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A social constructionist exploration of the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running.

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A social constructionist exploration of the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running.

ABSTRACT

Large amounts of previous research has investigated the motivations into long distance running by using quantitative methods, often incorporating the Motivation of Marathoners Scale (MOMS). Consequently, most of the past research has failed to obtain in depth qualitative data, whereas this research incorporated a social constructionist perspective to investigate the reasons behind participation in long distance running using a qualitative method. Six face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted and then analysed by using thematic analysis in accordance with (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The results of the thematic analysis found 4 themes that explained how constructing a social identity of a long-distance runner could be used to explain the reasons behind participation in long distance running. The four themes found were: health related factors; power; social support and coping; and negative addiction. The overall findings of this research indicated that the influences of constructing a social identity as a long distance runner can explain where the reasons to continue to participate in long distance running originates from.

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|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| KEY WORDS: | SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM | SOCIAL IDENTITY | LONG DISTANCE RUNNING | QUALITATIVE METHODS | REASONS |
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Introduction

Before the running boom, which began in New York in 1972, running long distances was considered an activity for only elite athletes who trained and competed in serious competitions (Ogles and Masters, 2000). However, since then UK participation in long distance running, in events ranging from a 5 km to anything above a marathon (42.2km) has significantly increased (Nicolas et al., 2011). In addition, in recent years in ultra-marathon events, which typically range from 50 km to 161 km participation figures have increased 52.6% worldwide from 2010 to 2013 (da Fonseca-Englehardt et al., 2013). Such events like ultra marathons and other long distances can be considered to go much further than what is considered to obtain the basic health benefits of regular exercise (Blair et al., 1989). These events tend to place great physiological and psychological demands upon participants (Simpson et al., 2014). Considering this, an individual's motivations for running ultra-marathons and other long distances may not be immediately obvious and clear as to why they participate in such a demanding activity (Shipway and Holloway, 2010). This raises the question of what motivates people who participate in long distance running.

Most of the previous research into this phenomenon has focused upon motivation when investigating the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running. Motivation refers to the means to be moved to do something. If an individual has no impetus to act, the individual will be considered unmotivated (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In comparison, an individual who is energised and activated with the focus of an end goal is considered motivated (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Individuals can either behave in an intrinsically or extrinsically motivated manner. Intrinsic motivation refers to the times when individuals are motivated for their own benefit and for the fun of the challenge (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivations behind an individual's participation in long distance running generally relates to life meaning, psychological coping, and self-esteem (Hanson et al., 2015). Whereas extrinsic motivations refer to an individual constructing an activity to obtain separable and often external rewards (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motives behind an individual's participation in long distance running consists of factors related to weight concern (Hanson et al, 2015). As will be discussed further in the literature review, people who participate in long distance running participate due to either being extrinsically motivated, intrinsically motivated or a mixture of both.

Furthermore, Masters et al. (1993) developed the Motivation of Marathoners scales (MOMS). Since then most of the research regarding the area of motivation in long distance runners has largely used quantitative methods incorporating the MOMS. For example, as will be discussed in further detail below, research conducted by Masters and Ogles (1995), Ogles and Masters (2003) and Hanson et al. (2015) have all incorporated MOMS when investigating variations in the motives behind an individual's participation in long distance running.

According to Shipway and Holloway (2010), the initial motives behind why an individual begins to run and then continues to run may not remain consistent and as a result may differ over time and experience of long distance running. Masters and Ogles (1995) produced a quantitative report, using the motivation of marathon scale (MOMS) to understand the similarities and differences in the motives of long distance running in veteran, mid-level and rookie marathon runners. The results found that participants categorised as a rookie marathon runner were primarily motivated by health and weight concerns, goal achievement and self-esteem. These results support existing knowledge regarding the motivations of rookie marathon runners, consistent with the findings of Carmack and Martens (1979). Whereas mid-level runners were motivated by different factors such as personal performance and a focus of achieving psychological rejuvenation (Masters and Ogles, 1995). These results share some similarities with previous research produced by Summers et al. (1982) who also found that midlevel marathon runners are mainly motivated by performance enhancement. Masters and Ogles (1995) also discovered that veteran runners were mostly motivated by marathon social identity, which includes social recognition, competition and health concerns. This raises the following question: does the way some individuals construct their social identity as a long-distance runner influence their reasons to run long distances? Moreover, it can be argued that the findings regarding individuals classed as a veteran marathon runner relate to Ryan and Deci's (2002) definition of extrinsic motives. However, this differs from previous research produced by Shepherd (1985) who reported that exercise motivation moves from extrinsic to intrinsic factors the more experience an individual gains.

Despite Masters and Ogles (1995) providing an insight into variations of motives at different levels of running experience, the study also holds some limitations. The

results of the study assume that a rookie marathon runner's motivations will change as their experience of long distance running increases. However, a rookie marathon runner could run primarily for health related reasons and could hold the same motives throughout their lives until they are classed as a veteran runner. This is problematic as even a quantitative study like this cannot deny the subjectivity of runners' experiences. Considering this reason, a qualitative method such as semi structured interviews may have been better suited for this study to discover whether an individual's motives towards long distance running varies over time (Masters and Ogles, 1995).

Furthermore, Ogles and Masters (2003) investigated the motivations in long distance running again. They used a quantitative method where they incorporated demographic and training questions as well as the MOMS to measure the motivation in 1242 men and 277 women who were recruited during marathon pre-race registration in one of six Midwestern marathons. Due to the quantitative data obtained they were able to derive five natural groups of runners based upon their motives of running by conducting a cluster analysis which included nine scales from the MOMS. Cluster 1 was labelled as 'Running Enthusiasts' who were mostly veteran runners or females who ranked health related factors, self-esteem and personal goal achievement as their main motives (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Cluster 2 was labelled 'Life Style Managers' who mainly consisted of females who were more likely to train alone in a less intensive manner with the main motivations including self-esteem, weight concern, psychological coping and personal goal achievement (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Whereas cluster 3 was labelled 'Personal Goal achievers' who mainly were younger and faster males who trained more than the other groups (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Their motivations to run tended to relate to personal goal achievement as they focused upon improving their own performances and running to the best of their abilities but were not motivated by being in competition with other runners (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Cluster 4 was labelled 'Personal Accomplishers' who were motivated by similar reasons to 'Life Style Managers' as they were mainly motivated by health, self-esteem and personal achievements (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Despite the similarities between the two groups, 'Personal Accomplishers' were not concerned about weight related motives (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Furthermore, cluster 5 was labelled as 'Competitive Achievers' who were mainly younger males. The main motives found in this group of

runners were personal goal achievement as well as competition with other runners (Ogles and Masters, 2003).

Considering the above research, it can be concluded that marathon runners are a heterogeneous group (Ogles and Masters, 2003). This research has used quantitative methods such as cluster analysis to find generalisable results regarding the motivations of why different types of people participate in long distance running (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Despite the positives of using such method, it can be argued that placing such a diverse group like long distance runners does not account for all the variations of motivations in individuals who run (Ogles and Masters, 2003). Consequently, for this reason it can be argued that an effective way to investigate the motivations behind why individuals participate in long distance running would be to use a qualitative approach. This method could be considered to add an even more in-depth understanding to the reasons of why certain individuals participate in running (Howitt, 2016). In turn, this method would make the results transferable rather than generalisable (Tobin and Begley, 2004).

Similar to the study previously mentioned produced by Ogles and Masters (2003), Hanson et al. (2015) used MOMS and asked questions based upon demographics and running history to investigate if there were any similarities and differences in the motives of individuals who had run various distances which included, half marathon, marathon and ultra marathon. Participants were placed into one of the three groups based upon the highest distance they had completed in the last two years (Hanson et al., 2015). The results of this study found some similarities between all three of the groups. For example, intrinsic motivations such as personal goal achievement was consistently a strong motive amongst the three groups, whereas extrinsic motives such as competition were not reported except for individuals who had been placed in the top three of a marathon within the last two years (Hanson et al., 2015). These results share many similarities with Ogles and Masters (2003) who found data that largely supported intrinsic motives. For example, as previously discussed they discovered that the majority of runners except those classed as 'Competitive Achievers' all ran for personal related goals (Ogles and Masters, 2003).

The research produced by Hanson et al. (2015) discovered interesting findings which increased the understanding of the motives behind an individual participation in long distance running. However, there are also many limitations due to the methodology

used in this study. As their research discussed the runners in this study were separated into three different groups. Consequently, some participants may have missed certain criteria (Hanson et al., 2015). For example, there could be a person who has run multiple half marathons in a period of longer than two years ago but have run just one marathon in the last two years. Whereas another participant may have run multiple marathons in a period of longer than two years ago but has only run one-half marathon within the last two years (Hanson et al., 2015). As a result of these categorisations, the results of the study can be affected. Considering this reason, using a qualitative method such as a semi-structured interview may be better suited as information can be obtained about how their reasons to run are constantly changing due to their experiences of running.

The research discussed has used quantitative methods and has identified many different intrinsic and extrinsic motives to explain why individuals participate in long distance running. The main findings from previous literature has been largely consistent and have reported that the intrinsic motives behind why individuals run long distances are psychological wellbeing, general health related factors and personal goal achievement (Masters and Ogles, 1995 and Carmack and Martens, 1979). Extrinsic motives explaining why individuals run long distances are related to weight concerns and competition (Ogles and Masters, 2003 and Hanson et al., 2015). It can be argued that these motives to run long distances can be explained further by applying a social constructionists perspective to understand reasons why individuals participate in long distance running. It can be considered that social constructionism incorporates social identity theory. In this social context of long distance running, social identity theory refers to the way individuals, who run long distances, can often adopt a social identity of a long-distance runner due to associating themselves with a larger group of long distance runners who share the same social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Moreover, Haslam et al. (2009) identified five impacts social identity can have on an individual. For example, social identity can be used as a determinant of appraisals and responses, a determinant of health related norms and behaviour, a basis of social support, a coping resource and a determinant of clinical outcomes. In turn the above, can explain why individuals who construct their social identity as a long distance runner continue to engage in long distance running. Considering this, the aim of the present research is to incorporate a social constructionist approach to investigate how constructing a social

identity as a long-distance runner can explain why individuals participate in long distance running.

Methodology

Participants

Interviewees comprised of six people from the UK. All participants were male aged between 23 to 57 who identified themselves as a runner. A selected respondent recruitment occurred via approaching local running clubs in the north of England.

Data Collection

In order to ensure that the research findings were suitable to be analysed using thematic analysis in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006), this present study used a qualitative research method of six face to face semi-structured interviews to discover the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running. As a result, this method can allow new understandings regarding the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running by allowing a unique narrative to develop whilst also including questions related to an informed theory or perspective (Opdenakker 2006; Galletta, 2013).

Ethics

In consideration of BPS guidelines, ethical approval was approved (see Appendix 1). Once ethical approval was approved all six participants were given the chance to ask questions regarding the study and were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 3). Participants suitable for this study received an invitation letter (see Appendix 5) and a participation information sheet (see appendix 4). Once the interviews were completed, participants were debriefed (see appendix 6) and were given until 20 February 2018 to withdraw their data. During the analysis of the study participants were given pseudo names to ensure anonymity.

Interview Technique

All six face to face semi structured interviews were conducted by the only author of this study in a quiet but open space which was convenient for each participant. A semi structured interview was designed which was partly based around past qualitative research produced by Jeffery et al. (2012). The interview included questions regarding initial reasons to run long distances, benefits gained from running and experiences of long distance running (see appendix 7). The typical time

of each interview was 25 minutes. Throughout, the research process, the researcher followed established qualitative research guidelines to assure that the research was reliable (Howitt, 2016).

Analysis

Interviewee speech was examined using thematic analysis which incorporated a social constructionist perspective. Thematic analysis was used to provide a detailed account behind the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Using this method allowed similarities and differences between participants to be examined but also allowed for any unanticipated insights regarding the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running (King, 2004). The analysis processes incorporated the six steps to analysis as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested. For example, the transcripts were read multiple times by the researcher before initial codes were generated. After the initial codes were generated the researcher searched for themes that were indicated through the text. The themes were then reviewed before being defined and labelled (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes identified effectively built on past research or offered a new insight which was important in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After the themes were defined the researcher could then produce the report. This method allowed the findings from this study to be transferred rather than generalised (Tobin and Begley, 2004).

Analysis and Discussion

Following the findings discovered in this present study, it became apparent that motivation is in fact socially constructed through a forestructure of shared intelligibility using a linguistic forestructure regarding motivation to interpret observations regarding motivations behind long distance running (Gergen, 2001). Previous research into the motives behind long distance running has socially constructed motivations in to two sub categories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Alternatively, in this present research the analysis of six semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis found that motivations are more complicated and interchangeable than previous research into the motivations of long distance running has explained. This is highlighted when Vincent said "I don't feel

like I'm motivated. Running is just something I always do. Maybe the benefits I have got from being a runner is why I choose to run." (Lines 258-262). This suggests that motivation does not exist without a social context. This can be explained further by engaging with Haslam et al. (2009). They suggested that there are five impacts of constructing a social identity. These five impacts can be used to explain the participation in long distance running. In turn, social identity may be a better explanation of their reasons to run long distances. Whereas most of the previous research has suggested the opposite, that motivation is independent of our social identity. Moreover, this has led to the analysis of this research changing direction from motivations explaining why individuals run long distances to the impact of constructing a social identity as a long distance runner explaining the reasons why individuals run long distances. Considering this, throughout the analysis of the present research, the reasons why individuals run long distances will not be labelled as 'motivation' but simply as 'reasons' to run long distances.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the initial reasons why people started to run can be explained through the benefits they obtained from constructing their social identity in a different way than the identity of a long distance runner. For example, Kyle started running because he was overweight and as a result socially identified himself with a weightwatchers group to lose weight. Due to constructing his social identity as a member of a weight loss group, he shared health related norms with other members of the weight loss group and as a result began to run to assist his goal of losing weight (Haslam et al., 2009). However, through his experiences of running and due to the fluid nature of social identity the way this individual constructed his identity changed over time to now constructing his social identity as a runner (Tarrant and Buttler, 2011; Tanti et al., 2010). Through this identity there are many other reasons that can explain why individuals participate in long distance running, as the thematic analysis of this research indicated.

The Thematic analysis process which was applied to all six transcripts discovered key explanations of the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running. Four themes were identified:

- Physical Health Factors
- Power
- Social Support and Coping

- Negative Addiction

Physical Health Factors

Through constructing their social identity as a runner, all six participants noticed how much their physical health has improved significantly either due to the cardiovascular activity or due to their change in diet. This can explain why individuals participate in long distance running as the following statements indicates:

Vincent: *"I asked a few guys in my running group what else can I do to be a better runner. They said diet is massive, so I stopped fuelling myself with bad food and took their advice. Now I eat loads of carbs good carbs though, protein and protein shakes."* (lines 141-147)

Nicholas: *"You can't take physical fitness away from runners. They tend to look younger than they are (1) because they are physically fit."* (Lines 264-266)

The above quotes can relate to Haslam et al. (2009) who suggested that behaviours related to health are driven by following norms related with a certain social identity. For example, in this present study there is a focus that all participants have socially constructed themselves as runners and therefore follow the norms that runners follow in terms of their diet and physical activity. This has some similarities with past research which found that people are motivated to run to achieve physical health benefits (Masters and Ogles, 2003; Hanson et al., 2015; Summers et al., 1982). However, unlike this present study, past research doesn't consider the importance social identity holds when explaining where the reasons for participating in long distance running originated. Alternatively, in this present study, it is argued that it is only when individuals identify themselves as a long-distance runner will they experience improved physical health through following the health-related norms long distance runners follow (Haslam et al., 2009). Nicholas can support this, as shown in the above quote, he indicated that it is considered normal that experiencing a good level of physical health goes hand in hand with constructing a social identity as a runner. Consequently, considering the health-related norms individuals with a social identity of a runner follow, it can be viewed that long distance runners will often benefit from having a good level of physical health. As a result of experiencing better

physical health this reason can better explain why individuals continue to engage with long distance running.

Power

Through constructing their social identity as a long distance runner, many participants indicated how they have felt more powerful. For example, as the following statements highlight:

Anton: *“The Ben Nevis race, I got to the top. I was about 40th out of 500 I was with this group of guys and I was running, and I just felt like I was on a train. It was a weird feeling (1) just in this effortless motion chugging along. It was like physical coming together with mental state.”* (Lines 190-196)

Joe: *“It was just after the arena bombings in the half marathon there was more of a feeling of togetherness from the runners. It felt like we were running together (1) as a unit of defiance as opposed to against each other. I think there was a feeling of defiance and power against terrorism and it was special for that reason.”* (Lines 146-153)

The above quotes can be related to the work of Simon and Oaks (2006) who argued that when social identity is related to a larger group this can lead to feeling powerful. It can be argued that Anton felt more powerful through running in a larger group who shared a similar identity to him as a long distance runner. Anton uses a simile to describe the experience of running the Ben Nevis race as being on a train due to the effortless motion he was feeling whilst running. It can be argued that such an effortless feeling was experienced due being part of a large group of men who shared a similar identity to him. They were running in sync and together which gave this participant the feeling of being a passenger on the train with other long-distance runners. This can be explained further by arguing that the feeling of being a passenger on a train meant the individual may have experienced a loss of one's individual self due to socially identifying himself with a larger group of runners (Slotter et al., 2015). This made him feel less tired but more powerful as he was like the other runners - a passenger, part of travelling train. Furthermore, an alternative explanation to Anton feeling as if he was a passenger on a train whilst running can be explained by a shift from his personal identity to a shared social identity of a long-distance runner (Onorato and Turner, 2004).

Similarly, it can be argued, through running the Manchester half marathon with other individuals who shared a similar constructed social identity as a long distance runner, Joe experienced a sense of power. He indicated that there was a togetherness and defiance amongst the runners as they ran together which generated a sense of power over the threat of terrorism. This finding can relate to past research conducted by Timm et al. (2017) who found that after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, all but one participant continued to run after experiencing the bombing. This shares similarities with the long-distance runners who participated in the Manchester half marathon six days after the arena bombing as both groups of runners showed an indication of resilience and power against terrorism (Timm et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be argued that this present research builds upon past research mentioned as this present study focuses upon how constructing social identity as a long distance runner can generate a feeling of power. This feeling of power experienced through constructing an identity as a runner can be considered as a reason that encourages individuals to continue to run long distances.

Social Support and Coping

Since the participants had constructed their social identity as a runner, many participants indicated that they had experienced improved levels of both perceived and actual social support, which individuals with a shared social identity of a long-distance runner can use as a coping resource (Haslam et al., 2009). Effective social support can explain why individuals participate in long distance running. As the following quotes indicate:

Leroy: *“They support me in terms of training and if I have injuries which is important because you can get down when you are injured, so it’s good to have people who you can relate to and who understand how you feel when you are injured. It’s good like (1) when you receive support off them but it’s also good knowing they are there should I need a shoulder.”* (Lines 30-37)

Vincent: *“Like I discussed before I am well supported in the running clubs. I know who I can turn to to talk about anything personal, but I’d like to think that they know where I am if they need supporting as well. You know (1) it’s a two way thing.”* (Lines 93-98)

Kyle: *“I’ve made so many good friends who support me in running and in everyday life and met so many interesting people after events and that’s all due to being a runner. That is my main motivation to carry on running because if I stopped running (1) then I’d maybe lose contact with all the friends I’ve made over the last few years and I don’t want that to happen in the slightest.”* (Lines 201-209)

Past research has shown that participating in long distance running places severe demands psychologically as well as physically on the runner (Simpson et al., 2014). It is understandable that through the semi structured interviews many participants stressed the importance of having effective social support whilst participating in long distance running. The above quotes indicate that through constructing their social identity as a long-distance runner, these individuals have seen improvements in the social support they receive. Through social interactions between individuals who construct their social identity as a long-distance runner, they are more likely to have received effective social support, have given effective social support and are more likely to interpret the social support given in the nature it was intended to be received (Haslam et al., 2009). The above quotes lend support to this, as Vincent indicated that he receives and gives social support to other individuals who share the social identity of a runner. In addition, Leroy indicated that it is beneficial to receive social support from other runners as they can easily relate to him as they have experienced similar things such as injuries.

Moreover, Kyle revealed that it is only since he constructed his social identity as a long-distance runner that he has received social support through forming friendships with other runners. In addition to this, Kyle implied that if he stopped running he would miss the social support he is used to receiving. Therefore, it can be argued that if he stopped running he feels he would lose in-group affiliation of being part of a group of runners due to no longer constructing his social identity as a long-distance runner (Turner et al., 1987). In turn, this means that Kyle may no longer experience the perceived and received social support he experiences through constructing his social identity as a long-distance runner. Due to the fear of losing this social support he continues to run. Therefore, in consideration of the above quotes and explanations, it can be considered that the social support long distance runners receive by constructing their social identity as a runner can be another reason why individuals continue to participate in long distance running.

Negative Addiction

Despite the above themes indicating the positive impact individuals can obtain through constructing their social identity as a long-distance runner, it is important to note that constructing a social identity as a runner can also lead to negative addiction. Negative addiction can explain why individuals continue to engage in long distance running. As the below quotes indicate:

Joe: *"It's helped me so much in the past mentally. It became my drug to make me feel better and without it I feel sometimes trapped (2) all I want to do is just get out there and run so at times its hard. Weird thinking about it how kind of without running I feel anxious I guess and abit sad. But I have a good group of runners around me who help me out, when I'm injured."* (Lines 164-169)

Kyle: *"Running isn't always this great feeling and buzz, it can start to control you in other ways like when you are injured I have had like almost withdrawal symptoms like I have got snappy with people like my family, friends, wife, kids. When I'm injured all I can think about is getting back running."* (Lines 110-116)

Considering the above quote from Joe, it can be argued that the previously discussed benefits as indicated in the above themes, which are experienced due to constructing a social identity as a long distance runner, can lead to negative addiction. Morgan (1979) reported that a runner who is negatively addicted will use running to cope with everyday stresses and because of this will experience depression, anxiety and irritability when they are unable to run. Similarly, in this present study Joe indicated that through constructing his social identity as a runner he obtained better mental health which allowed him to cope with day to day stresses. However, it can be argued that he relied too much upon running to seek better mental health and consequently when injuries happen he experiences anxiety and sadness as he described above. Joe indicated that through times of injuries he draws upon social support as a coping resource from in-group members who share the same social identity to him of a long-distance runner. Therefore, it can be considered that receiving social support is in fact problematic as it can be argued that the social support Joe obtains is in fact supporting his negative addiction to running. This can be considered paradoxical, as according to Haslam et al. (2009) social support is often a positive benefit of constructing a social identity as a runner. However, it is important to note that social support is not problematic if the individual

is positively addicted to run as opposed to negatively addicted. Therefore, it can be considered that by constructing a social identity as a long distance runner, social support received can sometimes assist a negative addiction. In turn, negative addiction can provide a further reason why individuals participate in long distance running.

To understand social identity further in this theme, it is important to explain the quote from Kyle in further detail. He indicated that running is not always a positive and drew similarities to running long distance as a drug as without it he felt withdrawal symptoms and his behaviour changed towards his family. This relates to the research of Morgan (1979) and suggests that Kyle is negatively addicted to long distance running. To understand his behavioural change towards his family, it is important to stress that social identity is fluid and can change as people move across social groups (Tarrant and Butler, 2011). This can be used to attempt to explain why his behaviour changed towards his family when he was injured. It can be argued that Kyle's social identity was so salient to him that when he was injured, he felt frustration (Charmaz, 1995). This feeling of frustration impacted on his behaviour when his social identity shifted from a long-distance runner to constructing the social identity of a husband and a father. It can be considered that he took the frustration related to his social identity as a runner and transferred it into his social identity as a husband and a father (Tarrant and Butler, 2011). It can be argued that this happened because Kyle was in fact negatively addicted to long distance running and when he was injured, he lost the benefits he experienced when he constructed his social identity as a long-distance runner, which can impact on his behaviour in negative ways in his other social identities. Furthermore, this also suggests that the five impacts of constructing a social identity as indicated by Haslam et al. (2009) can create a negative addiction to running. Therefore, negative addiction can explain why individuals continue to engage in long distance running.

Conclusion and Future research

The purpose of this study was to investigate further the reasons why many individuals participate in long distance running. Previous research has used quantitative methods to investigate the motivations of long distance runners (Hanson et al., 2015; Masters and Ogles 1995; Ogles and Masters, 2003). Whereas this present research offers an alternative insight. This present research, uses a social

constructionists perspective whilst incorporating social identity theory to explain the reasons why individuals participate in long distance running, using a qualitative method of face to face semi structured interviews using thematic analysis.

Two of the themes discovered: health related factors, and social support and coping relate to past work from Haslam et al. (2009). For example, through constructing a social identity of a long-distance runner, individuals benefited from following health related group norms which long distance runners follow. Such norms can often lead to a positive effect upon their physical health. This provides a further explanation as to why individuals participate in long distance running. Alongside this, the thematic analysis of the semi structured interviews indicated that through constructing their identity as a long-distance runner they obtain effective social support from other individuals who construct their identity in a similar way - that of a long-distance runner. This can explain why individuals engage in long distance running.

Furthermore, it was discovered that through constructing their social identity as a long-distance runner, participants indicated they can experience a feeling of power. It can be argued that experiencing a feeling of power can explain why individuals continue to engage in long distance running.

However, it is important to note that despite the above themes indicating that the impact from constructing a social identity as a long distance runner can be perceived as positive to an individual, they can also be considered negative. Through the process of thematic analysis, it became clear that for some of the participants, the benefits obtained through constructing a social identity as a long distance runner could allow the runners to participate in running for negative reasons. This was highlighted when Joe indicated that running improves his mental health. However, when he is injured he experiences withdrawal symptoms but turns to other runners who share the same social identity as him as form of a coping resource. Considering this, it is vital to note that despite a social identity of a long distance runner having a positive influence, sometimes perceived positive influences can be destructive as it can allow and assist individuals to be negatively addicted to long distance running.

To conclude, previous research would suggest that this is the first piece of research that has focused upon social identity in relation to the reasons behind long distance running. Therefore, considering the uniqueness of this present research, it is important that there is future qualitative research investigating further into social

identity being a source from where reasons to participate in long distance running originates from. In particular, it is vital for future research to engage further with the notion that the perceived positives of constructing a social identity of a long distance runner such as health related benefits, effective social support which can be used as a coping mechanism and power may not be as positive as previously suggested as these benefits can assist or lead to a negative addiction in running. Overall, incorporating a social constructionist perspective whilst engaging with social identity theory provides an important and unique insight when exploring the reasons behind participation in long distance running.

Reflexivity

Incorporating Willigs (2013) the personal and epistemological presumptions underlying this research which explores the reasons behind long distance running, are discussed.

Epistemological Reflexivity

During the research process it became apparent to me that motivation is more complicated and interchangeable than previous research had previously stated. This led to altering the way I approached the analysis of this present study as my epistemological position in this present study changed to a social constructionist. Due to incorporating a social constructionist perspective, it led to a shift from focusing upon the words and phrases such as motivation and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to use phrases such as 'reasons to run'. This shift was a result of the analysis of the interviewees which led me to argue that motivation is socially constructed and therefore shouldn't be labelled as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Gergen, 2001).

Personal Reflexivity

It is important to consider my research position when reflecting upon this present piece of research. As an individual who has had previous and current experiences of participating in long distance running, including distances ranging from 10km to a marathon, it is vital to reflect upon how these experiences may have influenced the interactions between myself and the participants. When transcribing the first couple of interviews it became apparent that due to my existing knowledge around the area of long distance running I did not probe and ask as many follow up questions as someone with a limited knowledge of long distance running may have done. In turn,

this may have impacted the amount of rich detailed information obtained as I made assumptions of what they meant rather than gaining clarity from the participants. However, I addressed this issue in the remaining interviews by probing more to gain more in depth qualitative data from the participants.

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