for Housing: Canberra.
- Tinning, R., Macdonald, D., Wright, J., & Hickey, C. (2001). *Becoming a Physical Education Teacher: Contemporary and Learning Issues*. Pearson Education Australia: Frenchs Forest, NSW
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1996, *Physical activity and health: A report of the surgeon general*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Atlanta, GA.

Webb, J., Schirato, T. and Danaher, G. 2002, *Understanding Bourdieu*, Allen & Unwin. NSW, Australia.

Wright, J., Macdonald, D., Wyn, J., & Glover, S. 2001, *Physical Activity and Physical Culture in the Lives of Young People* (ARC Funding submission). University of Wollongong. Wollongong, NSW.

Wright, J., Macdonald, D., & Groom, L. 2003, Physical activity and young people: Beyond participation. *Sport, Education and Society*, 8(1), pp.17-33.

Wyn, J., Stokes, H., & Stafford, J. 1998, *Young people living in rural Australia in the 1990s*. Youth Research Centre, Melbourne.