Back to Netball: Motivations for participation in a female focused Netball sport program.

Abstract

Background: Back to Netball (B2N) is a UK female national sports program that has been found to engage large number of females in the sport netball. This study sought to understand the participant motives for engaging in this program. Methods: Qualitative methods were used following an initial quantitative survey, which was part of a wider project (outside of this manuscript). Survey participants comprised of 374 females aged 16-68. Participants completed an online survey to capture demographic data. Interviews were conducted with 28 participants either still engaged or no longer engaged in B2N. Analysis involved both inductive and deductive thematic analysis to explore participant perceptions of their coach. Results: Initial motives for engagement were focussed on physical health motives and social motives. The coach was also found to be important in providing opportunities for competence development. Therefore, competence development was found to be an important factor for engagement. Participant motivations moved from an extrinsic concern with losing weight to a more intrinsic foci including socialising opportunities and feelings of competence. Conclusions: As a team sport B2N stimulates social engagement, competence, and other motives. Coaching is also a key facilitator for engagement in B2N. This research has implications for future practitioners and policy makers aiming to engage women in sport and physical activity.

Key Words: Coaching, Women, Physical Activity, Netball, Sport.

Within the UK, females have been found to be more inactive than males (Sport England, 2016). This finding has also been reported across wider research studies (Alvarez, 1992; Garcia & Llopis, 2011). This lack of engagement in females may lead to a number of potential health concerns, such as cardiovascular risks (Carnethon et al., 2003), and a number of well documented psychological conditions (Das Horton, 2016; Fortier, Duda, Guerin, & Teixeira, 2012). Therefore, it is important to be aware of this physical activity discrepancy and to further understand the importance of physical activity and its role in improving motivation and increasing the feelings of competence in women, which in turn may reduce health risks (Moreno-Murcia, Belando, Huescar & Torres, 2017).

In response to some of the above concerns, the UK Government has created a Sporting Future Strategy (2015), which aims to improve physical and mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development. From this strategy Sport England[1]developed 'Towards an Active Nation' (Sport England, 2016, p. 19), which aims to develop and sustain sport and PA participation in both inactive and under-represented groups. This strategy includes a focus on women and girl's participation, and it is hoped that through tailored support over a prolonged period of time, will create what Sport England describe as a 'resilient habit' (p. 25). From this 'Towards an Active Nation' strategy, National Governing Bodies (NGB's) within the UK, who receive funding from Sport England, are responding by setting up new initiatives aimed at engaging women in sustain physical activity.

England Netball, a governing body for the sport of Netball, has developed a number of program aimed at improving participation levels. For readers not familiar with the sport, netball is a fast-paced invasion sport, which involves two teams of seven players, where each team strives to keep or gain possession of the ball (INF, 2018). Through running, jumping and throwing the

[1] An organisation tasked by government to increase participation in sport and physical activity,

team with the ball aims to move the ball into its goal circle, where a goal can be scored. Players also have specific areas in which they can move and are restricted depending on their position within the team. In the UK, Netball was initially developed as a game that was predominantly played by women and girls, although more recently this is also becoming a sport played by men (INF, 2018). Netball is England's most popular female sport (England Netball, 2017) and is the fourteenth most widely-played sport in England by individuals over the age of 16. Furthermore, netball is part of the National Curriculum, meaning it is played by the majority of school-age children across England. Sport England's latest report measuring participation between April 2015 and March 2016 demonstrates that participation in Netball has significantly increased in the last twelve months. In the latest audit, 219,000 individuals aged 16 or over reported participating in netball once a month, an increase of 17,900 from the twelve months previous. Furthermore, 164,100 individuals reported participating in netball at least once a week between April 2015 and March 2016, an increase of 13,100 compared to the previous twelve-month period.

Despite netball being extremely popular amongst school-age children, as with many forms of physical activity, there is a large attrition rate during the transition into adolescence (Nader, Bradley, Houts, McRitchie, & O'Brien, 2008). With this is mind, England Netball developed the "Back to Netball" (B2N) program. B2N aims to provide women of all ages with a gentle reintroduction to the sport (England Netball, 2017). In practice, B2N typically involves female coaches reinforcing basic skills and concepts of the game, including passing, footwork and shooting over a 12-week program of sessions. B2N participants can choose to carry on engaging in B2N or progress to more competitive netball environments. All coaches on the program have level 2 UKCC/England Netball qualifications and the coaches are provided with a B2N resource pack and formal mentoring. These resources are administered by England Netball development officers with the aim of ensuring that coaching on B2N is tailored to

participant needs in order to facilitate the large-scale development of habitual physical activity. Following the 12-week program, England Netball hope that B2N 'graduates' will maintain their netball participation within local clubs and thus will have successfully reengaged with physical activity. Since its inception in 2010, more than 60,000 individuals have participated in the program (England Netball, 2017). Furthermore, a 2016 impact evaluation of B2N showed an impressive 89% of former B2N participants reported that they engaged in further activity (Whitehead et al., 2016), suggesting B2N is a particularly successful vehicle for increasing levels of PA amongst participants. Given the levels of participation B2N is an appropriate vehicle to develop our understanding of female needs within physical activity and sport engagement. Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand participant's motives for initially engaging in B2N, and for sustaining this behaviour associated with engaging in B2N.

Research specifically looking at motives for female participation in sport has found that those who experience feelings of incompetence, a lack of autonomy and social support are more likely to drop out (Sarrazin et al, 2002; Stephan, Bioche, & Le Scanff, 2010). Furthermore, gender differences have been found in swimmers motivations, where females were found to be more autonomous and self-determined, and where an intrinsic value is put on the importance of the activity (Pelletier, et al., 2002). In comparison, males were found to score higher in external regulation, where behaviour is regulated through external means such as rewards (Pelletier, et al., 2002).

Within a successful female specific sporting program such as B2N, Cronin, Walsh, Quayle, Whittaker and Whitehead (2018) emphasised the importance of an autonomy supportive environment, where caring relationships are features of a successful program. Walsh, Whittaker, Cronin and Whitehead (2018) also found that social connectedness amongst team mates was a key factor in developing physical activity engagement within a female sporting program, such as netball. These concepts of autonomy and social support (relatedness) are two

of three factors which underpin the self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). With the third factor being competence. These factors will therefore, be further considered below.

The self-determination theory proposes that if the social context satisfies the psychological need for competence, autonomy and relatedness, this will facilitate the development of more self-determined regulations, which underpin task persistence and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). Autonomy is characterised by feelings of choice and being able to choose one's own behaviour. Relatedness refers to feeling connectedness and being supported by the social environment. Competence refers to feelings of effectiveness whilst engaging in a challenging task (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Wilson and Rogers (2001) found positive relationships between women who had autonomous exercise motives and higher physical self-esteem. This research demonstrates how autonomous exercise motives can influence more than behaviour adherence. Indeed, as previously mentioned Cronin et al., (2018) found an autonomy supportive environment to be a key factor in engaging females in a netball program. More specifically, those who were given choice and were allowed to contribute to the netball sessions reported high levels of engagement. These individuals felt that their behaviour originated from their own needs, as opposed to being a response to external pressures or demands.

Walsh et al., (2018) demonstrated that social support and the development of a social identity between mothers who engage in a netball program was a key factor in their physical activity engagement. Previous research has also highlighted the importance of social support and physical activity engagement (Wilson & Spink, 2009; Nicholas et al., 2018). More specifically, in older females, social support has been found to be particularly important in that older females have reported greater social motives for being active than males (Kolt, Driver,

& Giles, 2004). Within a team environment such as Netball feelings of social categorisation and relatedness can be developed, which in turn promotes prolonged physical activity adherence (Walsh et al., 2018).

Competence refers to an individual's perception of being able to achieve the task at hand and evidence indicates a positive relationship between skill competence and physical activity engagement (e.g., Barnett, Morgan, Van Beurden, & Beard, 2008; Stodden, Langendorfer, & Robertson, 2009). Furthermore, males have been found to report a higher level of perceived sports competence than females (Overdorf, Coker & Kollia, 2016), which may account for why adult males are reported to be more physical activity than females. Nicholas et al., (2018) found that females engaging in pole dancing for the first time, expressed how the activity offered much opportunity to develop their competence (Nicholas et al., 2018, p. 111). The ability to develop competence and self-improvement within a chosen task in turn facilitates feelings of confidence through accomplishment (Nicholas et al., 2018). This improvement of confidence then promotes the intrinsic motivation and the likely hood of a prolonged engagement in the activity. Furthermore, it is important to note that the participants in the Nicholas et al., (2018) study also demonstrated the development of feelings of autonomy, through having choice over the activity and relatedness, through acceptance and support.

Given the body of evidence described above, it is clear that SDT is an appropriate framework to use as a means of understanding women's motives for participating in B2N. Furthermore, as evidence previously by Cronin et al., (2018), Walsh et al., (2018) & Nicholas et al., (2018), it is important to acknowledge the environmental context, in that it should allow for the development of intrinsic motivation through social inclusiveness, autonomy supportive opportunities, which facilitate competence development. Although previous studies have shed some light in this area, specifically within the sport of netball, (Cronin et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2018). It is important that more is done to improve the understanding of women's

engagement in recreational sport and physical activity. Therefore, this paper aims to explore participant's beliefs and motives towards engaging in B2N and to understand how the context of B2N contributes to these beliefs and motives.

Method

Participants

Survey: A total of 374 surveys were completed; 226 participants still engaged in B2N and 148 were former participants. Eligibility criteria involved being (i) a current participant in BTN, i.e. those engaging, or (ii) a former participant in B2N, i.e. those no longer engaging, at the time of the study due to dropping out or graduating onto other forms of netball of physical activity. Participants were further required to be over the age of 16 years. Based on the criteria, the age of respondents was 16-17 (n=4), 18-21 (n=7), 22-24 (n=22), 25-29 (n=70), 30-34 (n=64), 35-40 (n=79), 41-49 (n=84), 50-64 (n=41), 65+ (n=3). All participants were female and predominantly Caucasian (96%) and employed (61.2%).

Follow-up interview: Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 28 participants who were either still currently engaging in B2N or had graduated onto other forms of netball or physical activity. Interviews lasted between 28.21 minutes and 70.08 minutes. Institutional ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection.

Measures

Online Survey: Participants completed an online survey that included demographic questions about their age, employment status, race and current and previous physical activity levels. The survey was part of a wider project and co-created with England Netball to assess other motivational factors for engagement, not included within this study.

Interview: The interviews focussed on participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences of B2N. Six questions were designed to provide time and space for the participants to recount their personal experiences and motives for engaging in B2N. For example, "why did you initially engage in B2N"?, "what motivated you to go to the B2N sessions?", "Can you tell me about your first Back to Netball experience?" In addition, 6 further questions were also informed by the theoretical framework; Self Determination Theory. For example, questions included; Does Back to Netball challenge you in anyway? To what extent did you have choice over session content? In this sense, the study maintained a balance between inductively exploring the lived experience of participants and deductively drawing upon SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008) to understand these lived experiences of engaging in B2N.

Procedure

Participants were recruited and engaged in the completion of a questionnaire via social media (twitter). This was through the primary institutions social media account and also via England Netballs' social media account. Following survey completion, participants were invited to volunteer for follow up interviews, and provided their contact details. A total of 28 participants who were either still engaging in B2N (n = 16) or had gone on to engage in other forms of netball or physical activity (n = 12) were contacted. This sample was convenient rather than representative in that participants had declared that they were willing to participate as part on the questionnaire (Patton, 1990). Nonetheless, the sample fulfilled the purposeful criteria of previously engaging in B2N sessions and thus had knowledge of the phenomenon in question (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Interviews were conducted via the telephone as it was thought that this allows for the potential for the research to develop trust and rapport prior to the interview via contacting the participant to arrange the telephone interviews (Burke & Miller, 2001).

Further research by Rahman, (2015) has found that telephone interviews may also reduce anxiety and unease of a participant, in comparison to face-to-face interviews. To further build comfort, trust and rapport, these interviews were conducted by a single researcher at a convenient time for the participant. In addition, the participant was notified that they were free to withdraw at any point, and the interview was intended to be a conversation style interview.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted to explore participant perceptions of their B2N experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was utilised because it allows for the examination of lived experiences across numerous participants (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis is however a flexible framework that has been applied differently by researchers who may have different paradigmatic and epistemological positions. Thus, it is important to clarify that inductive reasoning was employed with the view of prioritising the experiences and perceptions of participants, and this approach was informed by a relativist epistemology. More specifically, the relativist epistemology sees knowledge as locally and social constructed and from this position the contextualised and subjective experiences of participants are a valuable route to understanding (Andrews, Mason, & Silk, 2005). That said, although an inductive approach was undertaken, is it is important to note that the researcher and therefore data analysis was not value nor could it ever be value free. On the contrary, consistent with a relativist ontology, a double hermeneutic exists wherein the researcher seeks to make sense of the participants' own sense making (McKenzie, Powell, & Usher, 2005). Accordingly, data analysis is influenced by the researcher's own subjectivity, and readers Therefore, in order to aid readers act as 'connoisseurs' and judge the integrity of the data analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), the following section will transparently detail the steps taken by the researchers to both analyse the data and to manage their own subjectivity.

Analysis began by a single author reading all transcripts of interviews (immersion in the data) in Nvivo 10 (step 1). Once complete the researcher developed a list of codes from the first two two interviews. To ensure rigour, at this point the initial codes were reviewed and considered by a second author (step 2). Collaborative coding is supported by Saldana (2013) as it allows a "dialogic exchange of ideas" that support interrogation and discussion from multiple perspectives. Following this critical review, the codes were amended and definitions of codes established. The codes were then utilised as a starting point analyse the remaining transcripts. That said, as the researcher identified new codes, they were also included in the analysis and again they were considered and reviewed by a second researcher. Once all interviews were coded, the researcher searched for themes across all codes (step 3). Once more, these themes were reviewed by a co-researcher (step 4). Once complete, and consistent with the potential limitations of inter-rater reliability as highlighted by Smith and McGannon (2017), a different researcher acted as critical friend to ensure data collection and analysis was plausible and defendable (step 5) (Smith and McGannon, 2017). This is a step which has continued during the peer review phase. Following this refining and naming of themes, the findings were produced (step 6) and are presented in the following section.

Results

Descriptive statistics

When asked to report their physical activity levels prior to B2N, those who were still engaging (63%) reported that they were physically active and had been for the previous six months. Within those who no longer engaged in B2N 68% were physically active. Following their ceased engagement in B2N, 87% of these participants reported that they were still moderately physically active on a regular basis. Interestingly, 37% of these went on to further levels of

netball (e.g. joining a league), 50% engaged in other forms of physical activity and 13% no longer participated in physical activity.

Qualitative results

The following section will present the keys themes that were generated from the B2N participant interviews. These themes depict the analysis across 28 participants who engaged in B2N and demonstrate how the initial motives of these participants changed throughout their experience. Initially participants engaged in B2N for the extrinsic health and fitness related reasons. As participation in B2N developed, participants then expressed how social and competence motives become important factors in engagement,

Initial Physical Health Motives

Participants initial motives for engaging in B2N were largely centred on physical health motives. For example, 20 out of the 28 participants interviewed specified that their initial reason for attending B2N was to improve their fitness and lose weight.

> Well, I, when I asked for it, I thought it might be a team sport and I'd be more likely to keep going as I hadn't done any exercise for a long time and I thought it was going to be really basic. So I e-mailed and said 'I'm not doing any exercise, I'm not very fit and I don't know how to play netball, is that okay?' and I got a lovely e-mail back saying 'that's fine, that's what it's for' so then I felt more confident to go because I thought it's not going to be like an exercise class where people are going to be really fit. I thought if it is for people that have been out of exercising for a while then that would be good. And, I think it started off like that, the first couple of sessions were quieter, erm, and I really enjoyed it and I thought this is good and I got a lot of exercise. (Participant 3)

This initial motive of wanting to improve physical fitness and exercise levels, also demonstrates a sense of low perceived competence. Further interviews revealed how some participants felt the need to have a certain level of competence prior to engaging in B2N, however the initial motive of fitness was still a major factor in the initial engagement:

> "No I probably didn't do anything until I was 34. I got married at 32. I've always been quite active and able and physical but then as soon as you have kids your body changes and your body needs to exercise otherwise you get fat. So after my second kid I was 35 actually and I needed to lose 3 stone because I'd put a stone on for every child and then one extra. So, I just realised that I didn't have the energy and I was starting to be a size that I didn't want to be and even though you have got kids and I was exhausted and I was tired and I was working full time still, I had to put myself first. I did a Slimming World thing and lost 3 stone and then I started running and I started exercising and I started going to Zumba classes and that was when Kirsty said to me 'right, netball has just started, do you fancy it?' and I was at my point where I had got back to my 10 stone and, erm, so I felt like I was able, because of the Slimming World thing and losing 3 stone in weight which is like a massive amount when you're 3 stone heavier than you wanted to be, erm, I felt confident enough to do it, if that makes sense." (Participant 22).

Again participant 8 below specified how fitness was her main motive to engage, however, the social/relatedness aspect of being with other people and making friends did 'help' with engagement:

"it was more the fitness really than the social side but, erm, I suppose, you know, it does help when you are in all day with the baby and that, you can actually go out and like, you know, totally switch off and perhaps make other friends and things but that wasn't my main focus. My main focus was to do it for the fitness aspect." (Participant 8).

Social Motives

These initial health motives also seemed to coincide with the participants need to seek social support from others. With 26 out of 28 participants expressing the importance of social interaction as either an initial motive or something that developed as a result of engaging in B2N. For example, participant 11 explains how although her initial motive was for fitness, she recognises how the social aspect of netball is something that is more likely to keep her engaged that attending the gym on her own:

I just wanted to do exercise and I suppose the social side is, erm, it might keep you going if you're, compared to like going to the gym where it is just down to you whether or not you go, like having a commitment of once a week, I suppose that helps as well. (Participant 11)

Similarly, participant 15, expressed how, although she may be less fit than her team mates, she has the motives to develop fitness, however to support her team and 'not let them down':

I think because, you know, you are very conscious that you are there supporting a team. I'm not a particularly small lady, I'm probably a plus size, you know, I'm, I play in a shooting position and you pick that because there's the least running around, you know. I was a good shooter at school so that's where you kind of fall back to but actually for me personally, my drive is to, I don't want to let my team down. I want to be able to

get round my team player, I want to be able to run down that line and I want to be able to run and warm up with them and train with them, you know. (Participant 15).

Again, participant 7 expressed how although she felt she was physically fit the social (relatedness) element of playing in a team sport, attracted her to participate:

Oh I'd played netball when I was younger and I'm quite a fit and active person anyway but I didn't do anything that was like a team sport and so the opportunity to do that is really what attracted me to it in the first place with, you know, team sport, get some friends together, it will be a bit of a laugh and a good way to get fit. (Participant 7).

For participant 18, it became apparent that through B2N a wider social support network had been formed:

Absolutely, yeah. I think there's lots of, it started off as, we live in quite a small village, erm, and it started off with us probably having, you know, twenty people from the village and all the people we knew, friends and mums from school and it started off like that and it has grown and grown and actually now we have got such a mixture of ages from people that we didn't know. We've got ladies that are coming from quite far afield now that come and play with us, erm, and lots of people that have then since become friends and it is brilliant. They've all said, you know, it's such a lovely group of people and we had a charity ball on Friday and one of our players who isn't a friend, she is kind of somebody who has come to the sessions and kind of become friends as we've gone along, she said 'I genuinely think that if I had any problem, I could ring any one of our players and they would come and help me' and that's lovely because its outside of friendships you form as children and through family and stuff, this is just completely separate and we're all very different personalities and different people but it is, it all seems to work and it gives everyone that drive. There's a lot of us have said, you know,

345 we've tried the gym, we've tried Zumba, you know, all these courses and things and
346 actually, none of us have ever stuck to anything, other than netball. (Participant 18).
347
348 **Competence development through coaching facilitation**
349 The themes from the interviews also revealed that competence was a key driver that
350 facilitated further or maintained netball or physical activity participation and the coach was
351 identified as the key mechanism for improving participant's competence. Within this theme,
352 sub themes became apparent in that the coaches improved competence through 1) providing
353 opportunities for skill development; 2) organising formal competition; and 3) sign posting
354 players to other netball opportunities at an appropriate competitive level. Each of these
355 methods of improving women's competence and sport experiences will be discussed in the
356 following section.

357 **Improving competence through tailored skill development:** As evidenced in much
358 of the coaching literature, one of the key characteristics of a coach is to develop skill level
359 within a performer. Although previous themes have demonstrated that participants initial
360 motives to engage in B2N were related to physical and social agenda's, it become apparent
361 (in 16 of 28 participants) throughout the interviews that participants valued the coach for
362 providing constructive feedback and helping them develop their skill level. This in turn
363 enabled participants to develop their netball competency levels:

364 She (the coach) would provide different points each week, and then if one person is
365 not there that week then we'll catch up the next week and help them through what we
366 did last week or if they are trying out a new position, she will help them and coach
367 them through it. (Participant 9)

The below quote provides an example of how the coach acts as a competence developer, through both providing advice and skill development feedback and also acting as a role model:

> If we wanted to improve or if you wanted to work on a particular thing she'd give you tips on it and we were kind of getting to that level where you might want to, you know, join a team so she was kind of giving us advice on how we can do that as well. So yeah, and she plays herself, she's in a netball team, way higher than we are but, erm, she really loves the sport so she was very helpful at getting us involved. (Participant 8).

Organising formal competition: This development of skill level and improved perceived competence from the B2N participants, allowed for participants to engage in additional netball competitions that may sit outside of B2N. Although, the initial motives for participants was focussed on physical and social motives, these participants felt an improved level of competence, which allowed them to challenge themselves further and engage in competitive netball environments, which were provided by the coach. This theme was evident for 16 of the 28 participants:

> The Back to Netball coach would enter a team into a local Back to Netball tournament or just sometimes they would just arrange the odd match here or there and we'd have a match booked with like local sixth form girls and we would go out and literally get thrashed like, awful, awful results like 60 goals to 3, but we were enjoying it. And then we just slowly started to improve and got more competitive I would say as we improved. (Participant 4)

> We've got a really good coach who is really involved in the netball in our area and she tries to get friendlies and things organised for us whenever possible. (Participant 6).

Furthermore, other participants discussed how their coach organised a formal competition, which gave B2N participants to opportunity to engage further competitive environments. In addition, this opportunity to engage in a tournament has provided some participants to play in a formal competition for the first time and in turn sparked further motivations to involve others and engage a wider netball group:

> We had a tournament that our Back to Netball officer organised in March I think it was and we had such a brilliant day and it gave the opportunity to some of our players who didn't play in the league to be able to play and to play teams of a similar level and, you know, to meet other players and other people and there were three or four teams there that were in the same situation. I think there were six of us altogether and it was such a great day that I contacted her the week after and said you know, 'can we get one sorted for summer, would it be good to do a summer one and do you want to do it or are you happy for me to do it or, you know, do you need some involvement with it being, you know, England Netball and Back to Netball and all that sort of thing?' She said 'no, no, if you're happy to do it', she's coming and supporting us and she's been a great help and she's given loads of information and stuff, erm, so she was like 'no, if you want to do it and are happy to do it, then please go ahead and do it'. We've got twelve teams, just by a little more advertising and a little bit more, putting it out on the Facebook pages for various areas and putting it on certain websites and tweeting about it and all this sort of stuff. We've doubled the amount of

> teams that have come so there's obviously a need and a requirement for it but it's just whether that can be done slightly more regularly. I think as well, especially for those teams that are new, it gives them something to work towards. (Participant 27)

In these instances, coaches organised competitive opportunities for the women in their B2N group. In doing so, the coaches not only used their knowledge of netball tactics, skills etc. but also drew upon their knowledge of local netball infrastructure. For the women on B2N, these opportunities were valued, and when successful provided an authentic feeling of competence. This suggests that the role of the community coach is not confined to the netball court but extends to contacting local clubs and schools in order to facilitate increased feelings of competence through competition.

Sign posting and supporting players to access other netball opportunities at an appropriate competitive level: Coaches' knowledge of the local netball 'network', was also paramount in helping participants' 'graduate' from B2N to more established netball clubs. This became evident in the 13 participants who no longer engage in B2N and have gone onto other forms of netball. For example, participant 5, who no longer engages in B2N, described a journey from B2N to one where she now participates in other forms of physical activity in addition to netball:

> I went through the Back to Netball process, and from having input from the coach I then joined a Netball Club. I'm part of a team there and I do more than just that now. I have also joined something else called Cross Fit so I do that regularly. (Participant 5).

> We attended a Back to Netball session with Emma and then we, because I was saying there were 16 of us who were all really keen to move on and new people were coming into the Back to Netball group and so, erm, I think Emma was a bit concerned about us already being, other people turning up and finding there was already a team formed, that there was some kind of clique there, formed already. So, I think she was keen for us to find a way to move on where new people who would join her Back to Netball session would feel that it was for them. So she suggested setting up a team and what we did, the 16 of us, we put two teams into a netball league, erm, and we have been playing that for the last 5 weeks and there is another 5 weeks to go, erm, and so we hope, there are 6 teams in that little league so we play each other twice, erm, and we hope at the end of August when it finishes that all the other teams will be happy to, erm, happy to do another league during the autumn for 10 weeks. (Participant 20).

Interestingly, it is important to acknowledge that B2N does not cater for everyone and there were instances where some participants felt too competent for the program. In these circumstances, the knowledge and ability of a coach to signpost a player to an appropriate club was important e.g. participant 03 states:

> I went to Back to Netball when I had just graduated at Loughborough and I was looking at joining a local team around there. I tried Back to Netball out and decided it wasn't for me, the skill level was quite low. I had, I used to play at a pretty high level and it was quite a low skill level, quite a few of the people there were older than me as well so when I was looking to increase the number of people I knew around the area it wasn't really ideal for me, so the coach suggested another team. (Participant 3).

Finally, in some rural areas which did not have local clubs for B2N participants to graduate into, coaches, again used their knowledge of netball infrastructure to help participants develop their own clubs.

> The more competitive we got, the harder it was to be part of a Back to Netball team because we were going into competitions and being absolutely thrashed. Erm, so it took us a while to get our act together, with the help of the coach providing us with information we decided that a few of us would kind of break away and we wanted to play a bit more regularly and a bit more competitively and we put this team together in the local social league. (Participant 23).

Thus, it was evident that those who left B2N perceived their coach as a positive gatekeeper who helped them access a wider netball infrastructure of teams, clubs and leagues. The decision of where and when to signpost and support participants was mediated by coaches recognising the competence and motives of participants. By considering these factors, successful coaches were able to connect participants with the wider netball infrastructure that furthered their netball journey. Once more, this data suggests that coaches should conceive of their role as more than instruction. Rather, coaches on B2N supported women most effectively by recognising participants' individual needs and helping participants to source and be prepared for progressive sporting experiences.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore participant beliefs and motives for engaging in a female focused sporting program aimed at getting women 'back into' netball. As B2N has engaged a large

population of females within this program, this study aimed to explore participant's qualitative experiences, beliefs and motives to engage. These findings revealed that participants developed social and competence motives as a result of their experience. Furthermore, the qualitative findings demonstrated how the coach exhibited competence supportive behaviours and promoted further opportunities to engage in netball outside of the B2N program.

Physical health motives are also evident within female physical activity research, such as Nicholas et al., (2018), their research into females engaging in 'non-traditional' exercise pursuits, demonstrated how physical fitness was a key motivator in the engagement in these activities. Further, Kilpatrick, Herbert and Bartholomew (2005) found that women rated weight management as more important that the male comparisons. Kilpatrick et al, (2005), also looked at the motivational differences between exercise and sport and found that participants were more likely to report intrinsic motives, such as enjoyment and challenge for engaging in sport, however motivates for exercise were more focused on extrinsic aspects such as appearance and weight loss. The Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), posits that different types of behavioural regulations underlie behaviour and can be differentiated by the degree to which they represent autonomous (e.g. self-determined) versus controlled functioning. Furthermore, the specific goals that individuals have for their behavioural pursuits will predict their efforts for sustained engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic goals, which are derived from external sources such as sociocultural pressures to lose weight represent the highest extrinsic and lowest intrinsic behavioural regulation (Segar et al., 2007). Although the women within B2N did initially specify an extrinsic goal orientation, it appeared that social benefits of developing friendships groups and wanting to support others may have promoted some level of intrinsic engagement towards B2N. Furthermore, it also appears that these initial motives represented typical extrinsic motives

towards exercise, as also found within Kilpatrick et al., (2005) research, in that exercise motives focussed more on weight loss. However, through the engagement in a 'sport' based activity, these participants may have developed intrinsic motives, such as enjoyment and challenge for engaging in the sport.

This element of challenge also become evident through the development of competence and the facilitation of skill development, which was supported by the coach. Within older adults, competence has been found to be a key indicator in physical activity engagement. Overdorf, Coker and Kollia (2016) found a relationship between perceived competence and physical activity engagement. Interestingly, men were found to exhibit higher levels of perceived sports competence than their female counterparts, which demonstrates a need for customised physical activity or sporting program aimed at engaging females in physical activity or sport. Developing this perceived competence is of high importance and previous research has found that females may demonstrate lower perceived confidence and competence when learning a new sport (Mackinnon, 2011). Mackinnon (2011) emphasised these gender differences, although this was in golf, they found that women preferred to learn in an un-intimidating environment, where they can support each other as they learn together. This non-threating environment, initially through group support, allows these women to overcome the 'intimidation factor', which then gives them the confidence and competence to step out into the wider golfing environment. What is evident within this study, is that these women are developing competence through a non-threatening environment of B2N, which is then giving them a higher level of perceived competence and in some cases an ability to go on to perform at higher levels of netball competition.

What seemed to be evident throughout these B2N participants is the notion to this non-threatening competence being developed in sessions, through tailored competition and sign posting. Sign-posting refers to the coach providing participants with information

regarding further netball or sporting opportunities. This coach behaviour may be something that is considered beyond the role of the coach. For example, Gilbert and Trudel (2004) found that youth team sport coaches emphasise fun, winning, development, team work, safety, creating a positive team environment, and equity as key coaching characteristics, but did not recognise this sign posting activity. Within B2N however, connecting participants with the wider sporting infrastructure seems to be a key mediator of continued physical activity and netball engagement. In order to effectively sign post participants however, B2N coaches need to understand the competence levels of participants. For example, at a certain point participants who experience competence development, may feel that they will outgrow their B2N sessions and coaches must recognise this moment. In addition, coaches must also be aware of the alternative opportunities (exit routes) that are available within local contexts. An understanding of these exit routes enable coaches to either change the scope of the B2N session (i.e. by introduce non-threatening competitions) or provide adequate outlets for these participants to progress to. Thus, this conception of the coaching role requires coaches to not only understand their participants competence needs but to also understand the opportunities that exist beyond B2N. This means, that within the context of a program designed to reengage women, the coaches' role was not confined to the netball court and did not finish with the final whistle. Rather successful B2N coaches drew upon their network of contacts in order to support participants through off the field activities such as organising competitions and recommending 'exit routes' to participants when appropriate.

In addition, from a coaching perspective, Duda (2013) and Cronin et al (2018) have emphasised the important of autonomy-supportive environments where the coach acknowledges athlete's preferences and welcomes their input in decision making, and that such environments promote prolonged engagement. It is thought that increased perceptions of autonomy supportive coaching behaviours significantly predict increase in feelings of

competence, autonomy and relatedness (Balaguer et al., 2012). However, what has become more apparent within this study is the need to provide bespoke and specific opportunities for competence development to happen. Borrowing from the achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1989) and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this added emphasis on a shared sense of improvement (promoting a task orientated environment) and providing specific skill development opportunities at the appropriate times within the B2N journey is a key facilitator to prolonged engagement in B2N or even future forms of netball or physical activity.

Duda (2013) described the concept of 'Empowering Coaching' where Duda and her colleagues have developed a training program, which is specifically designed for coaches and emphasises the importance of an 'empowering' environment which is task focussed, autonomy supportive and socially supportive. What is becoming evident throughout B2N is that although the coach seems to exhibit these 'empowering' behaviours, the nature of the program itself seems to foster a task orientated environment which is focussed on social support and a shared sense of experiencing improvement (Duda, 2013). This could be due to the sport of netball and its team-based approach, which is an important consideration for future physical activity or sporting interventions aimed at engaging females. Participants who were interviewed specified that compared to individual based activities such as the gym, B2N provided more of a 'social side', where the team sport allowed for friends to come together. This sense of relatedness or social support from other members of B2N, promotes a sense of shared development and experience of being a 'team', which in turns fosters and collective competence development. Therefore, there appears to be symbiotic relationships between the nature of B2N and its emphasis on being a team sport (promoting relatedness) and the task-orientated climate which is being facilitated by the coach, where opportunities for competence development are provided.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations within this research. Firstly, netball is a predominantly female orientated sport, and therefore, the current data set itself is a unique context. Further limitations include the issue that the data was not collected in 'real time' (whereby we monitored people over time, to assess feelings and behaviours, as would be the case in a longitudinal study). This research is therefore exposed to limitations of potential bias and memory decay (Hess, 2004). Instead, a cross-sectional/retrospective analysis was used, which has its merits, such as requiring less time to complete, and been more applicable to 'unusual exposures' (e.g., a sport activity limited to a certain group/demographic). However, it is important that future research does try and collect 'real time' longitudinal data to ensure that factors such as memory decay do not affect the reporting of the data.

Conclusion

Within female orientated sport and physical activity research, the Self Determination Theory has played a key underpinning theory to explain and understand how autonomy, relatedness and competence (Cronin et al., 2018; Walsh et al, 2018; Nicholas et al., 2018) are key drivers of participation. Within this study what has become apparent is that the nature of the activity in addition to the coach's behaviours are both equally important in the motivation to engage female participants. More specifically, through the demonstration of 'empowering coaching' behaviours through providing competence development in a supportive environment, participants were able to develop their competence levels and their motivations to engage. However, the nature of netball itself, being a team sport, allowed for a shared emphasis on challenge and engagement in the sport (Kilpatrick et al, 2005), where relatedness and competence development become an interdependent relationship. Therefore, it is vital for future organisations that aim to engage women in sport and physical activity to consider both

the nature of the activity and provide the opportunity for relatedness and a shared goal of competence development. In addition to considering bespoke coach education that not only includes technical and tactical content but also helps coaches specifically working with female participants to facilitate non-threatening competition and connection with wider sport and physical activities.

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