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## Chapter X

### **Making time for the tribes: The work of synchronisation in the making of youth collectivities in the age of digital media**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter argues for better attending to the way young people make time for cultural practices with others, something often taken for granted in both subcultural and post-subcultural framings of youth culture. Drawing on multiple rounds of qualitative data collection (2008 and 2017) from a mixed-methods study of youth in Australia, I show how the individualising social structure that shapes contemporary lives means that investments and demands in one sphere, such as employment, often do not articulate easily with those in other spheres, such as leisure. The timetables and rhythms of the participant's lives are constantly varying in ways that are difficult to control and 'non-standard' hours of employment are common. Contemporary life demands efforts, often drawing on digital technology, to synchronise schedules to engage in leisure and collectively create and consume culture offline. A paradox of contemporary life for these participants is that periods of collective creativity and 'tribal' abandon require active synchronisation, and even routinisation for it to take place, yet it is exactly this 'effort' that goes into finding time for co-present 'tribal' abandon that can lead to a 'special occasion effect' that heightens the pull towards liminal experience when the 'gang is all together again'.

#### **Introduction**

There is diversity and even significant disagreement among youth studies scholars about how to understand young people's cultural engagements. There have been questions about the degree to which young people's cultural practices cohere, such that they can said to belong to a particular subculture, or are relatively multiple and shifting, particularly in the context of the rise of digital technology (Blackman 2005, Bennett and Robards 2014). Secondly, scholars have asked how such practices relate to key social divisions and inequalities and the rest of young people's lives, and related, how they relate to politics (Woodman and Bennett 2015). However, in this chapter I suggest that despite these differences, common approaches to studying youth culture take for granted that young people can easily organise find time for collective practices. I am making what might at this moment seem like an obvious claim: it can sometimes be hard for young people to control the time they get to spend with other people. My argument is that researchers interested in young people's cultural practices need to attend to the work that young people do to *find time with each other*. In the wake of a global pandemic, school closures, and widespread lockdowns in many countries, it has become obvious that circumstances can conspire to separate people from each other. Nonetheless, the challenges I outline in this chapter that shape young people's cultural practices predate the separation caused by the pandemic and related interventions – and go beyond it.

The challenge of synchronising complex lives that I outline here is linked to profound social changes over the past three decades that will likely continue to shape the new (post-pandemic) normal that emerges in the coming months and years. Drawing on data from a mixed-methods longitudinal study called Life Patterns, which follows young people in Australian from the end of secondary school through their 20s and beyond, I will make the case that the structures of young people's lives are such that they must do more work to organise face-to-face sociality with friends and to take part in youth cultural practices. Individualising social structures that shapes contemporary lives means that investments and demands in one sphere, such as employment, often do not articulate easily with those in other spheres, such as leisure. The timetables and rhythms of the participant's lives are constantly varying in ways that are difficult to control and 'non-standard' hours of employment are common. Contemporary life demands efforts, often drawing on digital technology, to synchronise schedules to engage in leisure and collectively create and consume culture offline.

The existing conceptual resources in the study of youth cultures do not orient researchers to this challenge of finding time together and researchers have largely taken its availability for granted. I argue that focusing on temporal individualisation's effects and how young people navigate these effects

can help orient youth cultures scholarship towards the challenge for young people of making time for collective practices.

### **Youth Cultures: subcultures and neo-tribes**

The study of youth cultures is a major strand of sociological youth research. On the one hand, the youth phase of the life course has been conceptualised as pivotal in people's engagement with and creation of cultural forms. On the other, young people's unique leisure practices and cultural patterns are seen as giving social shape to youth – youth is at least in part defined and created from these particular cultural practices (Woodman and Bennett 2015).

An interest among sociologists in the young people's cultural practices, particularly young men in gangs, reaches back at least to the early twentieth century (Blackman 2005). The study of culture was cemented as a constitutive part of the emerging field of youth studies with the theorising of working-class young people's cultural practices by members (or associates) of the famous 'Birmingham School' at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the University of Birmingham (Cohen 1972; Clarke et al. 1976). The CCCS proposed that youth subcultures of the 1970s were the product of working-class youth repurposing mass cultural forms in reaction to tensions in their (working-class) social position. This repurposing of cultural forms could be understood as a symbolic form of resistance to the class structure of 1970s Britain.

Almost immediately, critiques of the Birmingham School theoretical framing emerged – alongside just as many creative applications. Through the 1990s and into the 2000s, the cultural strand of youth studies was largely shaped by responses to the Birmingham subcultures approach. New perspectives were framed through these critiques, such that the new frameworks developed were called 'post-' or 'after-' subcultures frameworks. In particular, these approaches asserted that youth cultural practices had creative and aesthetic autonomy from class position while still having collective dimensions (Bennett 1999; Maffesoli 1996; Muggleton 2000) and were structured by much more than class position, such as gender and ethnicity (Huq 2007; McRobbie 2000; Nayak 2016).

In some senses, the debate reached a stalemate in the 2000s, with many defending and applying the subcultures approach on the grounds that this lens foregrounded class inequalities, while others critiqued it (and proposed various post-subcultural framings) on the same grounds (Woodman and Wyn 2015). Yet behind the seemingly entrenched positions, ground was conceded by all. Paul Hodkinson (2016) highlights that scholars are increasingly using the term subculture in a more expansive form than that proposed by the CCCS while, conversely, those who use post-subcultural framings, such as 'neo-tribes,' have recognised the intersecting structures that provide the context for young people's creative engagement with culture. As opposed to a stalemate, arguably a *consensus* has emerged that youth cultural practices should be connected to their broader and complex social, cultural, structural, and historical contexts. We cannot treat young people creating culture as if they do not have family lives, other intimate connections that demand their attention, and for many the need to go to work or school (Woodman and Bennett 2015). Despite this recognition, in this chapter I suggest that an important aspect of the (temporal) structure framing young people's cultural practices has remained poorly recognised across all of these approaches.

### **Finding time for the tribes**

Debates about youth cultures have played out in the context of youth scholars' engagement with broader theories of social change from the social sciences, particularly those claiming structural fragmentation and individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In the youth cultural field, while some continued to embrace the Birmingham subcultural framing in the 1990s and 2000s and countered any suggestion that collective class cultures no longer had the same explanatory power they once did (Blackman 2005), others embraced terms like 'neo-tribes' (Shields 1992; Maffesoli 1996; Bennett 1999). This new conceptual terminology seemed to both recognise the fragmentation and individualisation of social life, while also recognising the continued importance of collective forms of

identity. However, in this chapter, I want to put the culture of these collectives, as a group or identity to one side, and instead to think through the practical question of how practices with others are organised and constituted in time and space. Generally, youth cultures research – including in its subcultural and neo-tribal lineages – takes the concrete existence of the group for granted. From even before the Birmingham School, groups of young people spending significant time together or ‘hanging out’ is the foundation for developing subcultural forms of symbolic style and resistance (Cohen 1955; Corrigan 1976; Willis 1977)

While the collectives conceptualised in more recent ‘neo-tribal’ framings have a relatively ephemeral existence, some have highlighted that this type of belonging does demand more of a temporal investment than simply making a decision to belong – such that stylistic competencies and embodied skills continue to shape how young (and not so young people) are able to engage with culture (Malbon 1999; Driver and Bennett 2015; Hardy, Bennett, and Robards 2018). Yet, rarely have scholars asked about the effort or investment that might be needed to spend time with others in the first place. One of the most promising directions in recent cultural research has been studies of people aging in ‘youth cultures’ (Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Bennett and Hodkinson 2020; Willing et al. 2019). A pessimistic reading of changing cultural practices across the life course proposes that older people continuing to engage in the same cultural practices they did as a teen or in their early twenties is evidence of cultural regression, of an ‘infantilisation’ of adulthood where youthful endeavours are not left behind. The implication, at least, is that they *should* be left behind (Hayward 2013). But others have shown how ‘youthful’ cultural engagement as people age not only accompany but also are reshaped by all kinds of responsibilities in other spheres, particularly as new commitments arise, such as parenthood and employment demands (Bennett 2018; Bennett and Hodkinson 2020; Hodkinson 2013a, 2013b). Yet, this insight has not led to systematic questioning of the way other demands in life might impact not just on older adults but on the way younger people themselves engage in youth cultural practices. Again, permitting myself a rather broad sweeping gesture, post-subcultural approaches assume young people dipping in and out of collective identities and practices with relative ease.

### **Temporal individualisation**

There is an alternative way to understand individualisation that can help direct researchers to attend to the *work* young people must do to engage with cultural practices. I have put forward this understanding of individualisation in earlier publications (Woodman 2009; Woodman 2010; Woodman and Wyn 2015). Individualisation represents a structural fragmentation (without any necessary weakening of these structures) that demands people’s active effort to hold together aspects of their lives. Focusing on individualisation is a way to note how young people are profoundly influenced by social change without mischaracterising this change as freeing them from structural constraints. Young people are able, and are being asked, to redefine social structures for themselves in our contemporary conditions, as is the common understanding of individualisation (Woodman 2009). This is not, however, because social structures have disappeared, or even diminished in their power, but because the contradictions to be juggled have increased (Woodman 2010). A convincing account of young lives must appreciate the everyday and less spectacular biographical work that goes on to create and hold together a life, particularly in the gaps between clearly defined transitional events or cultural practices (Woodman and Wyn 2015).

Any account of how young people manage individualisation thus understood will have to attend to the way that digital technology has reshaped sociality. These technologies have reshaped how people engage with each other, with young people at the vanguard of this shift (Bennett and Robards 2014; Lincoln and Robards 2017; Robards and Bennett 2011). New digital tools of sociality have emerged that bring their own forms of togetherness and infuse even face-to-face encounters (Jurgenson 2011). If we consider social networking and forms of asynchronous and synchronous digitally mediated interaction, people have never been more connected with others. Yet, even with this proliferation of devices for communication and socialising at a distance, time physically co-present with significant others appears to be highly valued (Molotch 2004, Woodman 2012). Seeing and sensing the other

person through physical co-presence cannot yet be replicated as yet in mediated forms of sociality. This applies to different types of interaction. The sense of one-ness with others and liminality of ‘collective effervescence’ that Durkheim ([1912]1965) used to understand the effect and affect of ritual, used more recently to understand rave culture (Malbon 1999), seems difficult to replicate without physical copresence. At least some aspects of the more everyday face-to-face ‘interaction rituals’ (Collins 2004), which create their own sense of belonging and emotional investment, similarly do not translate easily into online interaction.

While research on ‘work-life interference and integration’ is a booming field, it is almost exclusively focused on people aged in their 30s-50s, particularly those juggling work with care responsibilities. Intriguingly, in Australia younger adults in their 20s report levels of work-life ‘interference’ almost as high as those in their 30s and 40s and significantly higher than older adults (Pocock, Skinner, and Williams 2012; Woodman and Cook 2019) suggesting that this assumption may not hold (Woodman 2013; Batchelor et al. 2020). Excluding online and often asynchronous schooling due to public health interventions (which my children and many others experienced for much of 2020 and into 2021), the structures of schooling still tend to bring young people together in a way that guarantees significant periods of time alongside friends and peers. Yet otherwise, temporal schedules for young people are becoming more individualised. In Australia, where I am based, and similar countries, precarious contracts with variable hours of work have become more common. Young people are increasingly living to their own individual schedules, although these are largely not controlled by the individual. This appears to make leisure more precarious, more challenging to organise and potentially more loaded with significance (Woodman 2013; Batchelor et al. 2020). Using data from an ongoing Australian study of young lives, in the coming section I highlight these challenges and their impacts.

### **The Life Patterns Project**

This chapter draws upon the Life Patterns longitudinal research program on which I am a co-Chief Investigator (see acknowledgements at the end of the chapter for the full project team). Life Patterns has followed the young adulthoods of two cohorts of Australians. The 1991 cohort have been followed since they completed secondary education in that year. In 2006, a new cohort were recruited and have been followed since that time. A third cohort is currently being recruited. Here, I focus on the second cohort, who were asked questions about variable work schedules, which were not asked of the first cohort. The significance of this variability has been a new finding of our research with the 2006 cohort.

The 2006 cohort was recruited through stratified (by school sector type) random sampling of secondary schools in Victoria, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania (covering the South Eastern states of Australia, which are home to approximately 60 per cent of the Australian population). A total of 3977 completed the initial questionnaire during school time, with 2100 completing the first longitudinal survey in 2007. The 2006 cohort have been surveyed annually, and a sub-set (30-55) is interviewed most but not every year.

Like all longitudinal surveys of youth, attrition is a limitation. There has been greater attrition of men than women, and the participants are also on average more educated than their age group in the population. The sample for the 1991 and 2006 cohorts has otherwise retained consistency in terms of location and socioeconomic background. Interview participants were recruited for a representative gender split, and a mix of metropolitan, non-metropolitan and socio-economic backgrounds and have remained more representative of the original sample composition over time, due to the level of engagement beyond the survey questionnaire that the interview participants have undertaken and to additional targeted follow up from the project team with the interview participants to reduce attrition among this important group. Below I give a brief descriptive outline of work patterns for the 2006 cohort as they aged through their twenties (based on 420 respondents who completed the survey for each of these multiple waves) before focusing on qualitative interviews undertaken with this cohort when they were aged 19-20 and again at 29-30, in 2008 and 2018. Some of the interview data presented first appeared in Woodman (2012), Woodman (2013) and Woodman and Cook (2019). However, this

is the first time it has been brought together in this way.

### Non-standard hours as standard

In the context of the widely discussed ‘delayed transitions’ facing young people, most participants have shifted from casual part-time work to full-time work and ongoing contracts as they head through their twenties. However, one aspect usually associated with such ‘standard’ contracts – working ‘business hours’ of around 9am to 5pm on weekdays – has *not* become the norm alongside this transition to permanent and full-time work. In fact, in terms of patterns of work hours, it seems non-standard has become a new standard in Australia, at least for those in their 20s. Table 1 below shows these shifts in contract type and hours for Life Patterns participants between the ages of 23 (2011) and 29 (2017).

Table 1. Shifts in contract type for Life Patterns participants over time

AGE	PERMANENT CONTRACT	FULL-TIME WORK	NON-STANDARD HOURS
23	43.8	37.9	65.3
24	51.3	52.0	59.9
25	59.8	62.4	61.2
26	61.9	68.8	60.6
27	64.2	69.7	64.6
28	69.3	70.6	66.7
29	68.8	70.0	61.2

Source: Life Patterns questionnaire – 520 participants remaining in 2019 (reduction from 720 in 2013). From recurring questions asking: whether or not paid employment regularly involves night shifts, working weekends, public holidays; contract status; part-time and full time hours.

Our participants were mixing study with variable hours of employment in a precarious youth labour market when they left school (Woodman 2012). Using interview excerpts, I highlight some of the temporal effects of this. When interviewed in 2008, as 19- or 20-year-olds, a period of life where finding time with friends is often imagined to be non-problematic, around half of the interview participants raised maintaining their social networks as a challenge they face. Coordinating schedules was a big part of this challenge. Luke, a young man living in a country town, who was working full time and did not go on to any post-school study, spoke about how his hospitality hours did not line up with the time his friends were working:

I didn't enjoy [work] the most, especially working at [a bar]... Mates would be having a few beers and whatnot... and I'd be working.... Pretty keen to move on out of it at the moment, get a normal job, like normal hours... I'm just pretty much sick of the hours I have to work, like everyone's knocked off work and I'm going to work, that sort of thing.

Luke wants a job with ‘normal hours’, but, as highlighted in the table above, this pattern of work seems to become ever rarer, not just for 19-year-olds but for people all the way through their twenties.

Marissa was studying in a capital city and commuting from a nearby town. She raised a similar issue:

There's a couple of friends I don't see much cause they work full time and I'm at university full time, then I work weekends, they have weekends off, but I try and hang out with them a bit if I can.

Henry was living, like Luke, in a country town and not studying, working in retail. He talked about

challenges catching up with friends because of different working patterns:

I probably found most friends sort of disappeared [since school] ...separate ways, different jobs.... You can say 'oh what are you doing? Do you want to catch up?' and they'd say, 'look, I'm working I can't go out'.

Trevor was living in a capital city and working in hospitality. He highlighted the challenge of variable hours of work:

The irregular hours started to kill me you know. Some mornings you'd start work at 10 o'clock and sometimes you'd start work at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

He was sharing a house with friends and so got time with them, but their schedules were still out of synch. The rhythms and energy levels of their leisure time did not align (these rhythms being out of synch can have effects outside of whether regular periods of time together are available [see Woodman 2013]):

You'd come home from work ...and your [housemates] are at home... having fun and you've just come home off a ten-hour shift and you're [really tired] and all you want to do is sleep.

### **A new type of work – scheduling in leisure and culture**

For these participants, leaving school saw a significant new challenge in synchronising their lives with friends. Stacy, who was working in hospitality and studying at university in a capital city, spoke of the need to actively schedule time with friends:

You don't realise just how hard you have to work. I had to approach everything differently – like socially, I actually had to book people in.

When we followed up on these issues again ten years later, the participants were still discussing challenges of synchronisation, mirroring the survey questionnaire evidence that 'non-standard' work schedules remained common. Between the two interviews, some significant social changes include the emergence and rapid take up of smartphones and the related swift expansion in the availability of, and time spent on, social media and other apps. For Stacy, when we interviewed her again, this work of needing to actively schedule in her social life was as apparent as when she was 19. But now she was utilising new, social media tools to synchronise with friends:

The app makes actually making social plans and events and things like that a little easier, because it's a one-stop shop. We actually have a group calendar that we put in all our individual [stuff] that we have going on. So, if there's like a day free in three weeks, we're like, okay we're all going to hang out at whoever's house [interviewer... like what programme do you use?] What app is it? I'll show you...Um, it is ... It's called TimeTree. So, there's like a whole bunch of us, and so I can look at my own calendar or I can see like who's added things and who's – like for example, if one of my friends is going to, I don't know, going on a Sydney trip or saying I'm going with her, I can just add myself to it.....Yeah, your birthday, [and] you can put in anyone else's birthday.

Apps both facilitated the interference of work on non-work time while providing tools to manage it (Fu and Cook 2020; Gregg 2013). Leisure time was important to the participants. This was usually, but not exclusively, with others, and seen as. time away from work but also for many a break from social media. Nathan, when interviewed as a 19-year-old in 2008, spoke about the different affective quality of time engaged in physical activity and the sense of escape from the pressures of his study, employment and relationship that this allows:

Something like a physical activity of some sort is what I find relaxes me ... get my mind off [work and relationship difficulties] the most. It's very easy because you're just out there in the moment ... When I'm outside and in the water or out in the boat, or out hunting, or out playing

a game of [football], there purely just isn't the time to think about [other things]. You're thinking about what you're doing in the moment ... You're not thinking about what you've got, to study, back at work, or back at the house.

When I spoke to Nathan in 2018, he was still engaging in these activities and now added that they also facilitated a break from screen time. Mirroring the scholarship on ageing in youth cultures (Bennett and Hodkinson 2020; Hodkinson 2013a), his engagement had shifted along with new life responsibilities (including children) and the greater financial resources he now had available to him:

Still doing hunting and diving. I've got my own boat now to dive... I'd noticed my diving has dropped right off. I hadn't been for a dive in 12 month or so. And I really wanted to, and the opportunity came up to buy a boat...still not [going] probably as much as what I should, to justify spending money on a boat, but um, at least with it there if I do want to go, I've got some way there to go out. I've got all the means to do it. I'm not relying on anyone else. So, yeah, I still do the hunting. Um, and as I said .....when you're out on the boat, you know, it doesn't matter if someone rings you from work, because there's nothing you can do, anyway. (laughs) You know, um, work now is very portable. Um, with tablets and, and things like that now, so um, and the mobile phone.

Nathan spoke about how new technologies allowed him to work while travelling, potentially helping him justify diving trips and fit them in among other responsibilities. However, when he was out hunting or under the water diving, he was offline and this sense of escape was part of the appeal. Part of the reason he purchased a boat was that he would then organise his own diving trips, not be reliant on others with gear. Nathan reported that getting friends booked in for diving trips and other activities had become harder, not easier through his 20s. Another participant, Harry, who unlike Nathan, did not have children, raised similar issues. Harry worked in a consultancy type role in a large city. It was internationally oriented and involved working variable hours to interact with other time zones.

I try to do touch football and stuff like that.... I found it very, very, hard, when you do this shift work that I do, because, you know you might have touch football every Wednesday. Well, I can now only make fifty percent of the games because the other times I'm at work. So that with the shift work really does affect things and it does affect a lot of people that I work with.... So, I have tried to look at other sports but I've just kind of replaced that with activities of just going to the gym.

### **Who is synchronising lives?**

Both Nathan and Harry gravitated towards activities that engaged them physically and were offline and that, while still often undertaken collectively (like diving or going to the gym), were not as rigidly scheduled as organised team sports, which both had played in the past. Unlike Stacy, these participants were not using shared scheduling tools with their friends to organise their leisure time. In fact, the men who did report using these tools tended to be doing so at the request of a partner. By the second interview (age 28-29), many participants were in in long-term intimate relationships and organising 'quality' time with partners became a more significant theme in the interview. The work of scheduling in leisure with each other and with others was sometimes approached as a joint task. More often than not among the longer-term cis-heterosexual partnerships, women and not men were leading this task. Samantha, an accountant based in a capital city, spoke about how her and her partner (a male web designer) scheduled their time.

We both contribute ideas about what we want to do, and then we plan out the time to do some, most of them. Now, every Sunday night we have a meeting, and we will discuss what our weeks look like, and then what we are going to do on Friday night [etc.]... We both share ideas..... We share the calendars together, and I could see what he is on tonight, but if we don't update our calendars on time, we would just lose track of each other.

Her partner was, partly at Samantha's insistence, seeing a life coach who was working on improving his scheduling skills. Emerging evidence suggests that this new (or at least intensifying) burden of synchronisation is gendered, with women (at least in these heterosexual relationships and in mixed-sex

friendship groups) doing more of this work than men and drawing in part on new technologies to do so (Woodman and Cook 2019).

## Discussion

A theme in recent youth studies writing has been a call to attend to the times and places of young lives, including attending to the ordinary 'everyday' aspects of young people's transitions and cultural practices, recognising both the way cultures shapes transitions and how social structures of youth and adulthood shape cultural practices (Woodman and Bennett 2015). Hodkinson (2013b, 2016), Harris (2015) and others have already put forward a compelling case for the need for studies of youth cultures to illuminate how taking part in a cultural grouping connects to other relationships, affiliations, and spaces, outside of the particular cultural form being studied, including how it connects to employment, education and home life. Scene participants need jobs just as those transitioning through study and employment have cultural and collective lives.

As the participants left school, they moved into new forms of education, in which timetables shifted each semester, and employment in which the hours they worked also varied, sometimes each week (Woodman 2012). This increasingly common temporal structure shaped the participants' lives in inconsistent and singular ways that made it more challenging for many, but not all, to find regular periods of shared time to maintain close friendships and to build new acquaintances into friendships. As Batchelor and colleagues (2020) have recently shown, precarious work sets the conditions for precarious leisure. One limitation of the question asked in the Life Patterns study about working patterns and variability in hours is that it does not capture how much autonomy the participants have over their hours. There is some evidence from interviews that at least some participants had greater control over their work schedules as they moved into professional work, but work demands also often intensified. However, even if there is somewhat more autonomy for older workers, less than half of Life Patterns participants report that their work was confined to what was once considered the standard work week, even in their late 20s. The Life Patterns participants describing themselves above are not particularly precarious in their employment status or their lives more broadly. Yet, even for those with relative autonomy over their work, effort was often required to align time for leisure with significant others such as friends and partners.

Participants did adjust the way they engaged in leisure and culture as they aged. They had new resources (such as Nathan buying a boat to go scuba diving) and new limitations emerged, such as parenting responsibilities for themselves or others. This resonates with the work on aging in youth culture, showing that cultural engagements and identities from people's teens and twenties often remain important, if in shifting ways, through the life course (Hodkinson 2013b). Yet, the experiences of the Life Patterns participants suggest that scholars need to apply a lens that investigates the interaction of cultural practices with the demands of other spheres of life, not just to 'ageing' participants but also to those in their teens and twenties. The challenge of finding time with others emerged when these participants left school and continued through their twenties, that is *before* they entered the normal so-called 'rush hour' of life, where many will be juggling work and care responsibilities.

This insight into contemporary temporal structures can help illuminate individualisation and what it means for the making of inequalities in the lives of young people. It is important to note that the analysis here is not suggesting that they are living atomised lives. It is possible if not probable that busy lives and shifting and partially overlapping temporal schedules, paired with the rise of new digital platforms for social life, mean that people have a larger circle of friends and acquaintances than ever before. On average, people probably work with, study with and interact with significantly more people than ever before. However, concurrently, a greater effort to synchronise lives is now required and this, as we saw, is continuing for the younger people in this study as they age. Different responsibilities shaped the way these participants engage with culture as they headed through their 20s, but there was also significant continuity. The challenge of synchronisation – a type of temporal individualisation – has shaped their teens through to late twenties and will probably continue to do so.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest that the work of creating predictability and stability in individual lives, in families and social networks has been largely transferred on to individuals. Youth studies scholars tend to focus on the need for self-fashioning when they have engaged with and critiqued theories of individualisation, but in this theory of individualisation, it is the effort of managing, overcoming or at least ‘papering over’ structural discontinuity and desynchronisation that is the new task demanded of individuals. It is these efforts that need to be foregrounded in understanding and applying the concept and using (or critiquing) the claim to social change made by its proponents. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s actors are also ‘tightrope walkers’ holding inconsistent and changing social demands together in their own lives (Woodman and Vanderharst 2021).

The processes outlined in this paper – which suggest new questions for how youth studies researchers understand young people’s cultural practices – are a type of temporal individualisation. This conceptualisation then leads to new theoretical frameworks for investigating the remaking of long-standing inequalities, as they shape and are shaped by leisure and culture. Some people have greater temporal autonomy, and, importantly, are part of friendship groups or in intimate relationships with others that have more autonomy, making it easier to manage this new challenge of synchronising lives. Yet, even for those who have a relatively large degree of autonomy, spending time face-to-face with others now often requires active intervention. There are robust findings over decades about the additional labour for women (in heterosexual partnerships) to organise family life. The additional challenge of synchronising lives appears to now be adding to this burden (Woodman and Cook 2019).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have focused on how patterns of work time may impact on face-to-face leisure time with others. Some aspects of non-standard work are transitional for young people, even if these transitions are taking longer, but for participants in this study of youth in Australia, ‘non-standard patterns’ of work hours are less transitional and may be evolving into a new permanent condition for this generation.

In this context of increasing variability and, for many people, unpredictability of ‘non-standard’ work patterns, creating the time for collective practices seems to be playing a new role in shaping leisure and culture. Digital technology is closely intertwined with this reshaping of culture but in ambivalent ways and these changes are arguably refiguring aspects of gendered and classed inequalities. The late teens and 20s are widely understood in academic and non-academic accounts of youth to be a period in which time with friends is both crucially important to development but also unproblematically available. This notion of freely available time – of use to explore interests and identities alongside peers – underpins arguably the most influential contemporary conceptualisation of youth, as the stage of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett 2010). While the importance of social time with peers is surely still very important to people in this age group, this chapter has presented evidence suggesting that finding such time together is structured by new challenges that separate contemporary youth experience from the past. This finding points to limitations with both subcultural and post-subcultural framings of youth leisure and culture.

This chapter should be read as an invitation to further investigate how people make time for collective experience, face to face or otherwise. This appears to be an equally valid question to ask young people engaging in youth culture as one to ask those attempting to maintain engagement as they age. The global Covid pandemic and the accompanying social restrictions have highlighted for all the importance of spending (physically co-present) time together with friends and significant others (while those stuck at home with family have faced the challenges of too much time together). In the post-Covid social and cultural world, there is substantial work to be done by researchers on how young people manage, temporal (and spatial) structures that do not easily synchronise.

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