

Exploring the Role of Identity in Motivating Walking Netball Participants

By Claire Mulvenna* & Anika Leslie-Walker[‡]

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) WN as a form of physical activity, (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 et al. 2005, Mensink et al. 1999, Young and Dinan 2005). Alongside the physiological benefits for 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

*Lecturer, St Mary's University, UK.

[‡]Lecturer, Bolton University, UK.

PA can reduce anxiety, decrease social isolation, diminish the symptoms of depression and improve mental health amongst older adults (Bridle et al. 2012, Liu 2009, Netz et al. 2005, Scheerder et al. 2004, Windle 2014, Windle et al. 2010). Despite the benefits experienced from participating in PA, adult activity levels gradually drop with age (Hughes et al. 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 et al. 2005, Hughes et al. 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 et al. 2014, p. 15) as well as social interaction (Arkenford 2006, Carmichael et al. 2014).

Improving and increasing levels of participation in PA to meet current guidelines is a public health priority and PA recommendations need to be designed by public health professionals and organizations in order to try to address the issues associated with an aging population (WHO 2013). With this in mind programmes such as Walking Netball (hence forth will 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 to 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 adaptations to WN in

comparison to the traditional game of 7-a-side netball. These adaptations are provided 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 continued PA. Within this study primary motivations were classed as the principle reasons the participants chose to start attending and participating in WN, while the continuing motivations were classified as the reasons the participants sustained attendance at WN sessions. As such the different motivations of participants could be categorised as to what the trigger was to the participants starting to attend WN sessions and what the continued reasons for their attendance was, recognising any changes in motivations.

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 and 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 and 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 and 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 and Losier 1999). Competence is recognised as the aspiration of individuals, to effectively interact with their environment, in order to achieve anticipated outcomes (Deci and 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 and Duda 2006). Finally, autonomy is the widespread urge for an individual to be in control of the course of their own life (Deci and 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 and 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 and 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 and Ryan 1985). In contrast extrinsic motivation is created by exterior sources, such as participating in activities for social approval and trophies (Deci and 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 and 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, p. 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 two volunteer "hosts". The 'hosts' then 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 1). 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 et al. 2014).

Table 1. *Participant Information*

Name	Age	Experience of WN
Participant 1	50	24 months
Participant 2	72	18 months
Participant 3	50	12 months
Participant 4	61	14 months
Participant 5	65	18 months
Participant 6	64	13 months
Participant 7	61	24 months
Participant 8	54	17 months
Participant 9	58	14 months
Participant 10	70	16 months
Participant 11	67	22 months
Participant 12	61	18 months

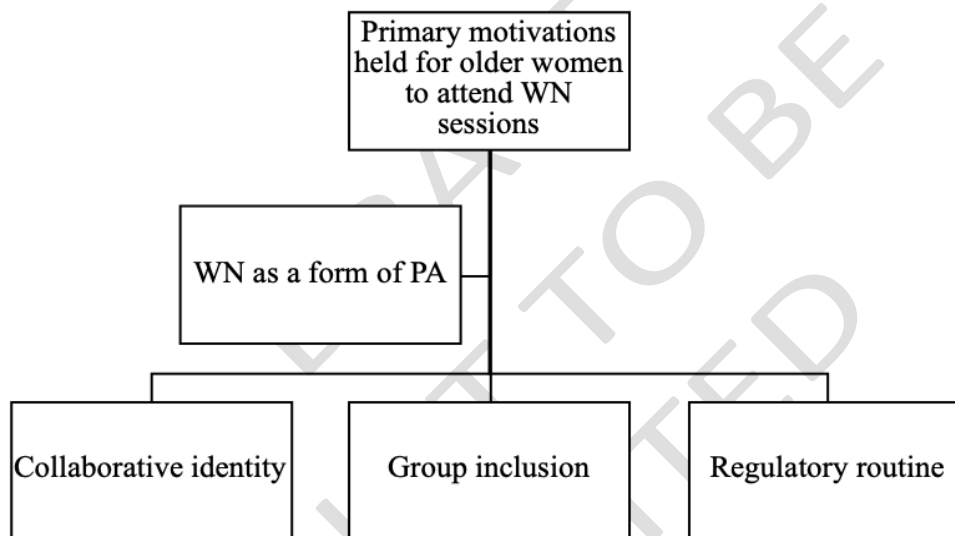
A qualitative method was used within this study to allow the experiences and in particular the motivations of WN participants to be analyzed. A provisional semi-structured interview guide was informed by SDT and focused upon the key areas; history of PA participation, experience with WN and the social factors experienced through participating in PA 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 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). All participants were provided with a pseudonym (e.g. Participant 1) 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). Following transcription of the interviews, 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). A hierarchy of themes can be seen in Diagram 1 with "WN as a form of PA" identified as the principle theme in this research in drawing participants to engage in WN. The remaining three themes acted as continued motivational factors for participants and were developed during the participants attendance at WN sessions.

Diagram 2. *Hierarchy of Themes*



Results

Participants in the study were aged from 50 to 72 (M – 61) and had an average of 17.5 months (range = 12–24 months) participating in WN.

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. Participant 2 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. Participant 2 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". Participant 2'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. Participant 2 spoke about the appeal of WN that allowed her to address the guilt she felt for having low activity levels. Participant 2 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. Participant 6 summarized the benefits experienced by engaging in PA by stating "You've got to keep moving otherwise you would seize up!" This attitude exemplified discussions by the participants in this study who were 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, with several discussing that it was engaging in PA through netball in particular that motivated attendance. Participant 7 stated, "Now my kids are older, I have the time to commit to the sport I've always loved and cherished". Furthermore, Participant 1 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. Participant 1 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 Participant 1 to participate in low impact PA, but principally was appealing because it allowed her to play 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. Participant 4 discussed her pride in the activity levels she has reached since engaging in WN. Participant 4 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!

Participant 4 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 her engagement in other PA. 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.

Collaborative Identity

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 continuing to attend WN sessions after their initial engagement. This motivational factor was exemplified by Participant 9 who discussed the togetherness that was expressed by all the participants being friendly and inclusive. Participant 9 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 Participant 9, Participant 6 recognised the social relationships that contributed to the development of a collaborative identity. Participant 6 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 suggests 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 humour being critical to the development of a collaborative identity via the delivery of WN sessions was also discussed by Participant 3. Participant 3 stated "I think it is because it is such a friendly bunch, the coaches, [Coach 1] and [Coach 2] 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. Participant 8 discussed how the PA 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. Participant 8 stated she started attending WN sessions and it quickly became part of her routine. Participant 8 said "I just got back in to [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". Participant 8 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 motivated to attend. Participant 5 discussed the idea of social interaction and how this motivated her to attend by stating her reason for attending WN sessions 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 Participant 10 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 in 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. Participant 11 discussed the actions she always tried to take when a new participant started at WN. Participant 11 discussed how this welcome was habit and an unspoken rule to include a new participant. Participant 11 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. Participant 11 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. Participant 2 emphasized how she had been made to feel welcome at her first session by someone taking time to specifically welcome her to the group. Participant 2 stated, "They are all lovely ladies, [that player] over there, [playing] wing defence, was friendly and nice at my first session and then you get to know them and just go from there". Participant 2 emphasized that this welcoming atmosphere was continued and her ongoing participation in WN sessions, was due to the friendly nature of the participants and volunteers. Participant 2 stated, "It is a lot to do with how friendly the ladies are". Whilst 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 participants felt included in WN sessions and activities/matches within the sessions. Participant 1 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. Participant 1 stated "The other thing is the rules, pulling them up nicely. Like for me there [Points to match taking place in session] [She] was too close and so you just pull them up nicely. You've got to be flexible". This form of adaptable umpiring allowed participants who had 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. Participant 4 discussed how the group was inclusive and how there was an annual Christmas dinner organized by WN participants. Participant 4 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 [restaurant] 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 PA sessions and non-PA sessions together. Participant 7 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. This started with the welcome from participants to new 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 PA sessions outside of the formal coordinated WN 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. Participant 12 discussed how she had to manage her working arrangements around WN sessions, however she expressed that it was now part of her routine. Participant 12 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 Participant 12 is an individual who is highly motivated to participate and keen to attend WN sessions. Participant 6 also expressed the way she looked forward to WN sessions and how they have become a part of her routine. Participant 6 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 feelings 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. Participant 4 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 Participant 4 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 that 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. Participant 4 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. Participant 1 discussed her feelings when she could not attend. Participant 1 said "After netball I always feel better. If I miss it, I just feel a bit meh [unhappy]". Similarly, Participant 2 discussed at times needing to give herself a pep talk before she attends, but always feeling good that she has attended WN sessions. Participant 2 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 participants discussed that the motivation for them starting to attend WN was an aspiration to become more physically active. Meanwhile the main reason identified by WN participants for continuing to attend WN sessions was the collaborative identity that was developed through the social interaction experienced with other WN participants whilst at WN sessions. This finding separates this research from previous work (e.g. Carmichael et al. 2014) focusing on the motivations of older women in PA because of the breakdown of motivations in to initial and continuing, which provides a detailed analysis of how the motivations of older women can and do change as they participate in PA. 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 and 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 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 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 that participation in PA has on their health and that this can stimulate them to attend PA sessions. 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 et al. 2014) as well as to increase occurrences of social interaction (Arkenford 2006, Carmichael et al. 2014). However, previous research has failed to distinguish between the primary and continued motivations for participation, identifying instead general motivations for engaging in PA. As such, this paper offers unique insight in to the reasons why older women begin to attend PA sessions and how their motivation to participate in PA changes as they maintain participation in PA. Interestingly, although Carmichael et al. (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 signifying another difference between this paper and the research carried out by Carmichael et al. (2014). This difference may be explained as the participants in the Carmichael et al. (2014) study were a sample of older women who did not participate in a weekly PA session focused 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 et al. (2014) study. Morris et al. (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 et al. 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. However, it is 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 et al. 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.

Conclusion

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

need to engage in PA for the associated physiological and psychological benefits. This motivation 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 older women in PA in order 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. Through the development of projects such as WN it is proposed that the decline in PA levels seen with age may begin to be addressed and the associated benefits of PA such as reduced falls, diseases and disability as well as increased psychological wellbeing can be experienced by an aging population. These benefits could potentially lead to less monetary spend on treatment and rehabilitation of some age related diseases and disabilities.

References

- Aiello C (2016) Sport as a strategy for preventing physical inactivity: walking football. *Euromediterranean Biomedical Journal* 11(24): 176–180.
- Arkenford & Act 2 (2006) *Understanding participation in sport: what determines sports participation among recently retired people?* London: Sport England.
- Basketball England (2020) *Walking basketball*. Retrieved from: <https://www.basketballengland.co.uk/get-involved/play/types-of-basketball/walking-basketball/>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- Berger U, Der G, Mutrie N, Hannah MK (2005) The impact of retirement on physical activity. *Aging and Society* 25(2): 181–195.
- Braun V, Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.
- Bridle C, Spanjers K, Patel S, Atherton NM, Lamb SE (2012) Effect of exercise on depression severity in older people: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 201(30): 180–185.
- British Heart Foundation (2017) *Beating heart disease together active for later life promoting physical activity with older people*. UK: British Heart Foundation.
- Carmichael F, Duberley J, Szmigin I (2014) Older women and their participation in exercise and leisure-time physical activity: the double-edged sword of work. *Sport in Society* 18(1): 42–60.
- Deci EL, Ryan RM (1985) *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci EL, Ryan RM (1991) A motivational approach to self: integration in personality. In R Dienstbier (ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Perspectives on Motivation*, 237–288. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Deci EL, Ryan RM (2000) The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry* 11(4): 227–268.

- Deci EL, Ryan RM (2012) Self-determination theory. In PAM Van Lange, AW Kruglanski, ET Higgins (eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 416–436.
- England Netball (2015a) *Walking netball*. Retrieved from: <https://www.englandnetball.co.uk/play/walking-netball/>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- England Netball (2015b) *Why walking netball?* Retrieved from: <https://www.englandnetball.co.uk/my-game/walking-netball/why-walking-netball/>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- England Netball (2015c) *Walking netball rules*. Retrieved from: <https://www.englandnetball.co.uk/my-game/walking-netball/walking-netball-rules/>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- England Netball (2018) *100,000 women are taking a shot at back to netball*. Retrieved from: <https://www.englandnetball.co.uk/100000thbacktonetballer/>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- Gill D, Gross J, Huddleston S (1983) Participation motivation in youth sports. *International Journal of Sport Psychology* 14(1): 1–14.
- Hagger MS, Chatzisarantis NLD (Eds.) (2007) *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in exercise and sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Haight T, Tager I, Sternfeld B, Satariano W, Van Der Laan M (2005) Effects of body composition and leisure time physical activity on transitions in physical functioning in the elderly. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 162(7): 607–617.
- Hughes JP, McDowell MA, Brody DJ (2008) Leisure time physical activity among U.S. adults 60 or more years of age: results from NHANES 1999–2004. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* 5(3): 347–358.
- Jones I (2015) *Research methods for sport studies*. 3rd Edition. London: Routledge.
- Khan K (2009) Employment of the older generation. *Economic and Labor Market Review* 3(4): 30–36.
- Liu Y-D (2009) Sport and social inclusion: evidence from the performance of public leisure facilities. *Social Indicators Research* 90(2): 325–337.
- Mensink GB, Ziese T, Kok FJ (1999) Benefits of leisure time physical activity on the cardiovascular risk profile at older age. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 28(4): 659–666.
- Morris T, Clayton H, Power H, Han J (1995) Activity type differences in participation motives. *Australian Journal of Psychology* 47: 101–102.
- Netz Y, Wu MJ, Becker BJ, Tenenbaum G (2005) Physical activity and psychological well-being in advanced age: a meta-analysis of intervention studies. *Psychology and Aging* 20(2): 272–284.
- Office for National Statistics (2018) *Living longer: how our population is changing and why it matters*. Office for National Statistics
- Pelletier LG, Fortier MS, Vallerand RJ, Tuson KM, Brière NM, Blais MR (1995) Toward a new measure of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation in sports: the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 17(1): 35–54.
- Reinboth M, Duda JL (2006) Perceived motivational climate, need satisfaction and indices of well-being in team sports: a longitudinal perspective. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 7(3): 269–286.
- Ryan RM, Frederick CM, Lepes D, Rubio D, Sheldon KS (1997) Intrinsic motivation and exercise adherence. *International Journal of Sports Psychology* 28(4): 355–354.
- Scheerder J, Pauwels G, Vanreusel B (2004) Sport and social integration. An empirical analysis of the relationship between sports participation and social connectedness. *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* 25: 417–450.

- The Football Association – The FA (2020) *Discover the health benefits of walking football*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thefa.com/news/2019/jan/25/health-benefits-of-walking-football-250119>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- Ukactive (2017) *Moving more, ageing well*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ukactive.com/reports/moving-more-ageing-well/>. [Accessed 23 November 2020]
- Vallerand RJ (1997) Toward a hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In M Zanna (ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 271–360. New York: Academic Press.
- Vallerand RJ, Losier GF (1999) An integrative analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 11(1): 142–169.
- Vallerand RJ, Rousseau FL (2001) Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in sport and exercise: a review using the hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In RN Singer, HA Hausenblas, CM Janelle (eds.), *Handbook of Sport Psychology*, 389–416. New York: Wiley.
- Windle G (2014) Exercise, physical activity and mental well-being in later life. *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology* 24(4): 319–325.
- Windle G, Hughes D, Linck P, Russell I, Woods B (2010) Is exercise effective in promoting mental well-being in older age? A systematic review. *Aging & Mental Health* 14(6): 652–669.
- World Health Organisation – WHO (2013) *Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- Young A, Dinan S (2005) Activity in later life. *British Medical Journal* 330(7): 189–191.