Seizing the Centre Pass. Exploring the Role of Identity in motivating walking Netball Participants

This paper examines the experiences of participants (n = 12) on the England Netball, ‘Walking Netball’ (WN) programme. Previous research has sought to explore participant experiences on programmes similar to WN suggesting greater social engagement and an increase in desire for life were positive consequences from participation. Semi structured interviews explored the motivations held for participation in the programme with regards to social identity and the affective consequence of participation. Four themes emerged from data analysis; (1) needs must, (2) collaborative identity, (3) group inclusion, and (4) regulatory routine. Findings suggest that participants on England Netball’s WN programme, are primarily motivated to continue attending WN by the collective identity they experience through being involved in the programme. Further research however on the construction of collective group identity is required to further enable project funders and deliverers in ensuring projects can effectively meet the motivations of their participants.

Keywords: Physical activity, identity, relatedness.

Introduction

Physical Activity and Older Adults

The UK population has been gradually getting older and has been classed as an ageing population from the concluding half of the 20th Century, with this trend being anticipated to carry on in the future (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Currently there are over 11.8 million residents in the UK who are aged 65 and over, representing over 18% of the UK population (Office for National Statistics, 2018). As life expectancy has increased, the amount of time spent enduring poor health has also increased (Office for National Statistics, 2018) with the likelihood of being disabled and / or experiencing multifaceted health conditions also increasing with age (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Participation in Physical Activity (PA) has been identified as being a contributing factor to older adult’s regulation of health and in decreasing the occurrence of falls, diseases and disability (Haight, Tager, Sternfeld, Satariano, & Van Der Laan, 2005; Mensink, Ziese, & Kok, 1999; Young & Dinan, 2005). Alongside the physiological benefit to older adults gained from participating in PA, are the positive impacts participation in PA can have on psychological wellbeing. There is evidence to suggest that participation in PA can reduce anxiety, decrease social isolation, diminish
the symptoms of depression and improve mental health amongst older adults
(Bridle, Spanjers, Patel, Atherton, & Lamb 2012; Liu 2009; Netz, Wu,
Becker, & Tenebaum, 2005; Scheerder, Pauwels, & Vanreusel, 2004;
Windle, 2014; Windle, Hughes, Linck, Russell, & Woods, 2010). Despite
the benefits experienced from participating in PA, adult activity levels
gradually drop with age (Hughes, McDowell, & Brody, 2008).

In the UK, ukactive, a not-for-profit body comprised of members and
partners from across the UK active lifestyle sector, suggest that 54% of
people aged over 65 can be classified as ‘inactive,’ meaning they participate
in only half an hour or less of moderate to vigorous PA a week (ukactive,
2017). Meanwhile the British Heart Foundation (2017) suggest that just over
10% of men and women aged 50+ participate in a sport or PA at least once a
week (British Heart Foundation, 2017), demonstrating that the PA levels of
over 50’s are the lowest of all age groups over the age of 18. Research
shows that fewer women achieve the recommended participation levels than
men (Berger, Der, Mutrie, & Hannah, 2005; Hughes, McDowell, & Brody
2008). Meanwhile women who participate in PA do so for a variety of
reasons including “ill-health prevention, health and mobility maintenance,
health problems and scares, doctor referrals” (Carmichael, Duberley &
Szmigin, 2014, p15) as well as social interaction (Arkenford, 2006;
Carmichael, Duberley & Szmigin, 2014).

Improving and increasing levels of participation in PA to meet current
guidelines is a public health priority and PA guidelines need to be designed
by public health professionals and organizations in order to try to address
the issues associated with an aging population (World Health Organisation,
2013). With this in mind programmes such as Walking Netball (hence forth
with be referred to as WN), Walking Football (The FA, 2020) and Walking
Basketball (Basketball England, 2020) have been developed with the
objective of engaging older adults into PA. The evolution of walking sports
has been established to promote and cater for older adults’ participation in
sport and PA, to support re-engagement and attain to intensity and
competitive levels (Aiello, 2016).

Walking Netball

England Netball, the National Governing Body for netball in England,
developed WN with the aim of creating open and accessible forms of
netball. WN was designed so that anyone wishing to play netball can
regardless of age or fitness level (England Netball, 2015a) and in 2018 WN
celebrated having over 100,000 individuals registered to participate
(England Netball, 2018). WN aims to target those that have played netball
previously and dropped out due to injury, those who may have not played
since school and those looking to re-engage in PA. Discussing the benefits
of participating in WN, England Netball highlight physical benefits such as
“lower heart rate and blood pressure, less fat and more muscle, and better
mobility.” (England Netball, 2015b). England Netball also acknowledges the
social benefits stating attendance at WN sessions can lead to participants “avoid[ing] becoming isolated and interact[ing] with individuals and small groups” (England Netball, 2015b). WN can therefore be seen to address the PA motivations of women by allowing a physically active lifestyle to be pursued alongside developing social interaction. There are three key rule adaptions to WN in comparison to the traditional game of 7-a-side netball. These adaptions are done to ensure players are walking throughout the game, to reduce the impact on landings, improve the momentum of the match and encourage improved decision making within the game (England Netball, 2015c). With the objective of the WN programme being to offer an open and accessible form of netball to older women and participants less physically active, there is an opportunity to carry out research utilizing the project to assess the motivations of those participating in WN. By investigating the motivations of the participants who engage in WN sessions, assessments can be made as to the determinants of older women’s engagement in PA. As such the aims of this study were to identify the primary motivations held for older women to attend WN sessions, identifying the motivational profiles of participants and secondly to explore the ways in which WN sessions affected participant’s motivation to engage in PA.

**Theoretical Framework**

Motivational theories can be employed to provide a framework to comprehend the circumstances and conditions that lead to positive or negative sport experiences (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2007). As such the identification of an individual’s motivation can lead to the development of understanding the determinants of an individual’s involvement in PA (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Self Determination Theory (SDT) is a motivational theory that recognises there are three universal, innate and psychological needs: relatedness, competence and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2012). SDT has been applied to a wide variety of contexts, including PA to investigate and identify the ‘why’ of behaviour. Relatedness is acknowledged to be the universal desire to be a part of caring relationships with others, developed through cooperation with others (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Within PA relatedness can be described as being the sense of belonging that is experienced through being a part of a team or society and the connection that is experienced when engaging in shared experiences with others (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Competence is recognised as the aspiration of individuals, to effectively interact with their environment, in order to achieve anticipated outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Competence permits an individual to believe that they can thrive and experience the successful completion of tasks, in a specific environment or situations. Within a PA context competence is seen as being crucial to the expression of motivation (Reinboth & Duda, 2006). Finally, autonomy is the widespread urge for an individual to be in control of the course of their own life (Deci & Ryan,
2012). The essential principle of SDT indicates that humans are profoundly 
motivated by activities which allow them to satisfy the three needs of 
competence, autonomy and psychological relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

The SDT framework offers the understanding that an individual’s 
motivations within a specific context can be on a spectrum across intrinsic 
motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 
2012; Vallerand, 1997). Intrinsically motivated individuals engage in 
specific activities for the enjoyment of participating, as well as the 
satisfaction of learning from participating (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In contrast 
extrinsic motivation is created by exterior sources, such as participating in 
activities for social approval and trophies (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Meanwhile 
amotivation is the belief of having a lack of intent to engage in a particular 
behaviour.

Intrinsic motivation is classified as being more self-determined whilst 
experiencing extrinsic motivation offers the least self-determined form of 
motivation. Self-determination is connected to increased psychological 
performance and as such a corresponding pattern of consequences can be 
foreseen (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This means that the most positive outcomes 
taken from participation in PA (e.g. feelings of satisfaction and positive 
emotions,) should be a product of motivation of the most self-determined 
form, while in contrast the most negative outcomes from sports participation 
(e.g. anxiety, lack of determination) should be a result of motivation that is 
the least self-determined. Vallerand and Losier (1999, 144) state that “the 
reasons for doing an activity are generally perceived as indicative of the 
person’s motivation toward a given activity”. As such SDT was utilized 
within this study as a theoretical framework to investigate the motivations 
held by participants on the England Netball ‘Walking Netball’ programme 
in light of the way in which participation at WN sessions contributed to the 
relatedness, competence and autonomy of participants.

Methodology

A key informant (England Netball Regional Development Officer) was 
initially approached to discuss the study and engagement of WN 
participants. The key informant identified a WN session in the Greater 
Manchester area that engaged 20+ participants each week and had been 
established for over 18 months. The session that was identified for data 
collection was a weekly session coordinated by two WN volunteer ‘hosts’, it 
took place on a Tuesday 12.30-13.30 and was free to attend. The key 
informant introduced the lead author to the session coordinator who 
facilitated the researchers attending a WN session, to meet the participants, 
discuss the research and invite the WN participants to volunteer to be a part 
of the research. Participants from the WN session were invited to be a part 
of the study if they were female, aged 50+ and had attended the WN session 
for a minimum of 6 months. This process and selection criteria allowed 12
participants to be recruited for the study from one WN session (See table one). For the purpose of this study an individual was defined as being older if they were over the age of 50, this follows the guidance of Khan (2009) and has been used in previous research to investigate the participation of older women in sport (Carmichael, Duberley & Szmigin, 2014).

Table 1. Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Experience of WN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>14 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gill</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>17 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>16 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>22 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>18 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A qualitative method was used within this study to allow the experiences and in particular the motivations of WN participants to be analyzed. A provisional semi-structured interview guide was informed by SDT and focused upon the key areas; history of physical activity participation, experience with WN and the social factors experienced through participating in physical activity and WN. A semi structured interview was used as the data collection tool, to allow the interviewer to adopt a flexible approach to data collection by adding probing questions in response to the interviewee’s answers (Jones, 2015). The interview guide was piloted on three recreational netball players who did not participate in WN and as such the results were not used within this study. Minor edits were made to the interview schedule in terms of the order of the questions, to ensure the narrative of the guide was consistent. Institutional ethical approval was gained from the University of Bolton ethical approval board and all participants in the study were provided with an information sheet about the study prior to data collection and asked to provide informed consent.

The interviews were conducted individually by the authors in a quiet location, at the same site on which the WN session took place and lasted between 32 and 48 minutes (M – 42 minutes). Participants in the study were aged from 50 to 72 (M – 61). All participants were provided with a
pseudonym (e.g. Wendy) in the transcription stage and within the results section only this pseudonym is used.

The data collected from the semi structured interviews was analyzed using the six stages of thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The lead author read and re-read the transcribed data to familiarize themselves with the data and consider initial codes. The transcripts were then all coded line by line and these codes were then arranged into categories to expose underlying ideas and assumptions. The categories that had been generated were then re-examined and reviewed in line with the raw data and the themes were then finally titled. Four themes were identified, the four main themes that emerged from data analysis were; (1) WN as a form of PA (e.g. participants were conscious of the physical benefits of attending WN and participating in PA) (2) Collaborative identity (e.g. participants attended WN sessions for the collective identity of being a part of a specific group with a single identity), (3) Group inclusion (e.g. a purposeful effort was made to include participants from their first week attending), (4) Regulatory routine (e.g. WN was an integral part of the participants weekly routine).

Results

WN as form of PA

The reason identified by WN participants to begin attending WN sessions, was the feeling of need associated with having to do exercise and PA because of the physical benefits of participation in terms of managing ill-health. While the need to exercise, was discussed by the participants in this study as a motivating factor in them starting to attend the WN sessions, WN sessions were selected as the type of PA because the participants held a clear passion for netball. Val clearly explained this balance of need to participate in PA and passion for netball when discussing the motivation, she had for starting to attend and continuing to attend the weekly WN sessions. Val stated her attendance “is a lot to do with [the] guilt of needing more exercise when you are older and a lot to do with netball really”. Val’s discussion that she attended WN session because of the guilt she felt due to the amount of exercise she did was balanced by the appeal of reengaging in netball, a sport she had participated in as a child at school. Val spoke about the appeal of WN that allowed her to address the guilt she felt for having low activity levels. Val said “When I retired, because you have been fit at one time you are always thinking I should be doing something, I should be doing something. I saw it [WN] and thought oh I could do that, you know I don’t think I was doing enough exercise, I have put on quite a bit of weight, so that was how I got into it”. This need to exercise was highlighted by all the participants in this study who recognised they had the realization before starting to attend WN sessions that they needed to become more active. This
realization was triggered by the knowledge of the physical and mental benefits experienced by participating in PA in older age. Jane summarized the benefits experienced by engaging in PA by neatly stating “You’ve got to keep moving otherwise you would seize up!” This attitude exemplified discussions by the participants in this study who were abundantly aware of the need to engage in PA and the associated benefits of participating in PA.

Engaging specifically in netball as a form of PA however was clearly a major draw to the participants who were interviewed, with several discussing that it was engaging in PA through netball in particular that motivated attendance. Anna stated, “Now my kids are older, I have the time to commit to the sport I’ve always loved and cherished”. Furthermore, Wendy stated that she specifically missed participating in netball when she was unable to do so and whilst the challenge of becoming inactive had impacted her life in many ways the lack of participation in netball was increasing difficult. Wendy said “Just about 2 years before Christmas I wanted to come back and play netball, I have had both my knees replaced. I lost my job and changed my career path kind of. I am over that bit kind of, but I never really got over not playing netball”. As such WN allowed Wendy to participate in low impact PA, but principally was appealing because it allowed her to participate in netball again, a sport from which her knee replacements had not allowed her to participate in.

The consequence of being aware of the need to participate in PA and being able to do so by engaging in WN meant the participants were incredibly proud of their newfound activity levels. Margaret discussed her pride in the activity levels she has reached since engaging in WN. Margaret said

I just love it [WN], I am buzzing on a Tuesday [Day of WN session]. I think it is a complete package... You know but it is getting me moving more which is important, like I say I am fitter than I have ever been. I have got to 61 and who would have thought I’d be playing netball and going to gym three times a week!

Margaret suggests here that the consequence of attending WN sessions and increasing her PA level is significant and contributes to her continued attendance at WN sessions and in other PA opportunities. The recognition of the need to engage in PA and the consequence of attendance at WN sessions, contributing to an increase in PA levels is important. This suggests that participants in WN are aware of the benefit of engaging in PA and the need to participate in PA, but that they will not choose to attend PA sessions only for the physical and mental benefits of participating. Instead the participants in this study highlighted they were motivated to continue to attend WN sessions for reasons other than increasing PA levels, such as community engagement and personal nostalgic experiences with netball.
The second theme identifies the primary reason participants within this study continued to attend WN sessions. This theme focuses on the collaborative identity developed by being a part of a WN session. The development of a collaborative identity shared by WN participants, was a key motivating factor to individuals attending WN sessions. This motivational factor was exemplified by Louise who discussed the togetherness that was experienced by all the participants being friendly and inclusive. Louise stated the key reasons for her attending were “Playing the netball, seeing the girls. It is a lovely crowd, this lot. We all get on really well”. The emphasis on social relationships was clearly a key part of the experience of attending the WN sessions and led to the development of a collaborative identity of being a ‘Walking Netballer’, a title that all the participants in this study embraced. Similar to Louise, Jane recognised the social relationships that contributed to the development of a collaborative identity. Jane commented “It is a really nice group, even when we are playing, we are clapping the team that scored, we are very encouraging. It is a laugh. It is the same faces because we have been coming a while. There is a lot of banter, cheeky banter, we just get on really well”. The concept of ‘cheeky banter’ and the focus on the sessions being ‘a laugh’, added to the facilitation of a collaborative identity and suggest that a key part of the session is the element of fun and enjoyment which in turn encourages social interaction and the development of a collaborative identity. The concept of humor being critical to the development of a collaborative identity via the delivery of WN sessions was expressed in an inclusive, fun and engaging environment for all was also discussed by Hilary. Hilary stated “I think it is because it is such a friendly bunch, the coaches, Sam and Rebecca are brilliant. Everyone just has a laugh. It is amazing. It is a good laugh; everyone is a good friendly bunch.” The emphasis on the relaxed, inclusive nature of sessions suggests a focus by coaches on making sessions open and inclusive, the result of which is the development of a collaborative identity by participants.

The participants discussed how the development of a collaborative identity motivated them to attend, by allowing the WN session to be more appealing than participating in other activities. Kathleen discussed how the physical activity she participated in included both attending the gym and also participating in WN sessions, but that WN sessions were far more appealing than the gym due to the inclusion she feels. Kathleen stated she started attending WN sessions and it quickly became part of her routine. Kathleen stated “I just got back into [netball], it was as if it was last week that I had played, and everyone is just so nice. They are really a nice bunch here”. Kathleen continued “I never want to go to the gym but always make myself go. Whereas I want to come here. When they tell me there is none, I am gutted. Going to the gym is routine but here, I want to be here”. The idea of wanting to attend the WN sessions and experiencing a positive...
environment which led to the development of a group identity was discussed by all participants in this research. The clear motivation for participants was the emphasis on social interaction and as such this made the session attractive and meant that the participants were strongly motivated to attend. Gill discussed the idea of social interaction and how this motivated her to attend by stating her reason for attending WN session was “It is meeting up with nice people and friends and stuff. Nobody is better than anyone [at WN sessions], nobody makes you feel rubbish [at WN sessions]. It is real good fun, nice people. [I] Can’t wait for Tuesdays!” Meanwhile Sally stated her motivation much more succinctly stating “It [WN sessions] is really social, it is a really nice group.” The clear focus on social interaction and subsequent development of a collaborative identity was vital in motivating participants to continue to attend WN sessions after their initial attendance. The primary motivation for all participants interviewed in this research to continue attending WN, was the collaborative identity experienced because of the focus on sessions to encourage social interaction. This finding is significant as it suggests that projects aiming to engage women over 50 in low intensity activity and PA, should ensure sessions include a social element and encourage social interaction which then has the potential to lead to the development of a collaborative identity of participants.

**Group Inclusion**

The third higher order theme was group inclusion which focused on the role that the participants in WN sessions played to develop a collaborative identity. These actions included welcoming new members and ensuring an inclusive environment at WN sessions through encouragement and reassurance of fellow participants. Gloria discussed the actions she always tried to take when a new participant started at WN. Gloria discussed how this welcome was habit and an unspoken rule to include a new participant. Gloria stated that when a participant arrives at a WN session and they have never attended before, effort is made to find out about them and their background. Gloria stated the focus is on quickly “Getting to know their name, if they have played [netball] before, where they played, when they last played.” This simple process welcomed new participants and attempted to ensure that an individual’s first encounter at a WN session was positive. Val emphasized how she had been made to feel welcome at her first session by someone taking time to specifically welcome her to the group. Val stated, “They are all lovely ladies, Patricia over there, [playing] wing defense, was friendly and nice at my first session and then you get to know them and just go from there.” Val emphasized that this welcoming atmosphere was continued and her continued participation in WN sessions, was then due to the friendly nature of the participants and volunteers. Val stated, “It is a lot to do with how friendly the ladies are”. While welcoming a new member and including them in the group was important, continued effort was made
to include everyone and make sure that the environment and sessions were all-encompassing.

In order to continue to make sessions inclusive and encourage group inclusion various specific efforts and adaptations were made. A flexible approach when umpiring was highlighted, as being crucial to ensuring all felt included in WN sessions and activities / matches within the sessions. Wendy discussed how at times when she took on the role of umpire, she tried to be more flexible in order to make the games inclusive and allow all group members to develop. Wendy stated “The other thing is the rules, pulling them up nicely. Like for me there [Points to match taking place in session] Rosy was too close and so you just pull them up nicely. You’ve got to be flexible.”. This form of flexible umpiring allows participants who have not played netball since their physical education classes in school, to get back up speed with the rules of the game in an inclusive environment. The use of flexible rules and the unspoken welcoming ritual to include new members, led to the development of a group that was very inclusive and whose communication and interaction occurred not only during WN sessions.

The WN participants interviewed in this study keenly discussed how they were included in the WN session from their very first session and how this has led to them participating in social activities, as a WN group outside of WN sessions. Margaret discussed how the group was inclusive and how there was an annual Christmas dinner organized by WN participants. Margaret said “Odd ones [WN participants] that I probably couldn’t tell you the name, but everybody chats to each other. It is not like little cliques and we all went out at Christmas to the Harvester across the road, which was really nice, we just had our lunch”. This use of informal social gatherings further developed the group inclusion of the WN participants. The group inclusion was such that a number of the WN participants arranged to regularly participate in other physical activity sessions and non-physical activity sessions together. Anna stated “There are a few of us who go to the gym together and I go to a choir and there are quite a few people who now go to choir. It is like a little community”. The WN participants in this study discussed how the group inclusion began and led to the development of a community, with the welcome from other participants and while this welcome was warm and inclusive it was interestingly unplanned and WN participant lead. This finding is significant as it shows the ownership WN participants take in order to make the WN sessions inclusive and in particular to make new participants feel welcome. This group inclusion is then further developed through flexible umpiring and social events held outside of the weekly WN sessions. This is significant for organizations setting up and coordinating projects aiming to engage women over the age of 50 as it suggests, women over 50 are keen to develop group inclusion. It also suggests to organizations that women over 50 are happy to take on unofficial roles that allow new participants to feel welcomed to sessions and
allow participants to meet up and engage in social and physical activity outside of the formal coordinated sessions.

Regulatory Routine

The final theme that was identified recognised the way in which the WN session had become a part of the participants weekly routine. The participants in this study all discussed the way attending WN sessions had become a part of their week and very little would change this routine. Stephanie discussed how she had to manage her working arrangements around WN sessions, however she expressed that it was now part of her routine. Stephanie said “It is part of Tuesday now. I play netball and then I go to work.” This organisation and structuring of her working week to allow her to remain engaged in WN, displays Stephanie is an individual who is highly motivated to participate and keen to attend WN sessions. Jane also expressed the way she looked forward to WN sessions and how they have become a part of her routine. Jane stated “It is friends you know if I wasn’t doing this I might be at home doing housework. It is something to look forward to each week.” This finding is important as it displays the way regular participants at WN embed WN sessions in their weekly schedule and commit to attending each week where possible.

The participants in this study described their feels of frustration if sessions were cancelled, acknowledging that the sessions were part of their routine and they thrived on engaging in WN on a weekly basis. Margaret stated “I feel cheated if I don’t go [to WN sessions]. I am fitter now than I have ever been. I feel cheated because last week they cancelled the netball and I was gutted because I love coming here on a Tuesday. It is part of my life now. I absolutely love coming”. The disappointment described by Margaret is important as it represents the feelings of participants when the opportunity to engage in WN sessions is taken away. This is significant for organizations who coordinate WN sessions, cancelling sessions can lead to feelings of resentment and frustration.

The participants acknowledged that it was not always possible to attend the WN sessions, although they only allowed one off events to make them unable to attend WN sessions. Margaret stated

I do [try and come every week] unless there is something, there was one week before in November where my daughters wanted me and them to have a day out and one of my daughters has every Tuesday off and she had no holidays so we had to go on a Tuesday [When WN session was on]. But very little else will stop me coming. There was another week where somebody had bumped my car and it had to go into repair. Otherwise I am here. Nothing will stop me.

This eagerness to participate and frustration when WN sessions were cancelled acknowledged the role WN sessions play in the participant’s weekly routine. The sessions have become embedded in the participant’s
weekly schedule and now form a habitual part of their week. The participants recognised if they missed a session, they felt physically deflated. Wendy discussed her feelings when she could not attend. Wendy said “After netball I always feel better. If I miss it, I just feel a bit meh [unhappy].” Similarly, Val discussed at times needing to give herself a pep talk when she comes, but always feeling good that she has attended WN sessions. Val stated “I feel really good that I have come. I nearly didn’t come today but then I think oh for goodness sake. I always feel better when I have done it”.

This finding is significant as it suggests that the participants in WN are committed to attending WN and have embedded WN as part of their weekly routine.

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to identify the primary motivation held by older women attending WN sessions, identifying and interpreting the motivational profiles of these participants. The second aim was to explore the ways in which WN sessions affected participant’s motivation to engage in PA. The main reason identified by WN participants for attending WN sessions was the collaborative identity that was developed through the social interaction experienced with other WN participants whilst at WN sessions. The participants in this study displayed self-determined motivation profiles with participants motivated by relatedness which can be identified as the sense of belonging experienced by being a part of a group and the connection experienced when engaging in shared experiences with others (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Self-determination profiles were also displayed by way in which the participants in this study discussed their motivation to attend WN session being focused on the development of autonomy related to PA participation. The WN participants in this study reported limited extrinsic types of motivation but did discuss the positive impact, that attending WN sessions had had on their health and their personal engagement with PA.

In relation to the self-determination theory, the motivation to participate because of a common social identity aligns to Ryan and Deci (2003) proposal that the development of identities is done in order to satisfy the three basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. As such through the development of a common collaborative identity of being a ‘Walking Netballer’ the participants in this study further enhanced their intrinsic motivation to participate in WN sessions. This aligns to the overall motivational profile of the participants in this study to engage in WN sessions, being self-determined with participants acknowledging their motivation focused on the intrinsic factors. This is significant as research suggests the form in which an individual’s motivation takes can predict the individual’s commitment and attendance to a particular sport or activity (Ryan et al., 1997; Vallerand and Rousseau, 2001). This is due to
individuals who are more intrinsically motivated, displaying greater attendance and adherence to activities, in respect of self-determination being linked with heightened psychological performance.

The older women in this study were initially motivated to attend WN by the need to participate in PA because of the benefits of regular PA participation in contributing to a healthy lifestyle and as such the role PA has in contributing towards avoiding ill-health. This is significant as it suggests older women are aware of the benefits of participation in PA has on their health. Similar to this study previous research has suggested older women participate in PA for multiple reasons including as a preventative measure to ill-health (Carmichael, Duberley & Szmigin, 2014) as well as to increase occurrences of social interaction (Arkenford, 2006; Carmichael, Duberley & Szmigin, 2014). However previous research has failed to distinguish between the primary and continued motivations for participation. Interestingly although Carmichael, Duberley and Szmigin, (2014) identified the role that friends and partners could play in motivating individuals to participate in PA, these motivating factors were not discussed by the participants in this study. This difference may be explained as the participants in the Carmichael, Duberley and Szmigin, (2014) study were a sample of older women who did not participate in a weekly PA session focussed on one team sport but instead participated in different types of PA. This could be taken to show that the interviewees in this study reflected a more common experience of PA than the participants in the Carmichael, Duberley and Szmigin, (2014) study. Morris, Clayton, Power and Han (1995) identified the different motivations of participants in five types of PA activity (team sports, individual sports, racquet sports, exercise activities and martial arts) presenting results that suggested participants in team sports were distinguished from all the other participants by presenting higher scores on the social or affiliation sub-scale of the Participation Motivation Questionnaire (Gill, Gross & Huddleston, 1983). As such it is important to acknowledge that the results from this study are limited only to the experiences of the older women participating in a PA session focused on a team sport and not a PA session such as swimming, jogging or gym classes. Despite this, the findings offer clear practical implications and recommendations for further research into older women and participation in PA.

Conclusions

In conclusion the findings of this study further enhance the research into motivation and older adult’s participation in PA. The findings have clear implications for organizations funding and coordinating projects aimed at encouraging participation of older adults in PA. With the key practical implication being to ensure projects aimed at engaging older women in PA make sure they allow time for the social interaction of participants, which in
turn will allow for the development of a collaborative identity. Project coordinators and funders also need to be aware of the initial motivation held by participants in WN that focus on the guilt felt of needing to engage in PA. This guilt is linked to the need to experience the health benefits available from PA participation, which would potentially allow participants to manage their health more completely than if they were inactive. As such project funders should be aware of participant’s primary and continuing motivations and consider them when planning activities aimed at increasing PA levels in older women and when attempting to ensure the sustainability of projects. Developing a project that incorporates such recommendations is imperative to engaging women in PA to address sedentary behaviour, degenerative diseases and social isolation. Alongside increasing PA levels of older women, such projects can begin to address the financial implications for organizations such as the National Health Service in the UK in regard to an aging population.

Despite the practical recommendations made from this research it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The data collection tool selected for this study only used interviews and as such a mixed method approach including participant observation and wider quantitative data collection using a tool such as The Sport Motivation Scale (Pelletier et al., 1995) or Participation Motivation Questionnaire (Gill, Gross & Huddleston, 1983) to collect data from multiple WN sessions, could offer greater insight in to the motivation of older women participating in WN sessions. This would allow a more complete picture of the experiences of WN participants to be presented.

References


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References


