

# Fitness Philanthropy



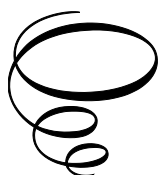
# Fitness Philanthropy:

*Sport, Charity and  
Everyday Giving*

By

Catherine Palmer

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



Fitness Philanthropy: Sport, Charity and Everyday Giving

By Catherine Palmer

This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2020 by Catherine Palmer

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5542-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5542-6

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	vii
Preface .....	ix
<b>Part One: Sport, Charity and Everyday Kindness</b>	
Chapter One.....	3
Sport, Charity and Everyday Giving	
Chapter Two.....	31
Athletes, Activism and Celebrity Giving	
Chapter Three .....	53
Families, Events and Philanthropy	
Chapter Four.....	81
Fitness Philanthropy and Therapeutic Places	
<b>Part Two: Sport Charity, Entrepreneurs and Compassionate Consumption</b>	
Chapter Five .....	105
Crowdfunding a Cure	
Chapter Six.....	125
Fitness Philanthropy, Corporate Social Responsibility and Cultural Intermediaries	
Chapter Seven.....	145
Reflections on Fitness Philanthropy	
Index.....	153



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this book has benefited from a period of research leave from the University of Tasmania, and from a Fulbright Scholarship which I spent at Florida State University in 2019. I thank the Fulbright Commission for the award and the opportunities this has created, personally and professionally.

Friends and colleagues along the way have provided invaluable moral and oral support and I am grateful to Kevin Filo, Kyle Bunds, Parissa Safi, Nick Hookway and Emmanuelle Tulle (the latter two for their enthusiasm for all things running). Zack Dwyer and Can Seng Ooi provided helpful comments on early drafts of work that have subsequently been included here.

I am especially grateful to Habitat for Humanity, Susan G. Komen, Carrie's Beanies 4 Brain Cancer Foundation and the McGrath Foundation for their engagement with the research and to the people who gave their time to share their own and their families' stories of fitness philanthropy.

To David, of course, and Wilkie, for the distractions.

Finally, thank you to Adam Rummens at Cambridge Scholars for supporting the project.

Thank you all.

Catherine Palmer





## PREFACE

The idea for this book was prompted by what I saw to be an emerging social phenomenon; the rise in popularity of “fitness philanthropy”. By fitness philanthropy, I refer to those consumer-oriented philanthropic solutions to health or social problems that draw on physical activity-based events such as fun runs, bike rides, long swims, epic hikes and multi-sport challenges in which participants seek to raise money for and awareness of a variety of health and social causes. Be it the Mother’s Day Classic raising money for breast cancer research and education, the Buddy Run raising awareness of anti-bullying campaigns among children or individual competitors seeking sponsorship for the London or New York marathons, an ever-increasing number of people are training for, competing in, donating to or sponsoring a broad range of sports-based charity events.

Alongside individual participation in these charity challenges, corporate sponsorship of events such as the Flora London Marathon, the BUPA Great North Run or the Medibank Melbourne Marathon has seen these events become unparalleled philanthropic endeavours, bringing together marketing strategies, corporate social responsibility and the agendas of health and medical research—and social care—to advance research, education and advocacy. Equally, we are seeing philanthropic fitness practices such as “GoodGym”—a UK based initiative that combines running with volunteering in local communities—emerging that also point to the burgeoning areas of sports and charity or fitness philanthropy.

As an avid but average runner who regularly takes part in the Mother’s Day Classic—an eight kilometre run held in most capital cities in Australia to raise money for Breast Cancer research, awareness and advocacy, I was intrigued by the growing plethora of events which occupied the space of what I’ve termed “fitness philanthropy”. As a sociologist, I was interested in what individual, social or structural factors might explain the rise and continued popularity of the charity “thon” (Palmer 2016). The book is an attempt to answer these questions.

Two central questions are explored, which frame the next seven chapters:

1. What can explain the emergence of fitness philanthropy as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon?

2. How can the research contribute to new understandings as they relate to sport, philanthropy, health and wellness and civic engagement?

Within these two overarching questions, there are a series of supplementary research questions, empirical examples and theoretical insights embedded in fitness philanthropy practices and events. They act as sites of suffering and embodied social practices as well as important sources of meaning that can make visible the meaning and politics of philanthropy, physical activity, illness, wellness, and shed light on issues such as citizenship, civic engagement, generosity and individual, state and corporate responsibility for health and wellbeing.

## **Structure and organisation**

Given the kinds of issues the book engages with, I haven't written a book that fits neatly into categories such as sports marketing, strategic philanthropy, corporate social responsibility, sports development or sports participation. Rather, the book examines the dominant themes in social science (and related) treatments of mass participation sporting events, the changing nature of charity and discourses around health and wellness and active citizenship. In highlighting the gaps and oversights, the book argues for the importance of widening the empirical and theoretical bases in order to better understand and explain the shifting cultural politics of fitness philanthropy in a context of neoliberalism and philanthropic citizenship. My interest, fundamentally, is in taking the debates about citizenship, social capital, generosity and kindness that are prevalent in the social sciences more broadly and applying these to analyses of sports-based charity events, and the social practices that surround them. That is, I am concerned with the everyday socio-cultural enactments of charitable giving, the changing nature of philanthropy, responsibilities for healthy, and the place of fitness philanthropy within this larger social and political landscape.

With this as background, the book is organized into two sections. The chapters in the first section—Sport, charity and everyday kindness—explore the theoretical and conceptual issues that relate to sport, charity and everyday giving. The chapters outline the changing nature of philanthropy and its relationship, most particularly, to sport. The chapters variously address the relationships between sport, charity and civic life and the emergence of fitness philanthropy as a social phenomenon and as my particular focus of study. The rise of sports activism and celebrity charity foundations as manifestations of the sport-philanthropy nexus are then considered in this first section. Drawing on empirical research with cancer

survivors and families affected by death and illness and who now donate their time, money and resources to participation and fundraising, the connections to health and illness, health care and medical research, education and advocacy are also mapped out. Underpinning these are the stories of death and diagnosis as among the many motivations for taking on the challenge of training for and participating in a fitness philanthropy challenge, and the first section of the book examines a range of individual, family and wider social experiences of sports-based charity events. The ways in which the spaces and places of sport-based charity events provide important locations in which healing or therapeutic encounters can occur are also examined in this first section.

The second section—Sport charity entrepreneurs and compassionate consumption—moves from the perspective of participants to the motivations of donor-supporters, corporate sponsors and philanthropic organisations in supporting charity foundations and events. Drawing on interviews with the Susan G. Komen Foundation (a pioneering charity for breast cancer awareness in the United States) and Carrie’s Beanies 4 Brain Cancer Foundation (an Australian charity which raises funds for brain cancer research) and ethnographic research with Habitat for Humanity (a charity raising money for housing and humanitarian aid in poor communities across the United States), the chapters in this second section variously explore the politics of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing a cure, along with the corporate strategies employed to support or sponsor sports-based charity events.

The chapters in this second section are principally concerned with the strategic decision making behind sponsorship, including the ways in which fitness philanthropy becomes dependent on the work of cultural intermediaries who use their standing and profile to raise money and direct public attention to particular charities and causes. Engaging with literature and concepts from corporate social responsibility and the intersections between sport and celebrity, this second half of the book explores some of the shifts and changes that have occurred within the global sports environment more broadly and the place of sports-based charity in this environment.

One of the central arguments to run through the book is that that the affective or emotional appeal of sports-based charity fundraising is located in a broader social shift towards compassionate consumption and active citizenship. That is, sport (and health) has emerged as a “super value”; or a lens through which a variety of other values—discipline, kindness, generosity, civic responsibility and so on are filtered (Crawford 1980). Using an auto-ethnographic case study of training for and competing

in the fitness philanthropy events of the Mother's Day Classic in Australia and the Southern Most Marathon in the Florida Keys, the book weaves through the attitudes to and experiences of charity, giving, kindness, volunteering and generosity encountered in my participation in these events.

To conclude, the book brings together the key themes, issues and debates and offers some reflections on and recommendations for the growth of fitness philanthropy in relation to sport, health, leisure and consumption. Theoretical and methodological possibilities for future studies, and the implications for not-for-profit and charity organisations, marketing and sponsorship and health and social policy, are discussed, reflected on and refined.

Thus, the material covered is a deliberately diverse and eclectic selection that reflects my previous, current or emerging research interests in relation to sport and charity. Although a book on sport and philanthropy that engages with marketing, sponsorship and corporate social responsibility, as well as the social sciences most broadly, it is informed by my background as a social anthropologist and I hope something of this comes through in what I've written. Because of this, I adopt a critical interpretivist approach to the analysis of fitness philanthropy and everyday giving. Following Sugden and Tomlinson, my approach is characterised by "a healthy disrespect for disciplinary boundaries, an adventurous cross-cultural curiosity and a commitment to critical social scientific scholarship not beholden to patrons, agencies or sponsors" (2011, xiii). I have long and unashamedly admired the work and writing of Clifford Geertz and Ulf Hannerz, and I hope this influence is apparent in what follows.

## References

- Crawford, R. 1980. "Healthism and the medicalisation of everyday life." *International Journal of Health Services*, 10: 65-388.
- Palmer, C. 2016. "Research on the run: Moving methods and the charity 'thon'", *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* doi:10.1080/2159676X.2015.1129641
- Sugden, J. and Tomlinson, A. eds., 2011. *Watching the Olympics: Politics, power and representation*. London: Routledge.

**PART ONE:**

**SPORT, CHARITY AND EVERYDAY KINDNESS**



# CHAPTER ONE

## SPORT, CHARITY AND EVERYDAY GIVING

### **Introduction**

On any Sunday, in any major city, parks and roadways are taken over by people taking part in any number of sports charity challenges. From fun runs raising money for chronic illnesses through to bicycle rides seeking to raise awareness of social problems such as poverty or homelessness, mass participation sporting events offer an ever-widening opportunity for people to take on the challenge of raising money for a favourite charity thereby “combining a personal physical challenge with an altruistic purpose” (Goodwin, et al., 2009, 66). Corporate sponsorship of events has led to the branding of the Virgin Money London Marathon, the Medibank Melbourne Marathon or the BUPA Great North Run, among others. These mass participation events now bring together sporting endeavours, marketing strategies and the agendas of medical research and social care in order to advance research, education and advocacy. In addition to fundraising, objectives of these events include raising awareness for a cause, encouraging community engagement and building sponsor profiles (Ruperto and Kerr 2009; Filo et al, 2012; Woolf, Heere and Walker 2013).

These events represent a critical aspect of a broader movement that leverages the synergy between sport and charity. This movement, I term “fitness philanthropy”; that is, consumer-oriented philanthropic solutions to health or social problems that draw on physical activity-based events such as fun runs, bike rides, long swims, epic hikes and multi-sport challenges in which participants seek to raise money for and awareness of a variety of health conditions or social causes (Palmer 2016, 254). Within the research on sport and fundraising, a variety of terms are used to describe the events that I term fitness philanthropy. These terms include charity sport events, sports charity challenges, charity “thons”, charity-affiliated sporting events, cause-related events, community events, participant sport events, and special events (e.g. Filo et al. 2008, 2009; Higgins and Hodgins 2008; Higgins and Lauzon 2003; Palmer 2016; Scott and Solomon 2003; Taylor and Shanka 2008).

Despite participation in sports charity events growing in popularity, little research has examined the emergence of fitness philanthropy as a social or sociological phenomenon. Participant motivations have typically been addressed from an individual rather than a socio-cultural perspective (as well as the benefits that individuals derive from participation (Rundio, Heere and Newland 2014). These individual motivations include striving to complete an individual fitness challenge, often inspired by participants' own personal loss, grief, or bereavement and desire to support efforts to cure particular diseases (e.g. Gregg et al., 2010; Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, and Ali-Choudhury 2007; Filo, Funk, and O'Brien 2008; Won, Park, Lee, and Chung, 2011; Won, Park, and Turner, 2010). The individual benefits of charity challenges also include a sense of personal empowerment as a result of realising fundraising goals (Coghlan and Filo 2013; Coghlan 2014; Bunds, Brandon-Lai, and Armstrong 2016), along with experiencing a sense of community among participants (Filo, Spence, and Sparvero 2013) and fostering empathy for the cause (Inoue, Heffernan, Yamaguchi, and Filo, 2018).

The impetus for corporate involvement in sponsorship has also been the focus of a body of literature in marketing and management where the involvement of corporate sponsors is important in terms of their role in event operations and design, while sponsor influence can further advance the social change inherent in fitness philanthropy. Sponsorship of charity sport events can bolster corporate image while positively influencing purchase intention among event participants (Lee, Sced, and Chen 2017). As discussed further in Chapter 6, the involvement of corporate sponsors in charity sport events has increased along with an ongoing shift in consumer attitudes towards engaging with products, services, and experiences that provide their lives with meaning (Matthijssen 2018).

At the same time, sport for charity (also part of the broader fitness philanthropy agenda) has also been considered from a corporate social responsibility perspective; by investigating how charity partnerships are good for business (e.g. Filo et al., 2009; Babiak 2010; Kihl, Babiak, and Tainsky 2014; Pfitzner and Koenigstorfer 2017). As detailed further in the following chapter, the involvement of professional athletes in charitable giving has also been addressed, with the motivations of athletes who form charitable foundations being examined (Palmer, 2019b) along with the attitudes of team officials, agents and athletes towards philanthropy in professional sport (Tainsky and Babiak 2011; Babiak, Mills et al 2012).

In the sport for development sector, sport can be positioned as "supporting those on the social, economic and geographic margins" (Darnell and Millington 2019, 175). In the Global North, sport development



initiatives have been linked to neoliberal urban contexts where sport fills a void in social welfare (Bustad and Andrews 2017; Clift 2014; Holt et al. 2013; Scherer et al. 2016). I return to these links between sport and neoliberalism throughout the book as they provide the important social, political and economic context within which fitness philanthropy has flourished.

In the chapters that follow, I offer a sociological investigation of the growth in popularity of mass participation sporting challenges as a unique social, health and philanthropic phenomenon. To do this, I review the dominant themes in analyses of sports charity events, highlight the gaps and oversights and argue for the importance of widening the empirical and theoretical bases so as to better understand and explain the shifting cultural politics of fitness philanthropy in a context of neoliberalism and philanthropic citizenship. The key argument I prosecute is that “fitness philanthropy” represents a unique form of giving in which displays of fitness are increasingly also displays of citizenship and being a “good person”. That is, fitness philanthropy is part of a wider, and ever-growing philanthropic endeavour that links notions of health, charity and philanthropy. This has broader implications for policy directions as they relate to sport, physical activity and health care. Indeed, fitness philanthropy resonates with the notion of “healthy publics” (Hinchliffe et al., 2018) in that both provoke and facilitate a shift in how we think about health-related interventions (Tupper, Atkinson, & Pollard). Like “healthy publics”, fitness philanthropy—and the fitness practices within—expands a focus on individuals or “passive recipient publics” to embrace a more dynamically and relationally constituted set of conditions for health and engagement with a range of people or publics. In other words, the growth in fitness philanthropy raises important questions about changing understandings of physical activity, health and wellness, as well as tapping into key sociological concerns about identity, community, charity, kindness and civic engagement.

## **Chapter structure**

This first chapter traces the key literature, themes, concepts and debates in sociological, marketing, management and related approaches to philanthropy and charity more broadly, and fitness-philanthropy more specifically. This provides the foundation for subsequent chapters and identifies the gaps in the research that the book responds to. I begin by outlining the growth of fitness philanthropy before contextualising it in a broader discussion about the development of running as a fitness practice and subject of scholarly interest. This is important, as many charity events

are running-based. The early “fad” of running as an individual activity, to the popularity of mass participation “fun runs”, and then the appropriation of these events for fundraising are discussed as important context for the growth of fitness philanthropy. The final section introduces the key sociological concepts of “healthism” (Crawford 1980, 2006) and “embodied philanthropy” (Bunds 2017) in increasingly neo-liberal times. These are the themes that underpin the shape and structure of the book.

### **Fitness philanthropy: An overview**

Since the mid-1980s, sport has been used by charities and philanthropic organisations as a means of acquiring donors and fundraisers to support a variety of social and health causes. In addition to fundraising, objectives of these events include raising awareness for a cause, encouraging community engagement, building sponsor relationships, and generating publicity for the charity (Ruperto and Kerr, 2009; Filo et al 2012; Lock, Filo, Kunkel, and Skinner 2013; Woolf, Heere and Walker, 2013). Defined loosely as “special events which include some form of physical exertion where participants raise funds for a charitable organisation based on the activity performed” (Filo, Funk and O’Brien, 2014, 492), sports-based fundraising events, or what I call charity “thons” (Palmer 2016) have grown apace worldwide. Writing about what she terms mass participation running events (MPREs), Herrick notes that “the climb in the number of MPRE races and the sheer scale of their participant numbers is clear evidence of their intoxicating mix” (2015, 298). While Herrick does not elaborate the nature of this intoxicating mix, others have documented a range of motivations for taking on the challenge of training for and participating in these sports-based charity challenges (Goodwin 2009; Filo, Funk and O’Brien 2014; Palmer 2016). These include striving to complete an individual fitness challenge, often motivated by participants’ own personal loss, grief, or bereavement and desire to support efforts to cure particular diseases, notably cancer and motor-neuron disorders. As I return to elsewhere in the book, using sports-based charity events to raise money to “find a cure” has been stimulated by the winding back of government funding for health and social services across most Western, neoliberal countries.

Charity challenges can also combine opportunities for leisure and tourism (Green and Jones 2005; Shipway and Kirkup 2010; Snellgrove and Wood 2010; Coghlan and Filo 2013). As Coghlan notes: “charity challenges are participatory events that combine touring activities with extended physical activity, social, environmental, or health awareness campaigns, and fundraising for charity” (2014, 88).

For participants, mass sporting events can serve as potential population-based interventions that are increasingly regarded as part of the “lifestyle medicine movement” in which individuals are active partners in their health care, taking responsibility for their long-term health and addressing causes of lifestyle-related disease with the view to preventing health problems (Egger and Egger 2012; Coghlan 2014). The popularity of parkrun—a free, weekly, five-kilometre event held in local parks worldwide—is an exemplar of this lifestyle medicine movement (Stevinson and Hickson 2013; Sharman, Nash and Cleland 2018). A citizen-led practice, parkrun provides individuals with a novel and accessible space to walk and/or run regularly and govern their health and well-being and resist potential neoliberal stigmatisation as lazy, inactive and morally lacking individuals (Lee and MacDonald 2010; Wiltshire, Fullagar and Stevinson 2018).

Details of the size and scope of sport-based charity events globally is lacking, however anecdotal evidence suggests that this is a growing event sector, with new events established each year and an increasing number of participants registering for existing events. In an Australian context, mass participation sporting events are plentiful. Coghlan notes that “linking charity events with cycling events appears to be particularly popular” (2012, 110), citing events such as the Ride for Life, Ride to Cure Diabetes and the Ride4Epilepsy. Reflecting the broader appeal of fitness philanthropy, sports charity events in one weekend in Melbourne alone include the Run for Rhinos (supporting endangered wildlife) the United Energy Bike around the Bay (supporting The Smith Family to raise funds for disadvantaged children to succeed at school), the Bloody Long Walk, which raises funds and awareness for mitochondrial disease and Miss Muddy, a women-only obstacle course which raises money for several women’s charities. These are in addition to established MPREs such as the Medibank Melbourne Marathon or the City2Sea run for which participants can raise money for their own nominated charities and causes.

Beyond Australia, other examples of fitness philanthropy include the Race Against Dementia, established by Sir Jackie Stewart—the renowned Scottish Formula One driver throughout the 1960s and 1970s—as a result of his wife’s battle with the disease. Cruse, a bereavement charity in the United Kingdom, offers a series of fundraising challenges whereby people can be “comforted by the outdoors” (Cruse.org.uk). In Qatar, the Tour de Qatar cycle race raises money for women in the Middle East to take part in exercise and sport. In the US, King (2010 a,b, 2012) has offered an analysis of events associated with breast cancer fundraising, and Bunds (2017) details an account of the sponsorship of the Miami Marathon by

water charities. In Australia, Coghlan (2012) provides an analysis of cycle tourism and charity, and I have explored participants' experiences of the Mother's Day Classic (Palmer 2016, 2017).

Although sports such as cycling, swimming and long-distance trekking do feature in sports-based charity challenges, most events are running-based. This is, in part, because at its simplest, putting one foot in front of another is an activity that requires very little skill, financial outlay or special equipment which both explains and confounds its popularity as a mass participation sport (Qvistrom 2017; Haberman 2017). As I turn to now, an overview of the development of running and the subsequent interest by sociologists, among others, provides some necessary historical and cultural context to the burgeoning appeal of fitness philanthropy and mass participation sports charity events.

## **A history of running**

Running has been discussed and analysed in terms of various "waves" of development (Forsberg 2015). The first wave refers to the arrival of running as a competitive amateur sport in the late nineteenth century, and this continuation into the mid-1900s (Mewett 2003; Forsberg 2015; Pedersen and Thing, 2016). From the late 1800s to the 1960s, running retained a competitive and exclusive status; dominated by strict class and gender regulation. Access was limited, largely, to middle-class males who participated on private running tracks (Mewett 2003; Forsberg 2015) where the emphasis was on competition and performance improvement (Breedveld et al. 2015). For non-runners, the activity was an unappealing endeavour and a poor use of free time (Pedersen and Thing 2016). This perception shifted following the 1960s when a "jogging craze" emerged following changes around ideas of lifestyle and health (Bale 2004; Scheerder et al., 2015; Herrick 2015; Barnfield 2017).

The publication of books such as Jim Fixx's *The Complete Book of Running* (1977), and the follow-up *Second Book of Running* (1980), were central in promoting these changes. By extolling the virtues of the "runner's high", weight loss, and improved self-esteem as part of a lifestyle transformation, the texts contributed significantly to the popularity of running. In Australia, the dominance of Australian athletes, Rob de Castella, Steve Moneghetti and Lisa Ondieki in the men's and women's marathon events at the Commonwealth and Olympic Games throughout the 1980s, along with the feel-good story of Victorian potato farmer Cliff Young winning the inaugural Sydney to Melbourne ultramarathon aged 61, also

worked to shift the popular perception to running as a fitness practice available to all.

Alongside these cultural developments, the arrival of running's second wave was also marked by the introduction of health policies designed to recognise the value and importance of sport in leisure time (Abbas 2004; Tulle 2007; Scheerder et al. 2015). This successfully freed running from its competitive roots, with women and those from other social strata entering the sport and taking it to public spaces such as roads and parks (Mewett 2003; Tulle 2007; Scheerder et al. 2015). While running still retained a competitive element, with an escalation of marathon events (Tulle 2007) and marked rise of running clubs (Scheerder et al., 2015; Barnfield 2017), fun runs and informal social running groups also grew (Wilson 2006).

This second wave signifies the period whereby running became a "global phenomenon" (Pedersen and Thing 2016, 8) and led to the activity attracting considerable academic attention. Much early research included attempts to classify participants, with the work of Smith (1998) regularly cited. Smith devised a simple framework categorising those who engaged with running as either "athletes", "runners", or "joggers". This typology positions athletes as elite runners- or "insiders" (Shipway, Holloway and Jones 2012)—motivated by interpersonal rivalry and capable of winning competitive races. This heightened level of performance distinguishes them from regular runners, who "run and train, week in and week out, at levels far in excess of that required for basic physical fitness, yet stand no realistic chance of winning, or doing well in any race" (Smith, 1998, 176). For this group, running is a recreational activity and competition and winning may not be primary motivational goals (Shipway, Holloway and Jones 2012). The third group—joggers—are casual participants who run/train sporadically, with no interest in competing. Fitness philanthropy, however, blurs the boundaries of such typologies, with elite runners and casual participants alike being involved in fund raising. Athletes, runners and joggers are all increasingly finding themselves training for specific events to raise money for various causes, with even the "moderately fit" requiring "concerted devotion to a fitness regime" (Herrick 2015, 298) necessary to achieve the fitness and therefore fundraising goals. As Bunds, Brandon-Lai and Armstrong (2016) found in their ethnographic study of runners in the Miami Marathon, the fitness commitment to running for a cause was one of the key characteristics of participants in sports charity events.

These studies of running cultures and runner identities provide a necessary point of departure to understanding the rise of mass-participation running events and their subsequent association with fundraising. They also point to a gap in the literature. With the majority of existing sociological

exploration typically concentrating on dedicated (Hockey 2004; Collison 2008; Hitchings and Latham 2017) and competitive runners (Bale 2004; Tulle 2007; Shipway, Holloway and Jones 2012), the experiences of casual or infrequent runners remains under-developed (Cook, Shaw and Simpson 2015; Hindley 2018). These casual or infrequent runners are often on the starting line of sports-based charity events, yet they have received limited academic attention.

The emergence of sports-based charity corresponds with the growth in popularity of mass participation running events more broadly. Reflecting Pedersen and Thing's (2016) assertion that running has become a "global phenomenon", marathon events have increased dramatically in China (Ronkainen, et al. 2017). As Qiu et al, note "a total of 1100 marathons events (with a capacity of 800 participants or more) were held in 2017, which attracted about five million participants in 234 cities within 31 provinces" (2019, 1). In the United Kingdom, the inaugural London Marathon in 1981 received 7,065 entrants. In 2018, that number has grown to an estimated 40,000 ([www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com](http://www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com)). The event is now televised, and viewers and roadside spectators are witness to an array of runners competing in fancy dress as superheroes and storm troopers along with the thousands of other entrants. While elite athletes and celebrities contest these events, their accomplishments often pale against the fundraising efforts of non-elite runners.

The sheer number of marathon charity events suggests that there are bigger social forces at play. It is no longer enough to run a marathon; one must raise significant funds, too. Somewhere along the way, these mass participation fun runs became key means of acquiring donors and fundraising for all manner of charitable causes, and my interest is in offering a sociological explanation for the shift from running to good running. Referring to the BBC's coverage of the 2005 London Marathon, Nettleton and Hardey recall the commentary that "it is the fun runners raising millions of pounds for worthy causes who are the real stars of the race" (2006, 442). This commentary speaks to the very nature of fitness philanthropy. At events like the London Marathon and indeed many other charity "thons" we see the intersections of the institutions of philanthropy and sport played out in a context of performance and bodily achievement. I argue elsewhere in the book that this is crucially linked to the emergence of neoliberalism and healthism as key ideologies shaping government policy and social practices in the twenty-first century. First, however, a discussion of sociological, marketing, management and related approaches to philanthropy and charity more broadly is needed, because the changing nature of charity and

generosity is equally implicated in the rise of fitness philanthropy and good running.

### **Philanthropy, charity and generosity**

The modern concept of philanthropy has its origins in Europe at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where the wealthy established mutual aid societies and promoted humanitarian reform (Dobrzynski 2007). Twenty-first century philanthropy, however, looks very different. Since the 1980s, charities have become increasingly professionalised and, drawing on commercial and marketing techniques, have become a significant sector of the economy (Nettleton and Hardey 2006). In Australia, Giving Australia reported a total of \$11.2 billion of charity funding in the Australian economy in 2017, with religion, international aid and health the top three beneficiaries of public giving (Koda Capital 2018). In the UK, medical research and children and young people are the most popular causes. In 2014–15, Cancer Research UK received the highest income from voluntary donations (£316 million), with the British Heart Foundation and Macmillan Cancer Relief rounding out the top ten.

While the particular cultural work undertaken by corporate sponsors and the charities themselves is dealt with in Chapter 6, there are two cultural shifts to note here. First, changes in the nature and accrual of wealth—from old money and inherited wealth to the “new wealthy”; that is, those who have made their fortunes in technology, entertainment or sport, among other industries—have seen a move away from the old aristocracy with its noblesse oblige to new philanthropy as a means of demonstrating an attitude of “wealth with responsibility” (Raymond 2012; Schervish and Havens, 2001). Second, the winding back or the retrenchment of the welfare state in most western democratic societies has created more causes and people with needs for charities and philanthropists to support which otherwise would have been neglected by the State. As I sketch in the following section, fitness philanthropy sits squarely within these two broader social, historic and economic changes.

This paradigm shift in philanthropy (Hay and Muller 2014) recognises the breadth and complexity of philanthropy, and also alerts us to the effects that a decline in the State provision of key services has created. Among most western, neo-liberal governments, welfare dependency is actively discouraged (cue the rhetoric of “dole bludgers” and “welfare cheats”), replaced instead by a version of citizenship in which rights and responsibilities are embraced. Alongside this, the “charitable citizen” has emerged as a virtuous contributor to civil society. Research from the UK

suggests that two thirds of adults give to a charity in a typical month, with women giving slightly more than men and higher socio-economic groups giving proportionately more than lower socio-economic groups (Nettleton and Hardey 2006). Such findings are reflected elsewhere. In Australia, women are more likely to give a proportion of their income than men, despite women earning 15% less than men (Giving Australia 2017; Koda Capital 2018). Research on social capital and volunteering (Hodgkin 2008; Skirstad and Hanstad 2013; Osborne, Ziersch and Baum 2016) suggests that women are also more generous with their time, volunteering more than men in community and other activities. Although I have posited a fairly crude distinction between the philanthropic “super rich” and “mum and dad donors”, this is done for reasons of analytical simplicity. In practice, this separation is far too blunt. Philanthropy is, in fact, a far more complex process and practice whereby the organization of the global political economy has far reaching social consequences and the “business end” cannot be separated from the everyday socio-cultural enactments of charitable giving.

Such charitable citizens reflect Bev Skeggs (2005) call to seriously examine middle-class subjectivities in leisure. Skeggs argues that leisure pursuits are implicated in the development of privileged and middle-class forms of subjectivity. For Skeggs, displaying the self-responsible and self-governing subject has become an ethical imperative central to making the good middle-class self who is involved in philanthropic endeavours. More and more, we are seeing such middle-class subjectivities come to the fore through an involvement in charity “thons” (Palmer 2016), be that through volunteering, fundraising, sponsorship or participation. As I return to in Chapter 3, Skeggs allows us to develop a critical assessment of serious leisure and its role in the formation of particular classed forms of family through the involvement of two South Australian families in fitness philanthropy. At the same time, aspects of fitness philanthropy, notably crowdfunding, are equally implicated in lower class lives and lived experiences. Put simply, many poor people turn to crowdfunding in desperation to raise money for health research and medical interventions for life-saving treatments that are beyond their financial means. These issues are explored in Chapter 5.

## **Philanthropy and social capital**

The formation of particular classed forms of subjectivity also alerts us to a conundrum in philanthropy and charitable giving. On the one hand, we see “charitable citizens” widely valued. On the other, we see a narrative which



suggests that civic engagement is declining. Indeed, one of the leitmotifs of contemporary sociological discourse is the suggestion that broad social, cultural and economic shifts have transformed or weakened previously durable interpersonal bonds (Bauman 2001ab, 2003, 2005; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2002; Giddens 1992). For these theorists, this transformation occurs alongside a transition to late or liquid modernity. For Bauman (2007), liquid modernity is characterised by a pervasive consumer logic where everything, including relationships, are reduced to commodities valued solely for their ability to provide pleasure. Social life is ephemeral and interactions fleeting. Underpinning such arguments is the assumption that liquid modernity has liberated individuals from “the tightly knit web of communal dependency” (Bauman in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, xv). For many individuals, this web of communal dependency was once the support networks—the safety net—of the welfare state. With this now replaced by the neoliberal imperatives of individualism—the argument goes—the nature of “community”, social ties and civic responsibility has also changed, with charitable acts, such as volunteering, donating time, money or resources perceived to also be in decline. Much of this argument finds its origins in the idea of social capital.

As with any concept that has assumed the widespread popularity of social capital, the definitions used are equally broad (Saxton and Benson 2005). Here, Robert Putnam’s early definition of social capital is adopted. For Putnam, social capital describes the norms of reciprocity and generalised trust that bind individuals together and enable them to work towards collective goals or, the “networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995, 67). Putnam (2000) claimed that society has experienced a widespread decline in social capital. He reached his conclusion following an extensive investigation of U.S. society in the mid-to-late-nineties. Drawing on comprehensive analyses of national survey data, he observed a weakening of civic participation in the United States, taken as a decline in voting and in membership numbers of groups, clubs and associations. These trends were taken as evidence that society has diminishing stocks of social capital as individuals are “withdrawing from those networks of reciprocity that once constituted our communities” (Putnam, 2000, 184). Echoing the late-modern assessment of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Putnam attributes the shifting labour market as influencing this change. An overall increase in time dedicated to work, and women’s entrance into the labour market, leaves limited time for socialising (Putnam, 2000). To negotiate the increasingly time-poor society individuals forego the opportunity to establish connections in organisations or groups.

While critiquing Putnam has become something of a disciplinary sport in the social sciences, his theory of social capital is a useful starting point for my subsequent exploration of fitness philanthropy. Sport and social capital or sport as social capital has been extensively explored, however, this has typically been done through an examination of membership of and participation in sporting clubs, teams, organisations and associations and sports governance (Tonts 2005; Burnett 2006; Coalter 2007; Palmer, and Thompson 2008; Nicholson and Hoye 2008; Spaaj 2011; Numerato, and Baglioni 2012). Nicholson and Hoye (2008) suggest that the prevalence of the social capital concept within public policy generally and sports policy more specifically makes it imperative to critically assess this relationship. I would add that it is imperative to also examine the kind of social capital that is found or generated in leisure spaces that sit outside these traditional understandings of sport as club-, team- or association-based. Fitness philanthropy represents a key opportunity here. Clearly, as Coalter notes, “the challenge for researchers is to disentangle these activities and determine which are more or less effective in building social networks and providing access to resources” (Coalter 2005, 12).

What the social capital research has overlooked are the everyday acts of kindness, trust, reciprocity and generosity that we find when a disparate group of people come together—some face to face, others at a virtual distance—to participate in, sponsor or fundraise through the mass participation events of fitness philanthropy. As James Coleman—another key proponent of social capital—notes, social capital is generally accumulated as part of non-market, non-state interactions between individuals, and its proponents ascribe tremendous importance to it in facilitating pro-social behaviour (Coleman 1990). Brooks adds to this idea, arguing that “social capital may also improve the functioning of the non-profit and voluntary sector, however, by stimulating more resources through charitable donations” (2005, 2). As I discuss below, philanthropy is a complex process and practice whereby the everyday socio-cultural enactments of charitable giving as a social act are given meaning by the social and financial transactions that take place between people. Thus, I argue that giving and giving back are now markers of civic engagement and social responsibility, and it is from this climate that fitness philanthropy emerges. The social exchanges that occur between everyday donors—our mothers and fathers, partners, children, siblings, friends, colleagues and, indeed, perfect strangers—need to be included in any framework of social capital or the giving economy.

## **Sport and philanthropic capital**

This overview of the changing nature of community, civic engagement and social capital provides an important backdrop to a more specific consideration of sport, charity and philanthropy. This relationship is by no means new. Sport Aid—a global fundraising event for famine relief, inspired by the 1985 Live Aid music event at Wembley Stadium—was the defining moment in the evolution of fitness philanthropy (Bunds 2017, Palmer and Dwyer 2019). As explained by Webster, Sport Aid was a globally co-ordinated marathon event. Held on 25 May 1986, it combined “humanitarian aid, and sports, [and] united several millions of people across the five continents” (Webster 2013), each participant running 10 kilometres in what was billed the “Race Against Time”. As outlined earlier, the “running boom” which was occurring across Europe, North America and Australia set the scene for the growth of mass participation running events around which most fitness philanthropy is based.

Seeing the increase in road race participants, charity organizations seized on the opportunity to join with races in an attempt to raise money (King 2010a; Bunds 2017). Sport, as a key fundraising platform for a range of health and social issues became big business. Recalling the early success of Sport Aid, Webster (2013) notes that the event brought in US \$100 million from the 1986 Race Against Time when it was held in 274 cities across 78 countries. In the United States, the first charity to implement the strategy of partnering with an established race was the Leukaemia and Lymphoma Society when it started its Team in Training program, which focussed on research and education for cancers of the lymphatic system. From this early beginning, Hamilton (2013) reports that road races pulled in US\$1.2 billion for non-profit organizations in 2012, more than double the amount from a decade ago. In 2015, the top 30 sports-based fundraising events generated US\$1.57 billion (Filo, Lock, Sherry and Quang Huynh 2018). In the United Kingdom, Macmillan Cancer Support raised £3.5 million through running events alone (Macmillan Cancer Support, 2015), while in Australia, in 2016, sports-based charity raised AUD\$1.3 billion. Beneficiaries include health-based charities (e.g. the Cancer Council), conservation charities (e.g. Greenpeace), animal welfare charities (e.g. RSPCA), and human rights charities (e.g. Amnesty International), among others.

Without question, raising money for breast cancer research, education and advocacy is the most common fundraising endeavour (King 2010b; Bixler 2014). Referring to fundraising efforts for breast cancer in the United States, King writes that:

The dizzying array of challenges created by foundations and corporations include the American Cancer Society's Make Strides against Breast Cancer, a non-competitive walk; the Danskin Women's Triathlon, which raises money for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation; the Revlon Run/Walk for Women, the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer; the Climb to Fight Breast Cancer, the Climb for a Cure; the Climb for the Cure, all of which take breast cancer survivors on mountaineering expeditions on some of the world's highest peaks; the Paddle for the Cure, a rowing event; the Ride for the Cure, a bicycle Race; and the Breast Cancer 3-Day Walk (2010a, 29).

Notwithstanding the politics of what has been referred to as one of the "good cancers" to have when seeking to raise money and awareness (Seale 2002), fundraising for breast cancer research, education and advocacy has a long history. Building on the success of Sport Aid, the Susan G. Komen race (now the Race for the Cure) is now among the most popular and profitable of sports-based charity or fitness philanthropy events worldwide. First run in Dallas, United States, in 1982, with 800 participants running for breast cancer awareness and education. The race has expanded globally and there are now 130 races across the globe. In 2014, 1.7 million people took part in the race ([www.w5komen.com](http://www.w5komen.com)). A sophisticated social media platform helps raise awareness of the Susan G. Komen charity, spruik for funds and advocate for improved health care and medical research outcomes in the United States. Along with pink themed cricket and football matches, in Australia, the oldest, most visible and most profitable of breast cancer "thons" is the Mother's Day Classic. First held in 1998 in Sydney and Melbourne, the event is a four or eight kilometre fun run/walk held on Mother's Day to raise money for and awareness of breast cancer. The event is held in all Australian capital cities, some regional centres and on Australian military bases in Afghanistan and the Middle East. By 2014, the MDC had raised more than AUD\$24.3 million (MDC, 2015). King's earlier summary of the proliferation of events that have developed to raise money or awareness of breast cancer is further evidence of the popularity of "pink" charity "thons".

While the period whereby running became a global phenomenon led to it becoming the principal physical activity aligned with fundraising endeavours for breast cancer research, there is another dimension to consider when discussing events devoted to fundraising for breast cancer, which may, in part, explain their somewhat privileged status in fundraising. These events have tremendous emotional potency. Certainly, participating in events like the Mother's Day Classic or the Race for the Cure requires a commitment to training and to the physical effort needed to complete the

distance, however, these events also have a particular poignancy. The majority of participants have a direct connection to someone who has survived or did not survive breast cancer (see Palmer 2016, 2017). Burke and Sabiston's (2010) account of a group of breast cancer survivors climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro also attests to the affective and affecting nature of these kinds of events. Critically, they also note the importance of "difficult and demanding physical activity" (2010, 3) for, in their case, breast cancer survivors. This is an important point, for it is not that long ago when vigorous physical activity—marathon running, mountain climbing—would have been seen as anathema to recovery and wellbeing among cancer survivors. This shift in attitudes towards illness and recovery, along with the "elision of charitable and commercial organisations in their desire to overcome disease and illness" (Nettleton and Hardey, 2006, 442), all reflect particular socio-cultural issues for fitness philanthropy. These raise a number of larger sociological questions that link together notions of health, charity and being a good person that are made visible in training for and then competing in mass participation sporting events.

### **Healthism, neoliberalism and embodied philanthropy**

A number of theoretical frameworks have been suggested for explaining individual motivations for participation in these sports-based charity events for participants (e.g. identification and attachment theory, connections to nature, religious affiliations, serious leisure). Such propositions, however, have not adequately explained the exponential rise of sports-based charity as a social (and sociological) phenomenon. Building on Bunds' (2017) notion of "embodied philanthropy" where physically active participation is the hook for fundraising, I argue that sports-based charity events have become a form of active citizenship. Generosity, giving, charity and kindness are expressed by both competitors and donors alike through the embodied experiences of running, swimming, cycling, or whatever the physical challenge might be. This proposition is not unproblematic. The individual nature of many of the sports involved in mass-participation events (notably running) can be seen as emblematic of the turn towards individuals taking responsibility for the pursuit and management of better health in many neo-liberal countries. Critically, the widespread uptake of fitness philanthropy highlights the movement from individuals taking responsibility for their own health (the fundamental premise of "healthism"), to individual citizens now also generating the financial resources needed for key medical research, education and health interventions across a population. As I elaborate in this section, fitness philanthropy brings to life

broader cultural and ideological values of responsibility, generosity, community, charity and kindness that speak to the moral imperative of “good running” and being a good person. These “super-values” can be viewed through Crawford’s (1980) concept of healthism and Bunds’ (2017) more recent notion of embodied philanthropy.

Nettleton and Hardey draw attention to the historical dimensions of this. In their work on the London Marathon as a charitable endeavour, Nettleton and Hardey (2006) note that this growth of charitable giving and fund raising for sports-based initiatives runs parallel with the retrenchment of the welfare state which, “in turn generated more ‘opportunities’ for charities to provide support for various projects that would otherwise have been neglected” (Nettleton and Hardey 2006, 445). While health and philanthropy have long had a close association, the withdrawal of the state from funding health and medical research has meant that individuals now shoulder the responsibility for this. While the neoliberal agenda attracts its share of critics, there is yet to be any call to wind back fitness philanthropy. Among personal donors, corporate sponsors, participants, beneficiaries, and governments alike it is seen as a virtuous endeavour. Indeed, “the moral tale... is that anyone who wishes to take part in the marathon can contribute to medical progress and save lives” (Nettleton and Hardey 2006, 450). Following Crawford’s (1980) assessment that healthism is associated with a set of tensions and dilemmas inscribed not only in the bio-medical domain, but which also interpenetrates moral, political, and social spheres of life, fitness philanthropy has similarly seen generosity becoming a choice that reinforces the idea of the active citizen, actively contributing to solving health and social problems. The link between training for and competing in mass participation sporting events and fundraising for a cause does, however, bring us to the moral imperative of good running and being a good person. Here, I draw on Bunds’ (2017) notion of “embodied philanthropy” to tease out this shift in attitudes towards sports-based charity.

In his ethnographic study of the Miami marathon and team water charity, Bunds coins the term “embodied philanthropy” (2017). Put simply, this is the ways in which the physical effort—in most cases running—is a motivation for taking part in a charity challenge, yet at the same time, “the charity cause itself is used as motivation to complete the physical task of running” (Bunds, Brandon-Lai, and Armstrong, 2016, 373). That is, attachment to running and attachment to a cause do not operate independently. Embodied philanthropy takes them as being mutually reinforcing. People run to raise money and use the motivation to raise money as the excuse to run. Here, we see the intersections of philanthropy and sport played out in a context of performance and bodily achievement. For example, Filo et al.