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Physical activity careers and oral histories of family membership: a synthesised approach to understanding physical activity and well-being in family contexts

Abstract

As it appears physical activity is not a widespread family practice (Day, *in press*), attempting to collect comprehensive life histories sensitive to connections between physical activity habits and family influences across the life course would be unnecessary. Reflecting upon data from my PhD study and the experience of collecting this data, it is argued that simultaneous investigation of physical activity careers and oral histories of family membership offers a more useful, meaningful and authentic approach. Furthermore, synthesis between career and oral history interviews highlight complex inter-relationships between physical activity experiences, family relationships and recollections of well-being. More specifically, participant's stories provide rich explanations that are supplementary and different to trends identified between family relationships and well-being in the 'new science' of happiness (see Layard, 2011) and assumptions made in the exercise sciences about the contribution of physical activity to well-being. Consequently, people's accounts of well-being emerge as meaningful, intimate and delicate moments in time that are both memorable and crucial to their physical activity careers and family memberships across the life course. It is thus also suggested that although socialisation is a process, the ways in which interviewees recall, interpret, relive and reinterpret this process in reference to family and physical activity is nonlinear, unpredictable and highly personal. In closing it is tentatively proposed that the methodology outlined represents

a more practical and human-centred way of understanding social influences upon physical activity and well-being than has traditionally been utilised in the exercise sciences.