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

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Article

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

3 **Abstract**

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

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

22

23

24 Within the UK, females have been found to be more inactive than males (Sport England, 2016).
25 This finding has also been reported across wider research studies (Alvarez, 1992; Garcia &
26 Llopis, 2011). This lack of engagement in females may lead to a number of potential health
27 concerns, such as cardiovascular risks (Carnethon et al., 2003), and a number of well
28 documented psychological conditions (Das Horton, 2016; Fortier, Duda, Guerin, & Teixeira,
29 2012). Therefore, it is important to be aware of this physical activity discrepancy and to further
30 understand the importance of physical activity and its role in improving motivation and
31 increasing the feelings of competence in women, which in turn may reduce health risks
32 (Moreno-Murcia, Belando, Huescar & Torres, 2017).

33 In response to some of the above concerns, the UK Government has created a Sporting
34 Future Strategy (2015), which aims to improve physical and mental wellbeing, individual
35 development, social and community development and economic development. From this
36 strategy Sport England¹ developed ‘Towards an Active Nation’ (Sport England, 2016, p. 19),
37 which aims to develop and sustain sport and PA participation in both inactive and under-
38 represented groups. This strategy includes a focus on women and girl’s participation, and it is
39 hoped that through tailored support over a prolonged period of time, will create what Sport
40 England describe as a ‘resilient habit’ (p. 25). From this ‘Towards an Active Nation’ strategy,
41 National Governing Bodies (NGB’s) within the UK, who receive funding from Sport England,
42 are responding by setting up new initiatives aimed at engaging women in sustain physical
43 activity.

44 England Netball, a governing body for the sport of Netball, has developed a number of program
45 aimed at improving participation levels. For readers not familiar with the sport, netball is a fast-
46 paced invasion sport, which involves two teams of seven players, where each team strives to
47 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,

48 team with the ball aims to move the ball into its goal circle, where a goal can be scored. Players
49 also have specific areas in which they can move and are restricted depending on their position
50 within the team. In the UK, Netball was initially developed as a game that was predominantly
51 played by women and girls, although more recently this is also becoming a sport played by
52 men (INF, 2018). Netball is England's most popular female sport (England Netball, 2017) and
53 is the fourteenth most widely-played sport in England by individuals over the age of 16.
54 Furthermore, netball is part of the National Curriculum, meaning it is played by the majority
55 of school-age children across England. Sport England's latest report measuring participation
56 between April 2015 and March 2016 demonstrates that participation in Netball has
57 significantly increased in the last twelve months. In the latest audit, 219,000 individuals aged
58 16 or over reported participating in netball once a month, an increase of 17,900 from the twelve
59 months previous. Furthermore, 164,100 individuals reported participating in netball at least
60 once a week between April 2015 and March 2016, an increase of 13,100 compared to the
61 previous twelve-month period.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

151

152

Method

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Participants

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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 or 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%).

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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.

167

Measures

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171

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.

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

183

184 **Procedure**

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

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

202

203 **Data analysis**

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

222

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

239

240

Results

241

Descriptive statistics

242

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245

246

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

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

249

250 **Qualitative results**

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

257

258 **Initial Physical Health Motives**

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

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

271 (Participant 3)

272

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

277

278 “No I probably didn’t do anything until I was 34. I got married at 32. I’ve always been
279 quite active and able and physical but then as soon as you have kids your body changes
280 and your body needs to exercise otherwise you get fat. So after my second kid I was
281 35 actually and I needed to lose 3 stone because I’d put a stone on for every child and
282 then one extra. So, I just realised that I didn’t have the energy and I was starting to be
283 a size that I didn’t want to be and even though you have got kids and I was exhausted
284 and I was tired and I was working full time still, I had to put myself first. I did a
285 Slimming World thing and lost 3 stone and then I started running and I started
286 exercising and I started going to Zumba classes and that was when Kirsty said to me
287 ‘right, netball has just started, do you fancy it?’ and I was at my point where I had got
288 back to my 10 stone and, erm, so I felt like I was able, because of the Slimming World
289 thing and losing 3 stone in weight which is like a massive amount when you’re 3 stone
290 heavier than you wanted to be, erm, I felt confident enough to do it, if that makes sense.”
291 (Participant 22).

292

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

296 “it was more the fitness really than the social side but, erm, I suppose, you know, it
297 does help when you are in all day with the baby and that, you can actually go out and
298 like, you know, totally switch off and perhaps make other friends and things but that
299 wasn’t my main focus. My main focus was to do it for the fitness aspect.” (Participant
300 8).

301

302 **Social Motives**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

328

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

331 Absolutely, yeah. I think there's lots of, it started off as, we live in quite a small village,
332 erm, and it started off with us probably having, you know, twenty people from the
333 village and all the people we knew, friends and mums from school and it started off like
334 that and it has grown and grown and actually now we have got such a mixture of ages
335 from people that we didn't know. We've got ladies that are coming from quite far afield
336 now that come and play with us, erm, and lots of people that have then since become
337 friends and it is brilliant. They've all said, you know, it's such a lovely group of people
338 and we had a charity ball on Friday and one of our players who isn't a friend, she is
339 kind of somebody who has come to the sessions and kind of become friends as we've
340 gone along, she said 'I genuinely think that if I had any problem, I could ring any one
341 of our players and they would come and help me' and that's lovely because its outside
342 of friendships you form as children and through family and stuff, this is just completely
343 separate and we're all very different personalities and different people but it is, it all
344 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)

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

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

377

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

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

391

392 We've got a really good coach who is really involved in the netball in our area and
393 she tries to get friendlies and things organised for us whenever possible. (Participant
394 6).

395

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

401

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

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

420

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

428

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

436

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

440

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

453 (Participant 20).

454

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

459

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

466

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

470

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

477

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

487

488

Discussion

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

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

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

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

520 This element of challenge also become evident through the development of
521 competence and the facilitation of skill development, which was supported by the coach.
522 Within older adults, competence has been found to be a key indicator in physical activity
523 engagement. Overdorf, Coker and Kollia (2016) found a relationship between perceived
524 competence and physical activity engagement. Interestingly, men were found to exhibit
525 higher levels of perceived sports competence than their female counterparts, which
526 demonstrates a need for customised physical activity or sporting program aimed at engaging
527 females in physical activity or sport. Developing this perceived competence is of high
528 importance and previous research has found that females may demonstrate lower perceived
529 confidence and competence when learning a new sport (Mackinnon, 2011). Mackinnon
530 (2011) emphasised these gender differences, although this was in golf, they found that
531 women preferred to learn in an un-intimidating environment, where they can support each
532 other as they learn together. This non-threatening environment, initially through group support,
533 allows these women to overcome the 'intimidation factor', which then gives them the
534 confidence and competence to step out into the wider golfing environment. What is evident
535 within this study, is that these women are developing competence through a non-threatening
536 environment of B2N, which is then giving them a higher level of perceived competence and
537 in some cases an ability to go on to perform at higher levels of netball competition.

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

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

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

566 competence, autonomy and relatedness (Balaguer et al., 2012). However, what has become
567 more apparent within this study is the need to provide bespoke and specific opportunities for
568 competence development to happen. Borrowing from the achievement goal theory (Ames,
569 1992; Nicholls, 1989) and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this added emphasis on a shared sense
570 of improvement (promoting a task orientated environment) and providing specific skill
571 development opportunities at the appropriate times within the B2N journey is a key facilitator
572 to prolonged engagement in B2N or even future forms of netball or physical activity.

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

590

591 **Limitations**

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

602

603 **Conclusion**

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

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

621

622

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